"IS THERE A WAY BACK TO ME, FOR ME"?

OLDER MEN'S STORIES OF LIFE, LOSS, CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Declaration

I, Thomas Coombes, declare that this thesis is my own work and I have not obtained a degree in this University, or elsewhere, on the basis of this work.

Signature: Thomas Coombes

Date: October 2020

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Glossary of Abbreviations

AIEB	All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training
CDP	Community Development Project
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CE	Community Employment (Scheme)
DCC	Dublin City Council
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
IACD	International Association for Community Development
SCCD	Standing Conference for Community Development
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
TCDP	Turas Community Development Project
TILDA	The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing [https://tilda.tcd.ie/about/]
VCRM	The Voice Centred Relational Method

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Thanks Ma.

This nobody woman that is leaving without any fuss

Has gifted us with the essence of her nature that is...love and forgiveness

It won't be good here without you Ma, but in that other place

that is calling you Others might need you more...So go there Ma

Light up their world, as you did ours….Love and

miss you Ma.

Abstract

It is well documented that older men do not connect in any real way with community work, are difficult to engage with, and are at risk of isolation. This narrative inquiry tells the story of six older men (55+) living on the margins of society in a public sheltered housing complex in Dublin and how they talk about their engagement with a local community development project.

The participants were selected from the many older men that engage with the local community development project, that were interested in sharing, as well as being capable of telling their story. The study is located within the interpretive paradigm where the narrative methodology approach involved un-structured, participant led interviews which maximized the potential for important discovery, particularly when combined with the researcher's long-time relationships that had been built over many years of working with the participants. Data collection took place over numerous hours of conversational type interviews and observation; stories were elicited, while also employing a constant back and forth researcher/participant clarity checking process.

The study was guided by an ethical imperative, embedded within community work values, and the relational ethic of narrative inquiry. The findings reflect the struggle faced by the participants in dealing with poverty, inequality over a lifetime, invisibility disconnection, unemployment, and loss of identity, struggle for redemption, love and loss, onset of old-age and the subsequent loss of their masculinity script. Participants displayed a strong sense of longing to belong, while dealing with personalized blame and regret for their perceived failure as men. The findings emphasised the important work of the local community development project, and the imperative of trusting relationships between community workers and the people they engage with. Engaging in community development as well as the research process created in the participants a sense of agency, renewed purpose, self-belief that grew throughout the study.

In order to create positive change, when working with older men, we need to create conditions and environments where those who are seldom heard feel that their voice is relevant, listened to, understood, and acted upon.

Chapter 1: Outsider, Insider, Beside(r) - Mapping the Research Context

1.1 Introduction

I don't want help from anyone; I've always looked after myself. It doesn't sit right with me asking for help from others, although I do struggle with stuff sometimes, but you just have to get on with it.

(Participant)

This research study was born out of seven years of continuous work with older men living in a public sheltered housing complex (Swan's Rest) for older people (55 years+), as part of my work in managing Turas Community Development Project (TCDP) in Dublin, Ireland. In this first chapter I will refer to the rationale for the study and what the aims and objectives are. There will also be a brief overview of the TCDP, its background and work, the public sheltered housing units, and the changing landscape in respect of older people's increased life expectancy. There is a reference to masculinity, loss of identity, and the subsequent struggle the participants of the study experience in maintaining their perceived role in society. The importance of the relationship between narrator and researcher, the values that guide the researcher, and the potential for the methodology to produce important discovery, is also discussed. Finally, I will introduce the six chapters that follow.

First impressions

My initial impression of the sheltered housing complex was that it was quiet and well-kept, with very little activity. A survey by the TCDP (2015), of residents who lived in the complex, established that there were 40 occupied units out of a total of 42, of which 35 were occupied by men, 4 occupied by women, all living alone, and one unit occupied by a married couple (female and male). The absence of any substantial signs of human activity in a complex that housed a fluctuating population of forty older people did not signal any negative connotations: it was only when two older men from that complex visited the community development project seeking information in respect of the maintenance of the complex, and the improvement of the meal service, that a different picture of life in Swan's Rest emerged.

