

The Lived Experiences of Men in 12-Step Recovery against a Backdrop of Hegemonic Masculinity

David Dwyer*

Summary: Hegemonic masculinity is a theoretical construct within sociology and represents socially constructed conceptions of dominant masculinity. Much of the sociological literature links aspects of this form of masculinity to men's poor health status, including a range of societal ills such as substance abuse. 12-step recovery is a widely endorsed model of addiction recovery which is based on spiritual principles. The features of hegemonic masculinity and 12-step recovery appear to be at odds with each other. This paper is based on the findings of a small qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of six men in 12-step recovery against a backdrop of hegemonic masculinity. The findings show how the active construction of hegemonic masculinity evolved throughout the life course of the men. A central theme to emerge is one of old and new formations of identity. Additionally, hegemonic masculinity interacts in a number of ways with the men's recovery.

Keywords: Hegemonic masculinity, identity, social class, addiction, alcohol, drugs, 12-step recovery, men's health, social constructions, status, change, crime, offending, desistance.

Introduction

A report carried out by the European Commission (2011) on the state of men's health in Europe identified substance abuse among men and social constructions of masculinity as a crucial area for academic exploration. The *National Men's Health Policy 2008–2013* suggests that 'it is crucially important to consider how men actively construct beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that can impact on their health' (Department of Health and Children, 2008, p. 23). It is within this social constructionist perspective that this paper is situated.

* David Dwyer is a PhD candidate in the School of Humanities, Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). Email: DDwyer@aiseiri.ie

The paper presents the findings of a small study which explored the experiences of men in 12-step recovery against the backdrop of hegemonic masculinity. The main aim of the study was to analyse how hegemonic masculinity interacts with 12-step recovery. The qualitative study involved in-depth interviews with six participants. The first section gives the background to the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the context within which it is used in this study. The literature is outlined briefly, taking account of issues such as social class, identity, men's health, 12-step recovery and how 12-step recovery may conflict with dominant masculinity ideology. The methodology is then briefly discussed. The final section presents the findings, discussion and conclusion.

Background

The development of the sociology of masculinity has been forced to confront many powerful myths, including the notion that gender is destiny (Whitehead, 2002). Throughout the 1980s a number of empirical studies gave rise to the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Among these was a study of social inequality in Australian high schools which provided empirical evidence of multiple hierarchical constructions of masculinity (Kessler *et al.*, 1982). Such studies undermined the dominant sex-role theory of that time, which implied two fixed, static and mutually exclusive roles of men and women (Courtenay, 2000).

According to Hatty (2000), hegemonic masculinity is the dominant model of masculinity within the gender hierarchy. The term was first coined by R.W. Connell in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* in reference to the acquirement of power through private life and cultural processes (Connell, 1987). Connell broadened the concept in *Masculinities* (1995), where it is described as the gendered practice of legitimising patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

Connell emphasises three elements that characterise hegemonic masculinity: toughness and competitiveness; the subordination of women; and the marginalisation of gay men (Connell, 1987). It is argued that this model of masculinity becomes hegemonic when a culture accepts and honours it and when this acceptance reinforces this gender ideology into the culture (Hatty, 2000). Consequently, hegemonic masculinity

perpetuates the unequal relations of economic, social, judicial and political power of men over women and also between different groups of men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Dover 2005; Bhana 2005). Regardless of whether or not individual men achieve the ideal-type masculinity, Connell (1995) suggests that the majority of men support it because of the patriarchal dividend of honour, prestige and control derived from the subordination of women.

One of the strengths of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical tool, according to Hearn (2007), lies in its ability to describe layers of multiple masculinities at the structural level. However, Hearn further asserts that it does little to account for the variety of dominant masculinities that exist beneath this umbrella term, and indeed the complexities between them (Hearn, 2007). Whitehead (2002) argues that Connell's hegemonic masculinity fails to incorporate agency and highlights the need for analysis of everyday social interaction of people's gendered being. This argument is reinforced by Howson (2005), who calls for the hegemonic form to have more interaction and negotiation with other masculinities rather than being seen in purely dominative terms.

In their seminal text on masculinities, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) assess a number of criticisms of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In short, they suggest that hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men; rather, the concept serves to express widespread ideals, fantasies and desires.

Contextualising hegemonic masculinity

In further developing the concept, Trujilo (1991) sets out five particular dimensions of hegemonic masculinity within western society. These are physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship and heterosexuality. Trujilo outlines how masculinity becomes hegemonic when defined through each of these features, which are summarised below.

Masculinity becomes hegemonic through physical force and control as this is one of the main ways in which the superiority of men becomes 'naturalised' and in this way the male body comes to represent power, control, toughness, force and domination. Defined through occupational achievement, masculinity becomes hegemonic when it contributes to the division of labour based on gender, thus ascribing masculine status to 'men's work' as opposed to 'women's work'.

Through patriarchy, masculinity can be seen as hegemonic through the institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children, not only in the family but also in society in general. The frontiersman represents the daring and romantic figure, the archetypal white cowboy with working-class values exploited and reproduced in advertising, film and literature. Finally, masculinity is hegemonic when heterosexually defined. This requires having only social relationships with men and primarily sexual relationships with women. By extension, it requires not being effeminate in appearance or mannerisms, not having associations with men that are overly intimate, and not failing in sexual relationships with women (Trujilo, 1991).

Similarly to Howson's critique above, Kupers (2005) highlights the integrative and harmonious dimensions in social roles, albeit without subscribing to any essentialist viewpoint. While acknowledging the positive aspects of male socialisation such as relational duty and obligation to society, the current study is concerned with the negative effects of dominant masculinity ideology on men. Kupers (2005) suggests that the efforts of subordinated masculinities aimed at establishing a respectable dominant masculinity often lead to many men living outside of society's rules and norms. Likewise, Courtenay (2000) alludes to subordinated masculinities often compensating their masculinity in destructive ways, in some cases leading to alcohol and drug abuse. In this sense, the concept of hegemonic masculinity as it is deployed in this study refers to how it can negatively impact on men's lives and how it interacts with 12-step recovery. The literature reviewed illustrates how the five dimensions outlined by Trujilo can play out in a negative way.

Hegemonic masculinity and social class

The allure of attaining social approval through hegemonic masculinity is especially strong among young working-class men, to whom access to power is often denied by their socioeconomic status (Evans and Wallace, 2008). A poor, jobless youth may compensate his manhood with displays of sexist banter, gangland activity or drug use to assert masculinity and enhance status (Karp, 2010).

Research into masculinity construction between working class male drug users in Liverpool revealed that efforts to reaffirm masculinity formed the basis for drug use and associated risk behaviours (Stanistreet, 2005). Groes-Green (2009) carried out research on hegemonic and

subordinated masculinities with 500 young men and women in South Africa. This study illustrated how participants from poor backgrounds, in the absence of work, status and money yet still strongly influenced by the familial breadwinner ideal, actively reasserted their masculinity through bodily powers such as sexual performance. These draw comparisons to the research of Scheff and Retzinger (2001) on shame. These authors highlighted the connection between emotions and social structures. They proposed pride as corresponding to secure bonds and social solidarity while placing shame as corresponding to threatened bonds and alienation (Scheff and Retzinger, 2001).

Notwithstanding McCullagh's (2007) assertion that it is mainly the crimes of working-class groups that are policed and punished, Levant (1997) argues that attributes of dominant masculinity ideology leave working-class men overly represented among prison populations. Levant further suggests that many of these men are substance abusers and experience stress-related illnesses. The examples cited here represent occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, the acquirement of power and the frontiersman figure living outside society's boundaries.

Hegemonic masculinity and identity

According to Bowker (1998), performing a masculinity that sits on top of the pile often involves violence and threat. It has been suggested that some men overly associate masculine identity with the external aspects of performance such as physical size, ability to fight, power and dominance, characterised as 'hardness' (Frosh *et al.*, 2002, p. 12).