As my work in supporting the men progressed, and trust began to be established, issues including, food poverty, addiction, mental health, loneliness, social isolation, and neglect were revealed. This is a community in the middle of a wider community, where the units of bricks and mortar housed the humans inside, where some men referred to themselves as being invisible; even when venturing outside the complex they felt they were seldom noticed. In their article 'The Invisibility of Older Men in Gerontology', Kosberg and Mangum (2002 p. 72) argue that because of the under representation of men in gerontological literature they 'often have their social, psychological, and health care needs ignored, misunderstood, or underserved'. They also refer to Thompson's (1994) 'Older Men as Invisible Men in Contemporary Society', in which he explores the absence of older men as the subject of 'professional research and practice, or public concern and, thus, are invisible'. Thompson (1994) also suggest that 'the diverse masculinities among elderly men are typically ignored, rendering older men a homogenised (and faceless) group. The powerless, apathetic demeanour exhibited by the men disturbed me and eventually led to my interest in exploring why this might be.; which subsequently, after many years of working with these men (and others) also led me to question why and how so many of these men engaged with the local community development project in spite of their low self-esteem and exile to life's margins.

1.2   Research Aims and Objectives

The central research question for the purpose of this study is:

> *How do older men living in sheltered housing talk about their lives, and their*
> *engagement with the local community development project?*
> *Older men's stories of life, loss, connection, and community development.*

Aim of the research

This research aims to contribute towards creating the conditions where older men living alone in a public sheltered housing complex in Dublin can tell their story of a life lived. The research also endeavours to develop an understanding of these men's experience of, and engagement with, the community development project so as to better develop strategies and interventions for future work with older marginalised men.

Objectives of the research

The objectives of the research are:

- To explore, through a narrative inquiry study, the lived experiences of older men living in public sheltered housing units, in respect of life, loss, connection and their experience of the community development project.
- To explore how the temporal realities including: gender, masculinity, identity, class, geographical location, family, influence the lived experience of the participants.
- To explore the value of narrative inquiry as a tool for change.

1.3   Background and Context

Established in 2003, the Turas Community Development Project (TCDP) began working directly with the residents of Swan's Rest (public sheltered housing complex in Dublin) in June 2007. The initial approach to TCDP, in 2007, by two older men seeking support in addressing basic issues of food provision, housing maintenance, and social activities was the beginning of the relationship between the men of the complex and the project, and in particular myself as the only full-time worker. The project mostly operates from a perspective of support, focusing on the causation rather than the symptoms of identified issues. The goal of the project is to create the conditions and spaces for positive change; this happens through meeting people where they are at in their lives and hopefully journey alongside them in an attempt to create new starting points for them.

The All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training (AIEB) describes community work/development as:

> *A developmental activity comprised of both task and process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way.*
>
> (AIEB 2016 p. 4)

The TCDP's mission statement reflects the essence of the above definition, in that it aspires to being a '*catalyst for positive change based on the identified needs of the community*', and this is reflected in the TCDP's community development practice, which incorporates the building of trust, being supportive by talking and listening to people, sitting with them, drinking tea and being available to them. Freire (1996 p. 71) states that 'someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter'. He argues that the point of encounter is where people have journeyed to, so that they are neither the owners of 'truth and Knowledge' who see themselves as 'elite', nor the 'great unwashed' who have little or no regard for themselves: to where there are 'only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know' (Freire 1996 p. 71). Ledwith (2011 p. 2) argues that 'community development begins in the everyday lives of local people' which she believes happens through a 'process of empowerment and participation' which 'encourages people to question their reality'.

As a community worker committed to promoting social inclusion, I was disturbed by how some of the men spoke about their life in the complex. They described circumstances where some neighbours shut themselves away and hardly ever ventured outside, while others turned to alcohol. What started out as two men seeking support in addressing basic food and shelter issues, grew into a longitudinal, joint participative experience, in which we developed a reciprocal understanding of each other's strengths, ability, power and weaknesses. As our familiarity and trust strengthened, it allowed the issues and needs of the men to emerge more freely; creating deep discovery, which greatly informed our practice.

A changing landscape

Statistics concerned with ageing in Ireland, produced by the Central Statistics Office (CSO 2017), refer to an increase of over 19% in the over-65s population, to 637,537, with a forecast of a further rise to almost 1.5 million by 2041. By 2030, one in every five people resident in Ireland will be over 65 years of age, with the greatest increase in the over-80s demographic (Donnelly 2015, TILDA 2020). While the projected changes in the population aged 65 and over are striking, McCrory *et al.* (2014) argue that changes for the group aged 80 and over which are set to increase in the same period by a staggering 250%, jumping from 130,600 to 458,000. Ageing on this scale is unprecedented in Irish history.

Exploring these statistics in the context of a country coming out of austerity, where public services are constantly in the news, particularly in relation to health (RTÉ 2017, Edwards 2018) and housing exposes extremely challenging scenarios, particularly for working class communities. The studies referred to above are holistic in nature and do not specifically capture older men living on the margins; the studies are very helpful as they give one a socioeconomic overview of later life quality of life experiences of different groupings from a health, wealth, and education perspective. There is also important learning as the studies also refer to the present and projected future later life scenarios of the most vulnerable older citizens. According to the CSO Census 2016 figures (2017) almost 7,000 people (58% male) were homeless in Ireland, with 73% of those located in the Dublin region. These figures included 896 families, with 1,720 children also included. There were also 123 rough sleepers counted, of which 104 are male. 4% of these homeless people are over 65 years of age (CSO 2017). Kitchin *et al.* (2015), in their paper 'Housing in Ireland: From Crisis to Crisis', point to households faced with 'mortgage arrears, negative equity, poor build quality, and the social housing waiting list extended'. They argue that 'housing in Ireland has been perpetually in crisis over the past twenty years'.

In their report, Barret *et al.* (2011 p. 8), drawing on findings from TILDA point to 'clear social divisions' in which some groups 'age more successfully than others'. The findings include: 'The best quality of life is experienced by older people with the highest asset of wealth; the group of older people who have the lowest quality of life by a considerable margin, are those who rate their health as fair or poor' (Barrett *et al.* 2011). In their summary Barret *et al.* (2011 p. 8) argue that generally older people 'perceive the ageing process positively', with the 'most educated' having 'the strongest sense of control over the positive and negative aspects of ageing' and the wealthiest being 'least aware of the negative aspects of ageing and least aware of the ageing process'.

Why so many?

> *Women are more likely than men to read books and magazines, visit friends or do voluntary work. For instance, women visit with friends and relatives more frequently than men, and religion is more important for older women than for men.*
>
> (Barret *et al.* 2011)

Sheltered housing complexes like Swan's Rest accommodate older people who generally have no other housing option. The criteria required in order to access the sheltered housing units is that: you are on Dublin City Council's housing list; are 55 years plus or, 50 years with a priority; with the priority generally being on 'health grounds' (Dublin City Council 2018). The disparity in relation to the number of men compared to women residing in Swan's Rest could be a question for a future study, but at a very local level it is an indicator that there are reasons and issues that cause so many men to end up there, particularly when you also consider men's lower life expectancy compared to women.