This macho identity is one contributing factor to the detriment of men's wellbeing, as it creates emotional and psychological isolation (Scase, 1999). Irvine and Klocke suggest that failure in any sense leaves men feeling excluded from the category of men. As they succinctly put it, 'when men fail, they fail alone' (Irvine and Klocke, 2001, p. 34). These are examples of control and force displayed through the physical male body, a fundamental attribute of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity and men's health

Gender has a crucial bearing on men's health, in that how men perceive themselves as masculine impacts on the management of their health

(Department of Health and Children, 2008). Men may avoid seeking help when they are unwell so as to escape the risk of being labelled feminine. Indeed, health-related problems pose such a threat to masculine identity that many men choose to remain stoic and to self-care, resulting in the use of alcohol and drugs, which are perceived as more masculine ways of coping (Department of Health and Children, 2008).

In a study of men's health, Tannenbaum and Frank (2011) found that many men pay the price for suppressing emotions and vulnerability in their efforts to subscribe to the masculine ideal. Further, the negative effects on their health and wellbeing far exceed any social advantage they may gain from the so-called patriarchal dividend. Similar results were found in an Irish study exploring men's heterosexual relations within the framework of hegemonic masculinity. Here it was revealed that just beneath the social construction that compels men into outward displays of hegemonic masculinity lie anxiety and insecurity (Hyde *et al.*, 2009). The playing out of heterosexuality through the denial of emotions and femininity is clearly seen. By extension, the decision not to seek help exhibits control and emphasises hegemonic masculinity.

12-step recovery

12-Step Programmes (TSPs) emphasise the spiritual nature of change and recovery as a continuous process and as a way of life (Tangenberg, 2001). Invariably, the steps suggest accepting powerlessness over one's addiction rather than denying it, accepting the inability to manage one's life alone, faith in a higher power, daily personal inventories and, in time, the willingness to help others along this path (Tangenberg, 2001). Farrell *et al.* (2005) see it simply as confession, restitution, reconstructing relationships with people and an injunction to help other addicts. A central component in TSP is the perception of addiction as a chronic disease, and recovery therefore as ongoing and unending (Ronel, 2000; White and Kurtz, 2005). This indicates that 12-step recovery needs to become a way of life rather than seen as 12 sequential steps to the point of being cured (Kurtz, 1982).

Regular 12-step meetings are an integral part of 12-step recovery, helping to maintain and reinforce one's recovery after initial treatment (Ronel *et al.*, 2010). They further serve to provide a sense of belonging

and community between recovering addicts (White, 2007). Such fellowships sustain recovery through fostering and embedding 12-step principles in the lives of members (Ronel *et al.*, 2010).

The strength of 12-step recovery is reflected through the efforts of behavioural health professionals in developing a series of parallel therapeutic approaches that maintain a consistency with the 12 steps (Moore, 2010). Treatment for problem substance use in Ireland is provided by statutory and non-statutory services, including residential centres, community-based addiction services and general practices (Health Research Board, 2011).

In this jurisdiction, the Minnesota Model is firmly established within treatment options for those seeking help from addiction. Treatment centres working under this model provide in-house workshops, lectures and individual written tasks with the aim that residents gain a deep understanding and embrace the 12 steps (Moore, 2010). Furthermore, 12-step self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) are well established on the island of Ireland. A comprehensive examination of the origins and place of AA in Ireland is provided by Butler (2010), who traces AA's path from its first meeting in Ireland in 1946 (also the first in Europe) to its current role as an important institution in supporting recovering alcoholics.

12-step recovery and masculinity

According to Clark (2006), 12-step recovery is a suggested pathway for ongoing recovery, of which the essence is a changed lifestyle including a gradual spiritual renewal and altering of behaviours and attitudes. The emphasis on spirituality is important as it forms the basis for 12-step recovery (Narcotics Anonymous, 2008). Yet the prevailing mode of dominant masculinity holds much sway in shaping men's lives, almost reconfiguring what it means to be human (Bendelow and Williams, 2005). Moreover, Elkins (1995) maintains that dominant masculinity, with its emphasis on the external, has for many men rendered an inward spiritual journey off limits.