> *Social isolation reduces the amount of informal support available, reduces the quality of life of older men, and increases the risk of developing depression.*
>
> (Mental Health Foundation 2010)

The potential for isolation and subsequent experience of loneliness is further exacerbated by the high ratio of men to women living in Swan's Rest (almost 10 to 1). In their study exploring the onset of dementia among 2,173 community-living older people 'living alone, unmarried, without social support', Holwerda *et al.* (2012) state: 'later life feelings of loneliness significantly increased the risk of death in older men'. They also argue that 'developing a better understanding of the nature of these feelings may help us to improve care and possibly develop interventions that may both enhance quality of life and increase lifespan, especially in older men' (Holwerda *et al.* 2012). While the effect of the loss of a man's perceived identity can also have serious detrimental implications, Venn *et al.* (2011 p. 76) draw attention to the struggle that older men face in maintaining their hegemonic masculinity when faced with 'younger, fitter, employed men' who exemplify this idea

Professional engagement

While acknowledging their struggle with identity, the Swan's Rest men's progression in relation to their re-emergence into the world is very encouraging; one became chairperson of the TCDP and another chaired an older people's area group initiative (Older People Together). Others got/get involved in various committees and organising and planning structures, while many continue to participate in groups, trips, and other initiatives supported by the TCDP. It is a fact that fewer older men engage with the project than older women, but that gap is narrowing. This research is designed with two purposes in mind. Firstly, to represent older men's stories, stories that too often remain invisible.

Secondly the research aims to deepen our understanding and build our capacity to engage with older hard-to-reach men in a meaningful way. Ellard-Grey *et al.* (2015 pp. 1-10) define 'hard-to-reach, hidden, and vulnerable populations' as being 'disenfranchised, and subject to discrimination and stigma', making these groups difficult to research. The strength of my relationship with the participants allowed them to sit and tell their story and, during that time, and in that space, they were no longer 'hard -to-reach'.

I am a community development worker who manages a community development project, seeking to engage with the more vulnerable, particularly those who are hard-to-reach and existing on the margins of society. I have a multiplicity of relationships with the participants of this study in that I have worked with them for many years, and know them well, and they know me. I am an older man myself from the same demographic background, and with similar starting points in life, so I could be considered as having an <u>insider</u> advantage. But I do not struggle to heat my home, I hold a position of power, I do not feel excluded or isolated, I feel loved, and there are more favourable life-choices available to me so, in that respect, I could also be considered an <u>outsider</u>. But I empathise with the struggle of the men involved in the study, and have been in similar dark places during my life, but was fortunate to climb free.

My work with the participants prior to the study and, more particularly, during the study has deepened my understanding of their struggle, and theirs of mine. Our similarities of lived-experiences, including our similar demographics of age, sex, gender, class, employment, social circles, marital failure, and subsequent hurtful family upheaval, are regularly shared and discussed. So, in respect of this narrative inquiry study I could also be considered a <u>besider</u>, as this narrative journey places me firmly with and alongside them.

This 'besider' experience was born out of a belief that my life journey had defining comparable similarities with the participants which was quickly identified by them, particularly those experiences concerned with the struggle to deliver on expected manhood, family obligations and peer ideas of what a successful life should look like.

The All Ireland Standards for Community Work (AIEB 2016 p. 8) sets out five core community development values in order to maintain 'professional integrity in practice'. These are: (1) Collectivity, (2) Community Empowerment, (3) Social Justice and Sustainable Development, (4) Human Rights, Equality and Anti-Discrimination, and (5) Participation. My values as a researcher/practitioner in the community work field reflects those values endorsed by the AIEB (2016) and positions me as an advocate for social justice, giving voice, and seeking social change for, and with, those who have less. The five values mentioned are an ever-present reflective measure for us as community workers. It is the combination of the teller/listener trusting relationship, and the employment of professional community development practice with a human focus, that creates the environment for connection and in particular the opportunity to tap into the stories of life experience that are there waiting to be shared. But with this sharing comes responsibility for the listener, to care for and honour the narrative. Lopez (1990 p. 60), argues that we are obliged to remember the storytellers:

> *The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put stories into each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves.*

(Lopez 1990 p. 60)

1.4   Methodological choice and rationale

This narrative inquiry study sets out to make the participants involved, visible again. It creates the condition and space for the participants to have their voice heard, that in some way allows their lived experiences inform community work literature; that the study will introduce the reader into the participants' seldom visited personal history so that the causations along with the symptoms that are present and obvious, may be understood and learned from. Webster and Mertova (2007 pp. 22-24) when referring to the 'significance' of Narrative Inquiry state: 'What makes narrative particularly appealing to research (compared to other more traditional research methods) is the capacity to deal with the issues of human centeredness and complexities in a holistic and sensitive manner'.

The uniqueness of the researcher/researched joint participation in the narrative process was puzzling initially, but very quickly I understood that it was a natural progression from the regular interactional conversations I would have had with the participants over the years, where we spoke openly about our collective life experiences. The potential for reliability of discovery described in the following section gave me the impetus and confidence to employ narrative inquiry as my methodology. A detailed description of narrative inquiry methodology will follow in chapter three.

Unlocking the treasure chest of lived experiences

Chase (2008 p. 64), offers five analytical lenses that reflect 'contemporary researchers' approach to empirical material' which are very useful in creating an understanding as well as recognising the 'distinctness' of narrative inquiry as a means creating a platform from which the voice to those seldom heard is amplified and out there. The five lenses will be explored in greater detail later, but it is important to say here that these understandings informed and framed the way the research was approached. Chase (2008) refers to stories as being 'enabled and constrained' by the narrator's world view which in turn is determined by 'the narrator's community, local setting, organisational and social memberships and cultural and historical location'.

In particular I was aware of the multiplicity of narrator roles generated through the narrative inquiry process; participant and researcher as joint narrator, where the advantage of the insider and the 'enabling' through journeying 'beside' is embraced. Furthermore, the re-narration/re-storying process that is narrative inquiry, employed by the researcher, in which the 'constraints' pointed to by Chase (2008) acknowledges the 'outsider' perspective, where concern related to bias and the multiplicity of roles including my role as an older man, as a manager of a community development project and as a researcher is placed front and centre and carefully navigated through and around these joint productions.

The multiple lenses offered by Chase (2008) whether used separately or connected create a narrative operational landscape from which the lived-experiences of the participants can be best interpreted and re-storied. Because the work I am involved in is also concerned with the 'uniqueness' of human beings, and the obligation of those engaged in narrative inquiry research to maintain an irreproachable level of ethical diligence, there is little

doubt that narrative inquiry is the fit-for-purpose methodology that will maximize the potential for discovery and learning from this research.

1.5   Summary and Overview of Thesis

In my day to day work the older men we work with are referred to as 'the men', but for the purpose of this research study I will refer to them as the research participants. In this first chapter I provided the background and context of the study by referring to the lived environment of the men both physical and social. I have highlighted the fact that Ireland has an ageing population and in this particular complex the residents are distinctly vulnerable. Working with these residents over the years has enabled some positive changes to take place in their circumstances, which strengthened our relationship and gave me the opportunity to engage with them at a deeper level. It was the strength of this relationship which subsequently afforded me the opportunity to negotiate entry as a researcher to carry out this study.

This research journey travelled with the participants has allowed for exploration into what it is like to be them, the circumstances that led them to be here, what sense they made of their lives, and what difference engaging with the project has made to them. As a community worker I was interested in the participants themselves but also how this inquiry could inform community work practice with older men, a group that has been historically hard to reach as highlighted earlier.

This was the first of seven chapters; the next chapter is the literature review in which I refer to the various books, papers and writings that were used to inform and challenge this researcher as I journeyed through the various debates, positions and arguments that informed this study.

The third chapter explores the methodological choices and the key conceptual and process dimensions of narrative inquiry. Chapter four describes the research design, which was selected to address the research question, and concentrates on not only the 'how' of the methodology employed, but also that the research design stays true to the imperative of the methodology, while being focused by a rigorous ethical commitment.