12-step recovery is characterised by conceding power and control over one's addiction (steps 1, 2, 3 and 11) and a deep sense of humility (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12) (Travis, 2009). As Seidler (2007) acknowledges, humility can be a difficult emotion for men who are conditioned to believe that they ought to know best. Indeed, 12-step recovery would

appear to be at odds with that which characterises dominant masculinity. Nowhere is this more evident than in the first step, where recovering addicts need to admit powerlessness over addiction and the unmanageability of one's life (Narcotics Anonymous, 2008).

It has been suggested by Griffin (2009) that men in recovery are expected to communicate in ways that are possibly neither familiar nor comfortable. According to Griffin, the 12-step community are reluctant to discuss the freedom of expression for men inherent in the philosophy of the 12 steps. While members are not pressured into talking at NA/AA meetings, a study by Weiss (1996) indicates that merely attending rather than actively participating yields less successful abstinence.

White and Hagen (2005) suggest that recovery involves a reconstruction of personal identity and a reconstruction of one's relationship with the world. It may be assumed, having reviewed the literature, that men in recovery are effectively recovering against social constructions of masculinity as well as addiction. However, it could be that they are only aware of the challenge of addiction, as their gendered dispositions are, according to Lynch *et al.* (2009), learned reflexively and habitually, thereby feeling natural and inevitable. It could therefore be argued that 12-step recovery is in some ways, albeit implicitly, a process of transition from hegemonic masculinity.

The study

The focus of the study is to explore the lived experiences of men in 12-step recovery against the backdrop of hegemonic masculinity. The main aim of the study is to explore how hegemonic masculinity interacts with 12-step recovery. It firstly seeks to establish the role that the construction of hegemonic masculinity may have played in the participant's lived experiences. It then aims to highlight how this mode of masculinity impacts on recovery. For instance, does it create barriers to 12-step recovery, as some of the literature suggests? The next section of this paper outlines in brief the methodology employed by the study.

Whitehead (2002) suggests that a qualitative approach is the most effective method when attempting to understand masculinity within a social and cultural context. Purposive sampling was chosen for this study. Study participants needed to be male and in 12-step recovery from substance addiction.

In the literature, the influence of socioeconomic status on how men constructed masculinity appeared substantial throughout. Therefore, a

sample of recovering male addicts from differing socioeconomic backgrounds seemed worthy of inclusion in this study. A residential addiction treatment centre based on 12-step recovery was chosen as the research site to recruit participants. Ethical approval for the study was achieved through the ethics committee at Waterford Institute of Technology.

Creswell (2003) refers to someone who has insider status within the research site and through whom access can be gained as a 'gatekeeper'. Given that the researcher at the time was a part-time employee of the study site, access was more straightforward. In the first instance I explored whether it would be possible in principle to gain access to carry out the research (Devers and Frankel, 2000).

Once permission had been secured in principle, a formal letter describing the research, its possible benefits and a description of the sample criteria was submitted and agreed upon by the manager. At this stage some exclusion issues were discussed, and it was decided that only ex-residents who had managed to remain abstinent would be approached for inclusion. One of the strengths of the treatment centre is its policy of actively remaining in touch as a support mechanism for ex-residents. Therefore the task of recruiting participants was left with the gatekeeper, given his knowledge of ex-residents in terms of their accessibility, characteristics and general wellbeing.

This process basically consisted of the gatekeeper contacting ex-residents who fitted the sample criteria and making them aware of the research. This was the only involvement the gatekeeper had, and after this it was left to the participants to come forward voluntarily. When they did so, the study was explained again and it was stated that participation was completely voluntary, and should they participate they could withdraw at any time and without explanation. Informed consent was achieved at this point.

Six participants, listed here with pseudonyms, aged between 24 and 33 were recruited for this study. Two were from high socioeconomic backgrounds, measured by their completion of third-level education and their immediate family's high occupational achievement: Frank, 31, from Meath, and Pat, 30, from Kerry. Four were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, measured by low educational achievement and long-term unemployment of both the participants and their immediate families: Nathan, Wexford, 24; Simon, Limerick, 33; Peter, Louth, 29; Kevin, Dublin, 27. The period of time in recovery across the various participants

ranged from one to five years. In-depth interviews were chosen as a means of data collection for this research.