Chapter five characterizes the participants with individual biographical vignettes that set the scene for the findings. As a means of putting a person to the names, a biographical overview of the participants and researcher is explored including those participants whose data was not used in the study but contributed to the overall sense of meaning and understanding of the research inquiry. Chapter six presents the main findings of the study, followed by chapter seven which discusses the significance of the findings while pointing to the contribution towards the discourse and learning gained from the study, while offering insights into how community work practice might develop in relation to working with older hard to reach men.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

Researching how older men living in sheltered housing in Dublin talk about their lives and their engagement with the local community development project (CDP) necessitated engaging with literature from various theorists, scholars, and writers, both from a theoretical and methodological perspective, addressing not only the discourse related to older men, and the themes, topics, issues and challenges that emerged from the data but also the methodology employed to analyze the data. This chapter represents a summary of the various sources that informed the study. In section 2.2, creating a male script for life, reviews masculinity from boy to man and the challenges living up to this one-size-fits-all script brings, while section 2.3, Surviving Masculinity, explores surviving hegemonic masculinity. The following section (2.4), Class: Born into a defined, predetermined bubble emphasizes the importance of a consideration of class in respect of this research study. Section 2.5, Ageing, is this it? refers to community-based responses when working with older men and Section 2.6, Community Development, refers to community development theory and practice and relevant writings. 2.7, Let me tell you a story, describes the significance of story as a tool for social change is explored. The final section 2.8, Summary, closes the chapter with a summary of all the above.

"Man of The World"
Shall I tell you about my life?
They say I'm a man of the world
I could tell you about my life
And keep you amused I'm sure
About all the times I've cried
And how I don't want to be sad anymore
And how I wish I was in love
(Fleetwood Mac 1969)

2.2 Creating a male script for life

Writing the script

Adams and Coltrane (2005), while referring the family as being a 'microcosm of society' where a child's first interaction with others occurs, argue that 'the family typically is considered the main institution for both production and reproduction of popularized gender values. Although individuals are socialized in many different contexts throughout their lives (school, neighbourhood, community, peer group, workplace, church, polity), family tend to be the initial socialization agent (Adams and Coltrane 2005 p. 233).

In a recent conversation with my elderly mother, I spoke of my concern for my twenty-year-old son and his ability to cope living away from home for the first time, following his recent move to Letterkenny (County Donegal) as part of his apprenticeship training to become an industrial plumber. Shaking her head from side to side and with an expression that was a cross between shock and annoyance she struggled as she pulled herself forward: "Ah will you give it over, what's wrong with you?" she paused for breathas I searched my brain for the family crime I had just committed. Before I could say "whatdo you mean Ma?" she continued "Sure won't it make a man of him?" Historically my mother regularly spoke about and was very proud of her five 'boys' who she claimed allhad their late father's work ethic, without mentioning where her three daughters fitted, inthe work ethic chart. The gender script had been passed down through generations. "Yourgrandad worked into his late eighties" the boys would be frequently told, while the girls were informed of the happy home our Nana kept.

Bem (1983 p. 603) refers to the 'gendered messages' given over time to boys and girls by parents and other adults involved in their development, which are eventually incorporated into what she maintains is their own version of an "age-appropriate gender schema". Further on in the paragraph she describes the gendered schema as 'a kind of perceptual lens, a cognitive way of organising information, a sort of network of associations' (Bem 1983 p. 603). Adams and Coltrane (2005 pp. 133-34) also point to pre-birth methods of sex identity that allows for planning 'gender-appropriate' furnishing, space and clothing which can be organised and suggested based on the sex of the unborn child. The sub-conscious rationale is seldom visited, but the conscious act of gender branding is all consuming.

My mother did not realise she was perpetuating societal norms that re-created gender inequality from generation to generation. This was her social reality, her human perspective; she was a victim of the socialization process that managed to fool her as she referred to the flawed 'gender schema' that continues to polarize boys and girls and men and women. Garrett (1987 pp. 40-42) points to 'housework' to illustrate gender roles within the family. She refers to the notion that men 'help' with the various housework tasks including cooking meals, food shopping, making beds etc., but the use of the word 'help' alludes to the belief that 'these tasks are not considered their prime responsibility'. According to Garrett (1987) many advertisements show housework as 'something women enjoy and excel at' and when men are involved, they are only capable of carrying out 'simple tasks, or demonstrate ineptitude' (Garrett 1987 pp. 40-42). An appreciation of this is relevant for the study as this is the gender reality that the participants were born into and carried with them throughout their lives.

Shape up or?

The seemingly global acceptance of a dimorphic prescribed identity of the sexes, that more often than not creates a consensual patriarchal dominated framework of expected norms and images, becoming, what D'Andrade (1974 p. 36) describes as: 'psychic anchors, or psychological identities, for most individuals, serving as a basis for self-perception and self-esteem'. Manhood ideologies force men to shape up, on penalty of being robbed of their identity, a threat apparently worse than death (Gilmore, 1990 p. 221). Maxine Green (1998), referring to social imagination points to her relationship with Paulo Freire and quotes him stating: "if peasants do not have a notion of a lovelier world they're never moved to try to transform the world that there is". Green (1998) also cites Jean Paul Sartre, the renowned existentialist, who talked about workers in a nineteenth century French factory (resigned to working 'God knows' how many hours per week) hearing about a better way of life from a trade union official, and argues that it's only when you are shown the possibility of 'a better way of life', do you find what exists as 'un-endurable'. She describes this as 'the utopian thrust of imagination' (Green 1998).

The cognitive awareness and intellectual/academic discussions that challenges ideologies and assumed norms were not available to the men taking part in this study. Their world was/is one of a packaged masculinity that offers acceptance and status. Exploring the biological connection that places 'maleness' with masculinity and 'femaleness' with femininity is of particular interest to this study. Berger *et al.* (1995) argues; if 'maleness'

is biological, then masculinity is cultural. Indeed, masculinity can never float free of culture: on the contrary, it is the child of culture shaped and expressed differently, at different times, in different circumstances, in different places by individuals and groups (Beynon 2002 p. 2).

There is a dearth of comparative research that identifies androgynous societies, which in turn negates against shifting (to any large degree) the systemic, cultural commonality of how we understand the world and the related gendered expectations. Gilmore (1990 p. 9), in his book 'Manhood in the Making', argues that all societies distinguish between male and female, and that they also provide 'institutionalised sex appropriate roles' for adult men and women. While giving over a chapter of his book to explore the absence of a gendered schema in relation to Tahiti and Semai, Gilmore (1990) adds that 'very few societies recognise a third, sexually intermediary category'. He also refers to the various masculinity/femininity studies that have taken place (Brandes 1980, Lonner 1980, Raphael 1988), and states that although many agree that 'gender ideals, or guiding images, differ from culture to culture, there is a thin veneer that hides 'an essential universality of gender dimorphism'(Gilmore 1990). In their thirty-nation study of sex images, Williams and Best (1982 cited in Gilmore 1990 p. 10) conclude: 'there is a substantial similarity to be found pan-culturally in the traits ascribed to men and women'.

Being a father brought extra pressure pertaining to personal and external expectations of what that role implies. Marsiglio and Pleck, (2005 p. 260) refer to the social class of men as an impactor on how they view themselves particularly from a 'financially disadvantaged' perspective: 'when men are unemployed or under employed, they often find it difficult to feel good about themselves as fathers because the provider role continues to be an important feature of hegemonic images of masculinity and men's fathering experience (Bowman and Sanders 1998, Christiansen and Palkovitz 1998).

2.3   Surviving Masculinity

Human history which propelled us from hunters and gatherers (which focused on the provision of food, water and shelter, with little or no job specification), through to agrarian and then industrialised societies leading to our post industrialised reality, offers little to those without tag or title. Giddens (2006 p. 462) points to the 'fundamental changes affecting the role of women and family patterns in industrializes societies. In this

time of rapid change, he refers to the 'traditional expectations and pressures and asks: 'what does it mean to be a man in modern society? Is masculinity in crisis?