All interviews for this study took place in the relatively safe environment of the residential addiction treatment centre, with which all participants were both familiar and comfortable. The study was structured by a thematic interview guide relevant to the research question (May, 2001). The questions focused on the participants' views of what it means to be a man, their experiences of growing up as a man, their history of addiction, their experiences of recovery thus far, and what it is like for a man in recovery.

The interviews were all recorded and transcribed in full. Interviews ranged in duration from 50 to 85 minutes. Descriptive and pattern coding was used to analyse transcripts. Three broad interrelated themes emerged: Hegemonic Masculinity; Identity; Recovery and Masculinity.

Findings

Hegemonic masculinity: Constructing crests of manhood

The emphasis on male role models was prominent across the interviews. Role model influence appears to have served as an ideal against which to measure oneself as a man. The findings show that the ideals internalised by the men in this study were some of the essential elements underpinning hegemonic masculinity, such as competitiveness, invulnerability, material success and power.

my father told me that I had to get a man's job, I went for business but I loved art, I was told that men don't cry, don't show emotions and always show yourself to be hard ... he was the only one I could refer to as being a man so I latched onto it. (Nathan)

where I grew up there was always drugs and crime, people looked up to them, they were top men. There was one guy who I had as my idol ... he was the main man ... I wanted to be like that. (Simon)

There was also evidence of socioeconomic conditions impacting on the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Closely linked to this is the role of education. For some, education stands out as a means of achieving a socially accepted masculinity, while for others education is overlooked in such efforts:

I got my degree, I had my own business and house when I finished college so that people could see that as a man I was a success. I never portrayed being the hard man: for me it was smart and clever which defined a real man. (Pat)

I was always bullied and that was it for me in school ... I just didn't see the importance of education ... I was busy fighting and being funny to fit in with the cool guys so I'd be seen as a man and wouldn't be bullied. (Peter)

Data from research respondents also supports the idea that the construction of masculinity, in this instance through criminal activities, is an ongoing activity as opposed to something that is ultimately secured.

I was 10 when I began smoking hash, I was the first in my group to do it and that made me the top man, then at 14 I had to do the same by taking Es, I got something from that, the drugs became like 'crests of manhood'. (Simon)

When it came to drugs it was all lads older than me, I used to be pretending 'cos I was too afraid of drugs, then I eventually started taking drugs and it was all about being the bravest man, you know. (Kevin)

I started dealing drugs proper then I got respect and the ego kicked in and then when I started selling drugs lads who had bullied me began to fear me and I started going up a ladder of ... a ladder of social status as I saw it, with, eh, the likes of [named prominent criminal figure] at the top of it and I was moving me way up there so I was looking down at the lads who had bullied me a year or two ago. (Peter)

Identity and transition

A central finding was a narrative of the transition between old and new identity. 'Yeah well, like, I definitely think my life is in two parts like, in recovery and pre-recovery' (Kevin). The literal use of terms across all transcripts highlights these old and new identities, such as 'looking back', 'the old me', 'back then', 'that was then, this is now'. There is also evidence of change in masculine identity, which highlights the transition from hegemonic norms towards a more open and spiritual masculine identity:

you just wouldn't go around talking about stuff back then, some of my friends died at 15 and 16 from heroin so I was afraid of it but I'd have a bag of it like a crutch when emotions were too much ... better than being seen as

a weak man talking about them, now I have freedom to be soft and I can say how I am, I like that. (Kevin)

in recovery everything has changed, before I'd never reveal feelings or vulnerabilities, for me to go into a meeting and reveal how I might be struggling in front of 30 people when I couldn't tell my mates of 20 years, now that's big change, I would've seen that stuff as being weak and girly. (Pat)

A clear theme that emerged from the participants' accounts was the transition they experienced from viewing themselves as being outside of society to a sense of belonging within it. This change appears to run alongside the easing of hegemonic traits and may be seen as a move towards a more interrelational state of being.

I didn't feel part of the family, I took on the outsider identity and I withdrew from society; the drugs helped me escape from the world, now I am one of those people in society doing normal things, going to work every day. (Nathan)

I was taking coke in school and was asked to leave, then I was asked to leave home, I was excommunicated from my family. I had the opportunities others had but I couldn't manage life, I didn't feel part of it; now I'm in it, I'm part of life, I'm living that type of normal way which as a man I feel I ought to be. (Frank)

Recovery and masculinity

Insights from the interviews also suggest that hegemonic masculinity interacts with recovery in a number of ways. Firstly, hegemonic masculinity has been drawn upon and served as a motivational mechanism in the lives of the men in this study as a means to enter recovery in the first instance.

My last year of addiction, I had no control and no structure, I knew I was fucked when I had to admit defeat because that meant I had lost control. My long-term plan is to get that manly control of my life; this recovery thing will give me direction. (Peter)

My last session, the come-down lasted days; it was a bad time but I saw my life and it had nothing ... no car, no job, no bird, no money. I had no control over my life so I headed for treatment to take back control. (Kevin)

Secondly, traditional conceptions of masculine norms appeared to create conflict for participants in the maintenance of their recovery.

I like to bake and cook and I take drama classes, it's therapeutic for me; if I was seen back in my own city with an apron and recipe book they would all think I was gay. (Simon)

Growing up, you were told never to talk about how you're feeling. I do find the meetings difficult; I get a lot of anxiety in them. (Peter)

I found the sharing in meetings, all the dealing with emotions and weaknesses very hard, 'cos that to me was revealing me as a soft person, I just wasn't able to take on recovery and spiritual principles; in my mind you had to have a career and be a success. (Frank)

Thirdly, when taken as a whole, the recovery culture appears to act as a safe environment to navigate and overcome these conflicts. The self-reflective nature of 12-step recovery provides an environment which in essence allows for new conceptions of masculinity to unfold:

Being in recovery, like whoever is around you will definitely shape you, and like now I am surrounded by people in recovery who are far more open and I don't feel so bad for trying to be more open. (Pat)

The first step was difficult, I never seen myself as powerless over anything let alone drugs ... I couldn't admit that; as a man you need to be in control but I listened to other men in recovery and that kind of made it easier to admit powerlessness over drugs. (Nathan)

Discussion

Male role models appeared to be a strong issue for the men in this study in setting in motion an ideal against which to measure oneself in terms of being a man. The notion of a masculine ideal was common across all of the participants' conceptions of being male. This sits well with Connell's

(1995) notion of a hegemonic ideal, in that the men in this study seem consciously aware of measuring themselves against such an ideal. One of the participants referred to his social environment as endorsing the dominant behaviours of a certain group of men within that environment, thereby creating its own version of hegemonic masculinity.

The impact of socioeconomic status on masculinity features throughout the literature, particularly in the research of Evans and Wallace (2008). The results from the current research appear to fit comfortably with their findings. For instance, and similar also to the findings of Karp (2010), the allure of attaining hegemonic masculinity for a number of men in this study has been satisfied through criminal activities associated with gangs and illegal drugs.

This route offered them the opportunities to attain power, status and, perhaps more importantly, to be seen by others as being in possession of such hegemonic traits. Similar to Kupers (2005), Kimmel (1994) and Connell (1987), further embodiment of the masculine ideal can be seen throughout the narratives by the rejection of that which is deemed feminine and/or stereotypical notions of being gay. Here, an element of fear was attached to ownership of gentler traits such as emotional expression; the heterosexual dimension of hegemonic masculinity was thus acted out.

Many of the men in the study seem acutely aware that their old identity may still be assigned to them if and when they decide to return to their old environments. The findings also illustrate how the men in this study have made, or are in, a transition from viewing themselves as outside of society to holding a firm place within it. It is worth bearing in mind Kupers' (2005) work which highlights men relying on destructive and illegal means to achieve hegemonic masculinity, thus living 'outside' societal norms. It does not take much effort to see the link between being 'outside' society in this way and the frontiersman figure living in a risk environment where rules are blurred.

Concern for physical and mental health was notable by its absence from the participants' accounts. This reflects Courtenay (2000) in highlighting that such health issues carry the potential risk of reducing masculine status, again emphasising the opposition to effeminate traits. Similarly, Seidler's (2007) reference to concealing vulnerabilities so as to maintain a credible masculinity seems to have applied to the men in this study during their addictive lifestyles; for instance, concealing fears and anxieties. Indeed, the loss of hegemonic traits such as control and power

provided the motivation for recovery above issues of health, whether physical or mental. Additionally, Stanistreet's (2005) findings relating to efforts at establishing masculinity as a basis for drug use and associated risk behaviours bear resemblance to some of the participants' accounts here.

Throughout the interviews the use of illegal substances was shown primarily as a means of achieving and maintaining masculine status. This reflects Levant's (1997) finding that attributes of hegemonic masculine ideology see working-class men overly represented in substance abuse figures and prison numbers.

All of the men in this study had engaged in criminal lifestyles, some more than others. In tandem with their recovery, the men had achieved crime-free lifestyles. The conflict comes from striving for new ways of being against years of masculine socialisation to a point where, as Lynch *et al.* (2009) and Kimmel (1997) suggest, it feels natural and inevitable. This transition mirrors the findings of White and Hagen (2005), who maintain that 12-step recovery is essentially a reconstruction of personal identity and of one's relationship with the world.

From the past perspective of the 'old me', hegemonic masculinity provided a focal point, albeit a constantly shifting one, for the men here to work towards. The opposite of this represents the perspective of 'the present me', in that the dominant masculine ideal serves as a focal point to move away from. While the main focus here is on masculinity and 12-step recovery, the presence of criminal activity is substantial throughout. The narrative change outlined in this study may have implications for the field of desistance.

According to Maruna (2001), narrative is a crucial element in desistance and is linked to promoting positive emotional responses in the lives of offenders. Moreover, it is argued that maintaining desistance depends largely on forging a new identity, beliefs and value system incompatible with offending behaviour (Maruna, 2001). While 12-step recovery and desistance seem to have considerable overlap (see for example Marsh, 2011), it is not too far a stretch to see the role that hegemonic masculinity may play in the new life script advocated by Maruna (2001) in the desistance literature.

Supporting this view, Carlsson (2013) suggests that men 'do' masculinity and that this needs to be considered when one is attempting to understand persistence and desistance. The current study links to the work of Sampson and Laub (1997), who describe the process of

marginalisation from the institutional fabric of society resulting in offenders persisting in criminal activities in order to reproduce themselves as men over and over. The participants in this study had successfully managed to maintain abstinence and desistance while supported in a therapeutic environment. Future studies might focus on those who relapse into active addiction and crime, and explore the possible role that hegemonic ideology may play.

Conclusion

The research has shed light on the varying ways and means by which these men have adapted to their recovery despite having exhibited many of the negative hegemonic traits referred to throughout the literature. In terms of masculinity, it revealed evidence of the internalisation and the active construction of hegemonic masculinity among the participants. It showed how early conceptions of masculinity may have been influenced by significant others who portrayed the dominant masculine ideal. This internalised ideal served as a template to pursue and adhere to over the life course in securing an accepted masculine identity.

Recovery represents a crossroads in the lives of the men in this study. The complex nature of hegemonic masculinity can be seen clearly through the lens of recovery. In one sense, it played a significant role in addiction. It further provided the impetus to seek help for their addiction, not from concern regarding health but rather because of a loss of hegemonic control, self-reliance and material accumulation. Once in recovery, the norms of dominant masculinity created conflict for the men within the recovery process. This appears to be a conflict that is played out in the lives of these men and is defined by old and new conceptions of self. The recovery process, however, is buttressed by the collective culture of recovery, thus creating and maintaining its own construction of masculinity and producing a less rigid and restrictive environment. This point is illuminated by the insistence of the participants on remaining in close proximity to the recovery community, seemingly aware of the old masculine identity that awaits them where earlier manifestations of the hegemonic norm were formed.

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