A 2012 study in the UK, in which 'five leading social scientists' were engaged by the Samaritans to explore theory and evidence in relation to psychology, sociology, economics, and gender, concerning 'Men, Suicide and Society' while referencing 'masculinities', states:

> *The way men are brought up to behave and the roles, attributes and behaviours that society expects of them contribute to suicide in men. Men compare themselves against a masculine 'gold standard' which prizes power, control and invincibility. When men believe they are not meeting this standard, they feel a sense of shame and defeat. Having a job and being able to provide for your family is central to 'being a man', particularly for working class men. Masculinity is associated with control, but when men are depressed or in crisis, they can feel out of control. This can propel some men towards suicidal behaviour as a way of regaining control. Men are more likely to use drugs or alcohol in response to distress.*
>
> (Samaritans 2012)

Seeking to explain why middle-aged men of low socio-economic status were 'excessively vulnerable' to suicide, the report (Samaritans, 2012) also points to a number of startling statistics including; men in the lowest social class, living in the most deprived areas, are up to ten times more at risk of suicide then those in the highest social class, living in the most affluent areas; In Ireland (26 counties) the suicide rate is four times higher among men than women, with the highest rate of suicide among men being for those aged 55-65. The burden that some middle aged men with low socioeconomic status endure, when matched with other factors, and then carried into later life scenarios (with all that later life brings), becomes a weight that is often too difficult to bear.

Murphy (2017), writing on suicide, also refers to the challenges for men with low socio economic status and elaborates further particularly in relation to psychological factors for mid-life/low-socioeconomic men which include; social perfectionism – perception he should always reach the expectation of others; self-criticism – excessive negative self-assessment, not recognising personal success; rumination – thinking what they should be

or have by this stage of their life; reduced ability to problem solve; inability to produce positive future thoughts – negative about the future and a feeling that they are a burden – feeling they are so incapable they are a hindrance to loved ones an society. She describes men as being brought up in certain ways and having certain goals. In lower socio-economic groups, especially, the need to 'be a man' is paramount, if this is not happening, in his eyes he feels defeated e.g., not providing or protecting or succeeding (Murphy 2017).

2.3.1 The Social Reality of Hegemonic Masculinity

A dominant group inevitably has the greatest influence in determining a cultures overall outlook – its philosophy, morality, social theory, and even its science… Inevitably the dominant group is the model for 'normal' human relationships.

(Miller 1976 cited in Oakley 1992 p. 39)

Connell (1995) describes Hegemonic masculinity as the idealised form of masculinity at a given place and time. Courtenay's (2000 p. 1388) description of hegemonic masculinity as 'the socially dominant gender construction that subordinates' femininities as well as other forms of masculinity and reflects and shapes men's social relationships with women and other men; it represents power and authority'. As younger men the hegemonic masculinity script that places men above women is easily played out; it only becomes a problem when age, Ill health, unemployment, addiction, etc. gets in the way as their once shining masculinity star fades. Working-class men's bodies are often the tools for their work (e.g., men who work in construction and other trades, manual labour, and the like); and so their ageing may differ from that of nonworking-class men in important ways (Calasanti 2009 pp. 27-31). Johal *et al.* (2012) describe some scenarios where men might be 'reluctant to engage'; fear of stigmatisation that could be linked to 'notions of masculinity and manhood' which can derive from abuse, isolation, being perceived as a failure if they try to express their fears and needs, or just 'not being 'manly'.

In considering Saxton and Cole's (2012) paper, 'No Country for Old Men: a search for masculinity in later life', Campbell *et al.* (2006 p. 28) examines one of the character's (Bell) 'monologic masculinity' that 'limits the range of topics deemed appropriate for men and women to discuss, regulates a specific definition of what constitutes work and success, and recognises precise boundaries of manhood'. He observes Bell's realisation

that following the life-changing events that he witnessed, his personal perspective when 'held to the light' challenges his understanding of manhood and leads him to 'a more flexible, alternative understanding of what it means to be a man'. Bell begins to question his role in society as he ages and struggles to adapt to what Campbell *et al.* (2006) describes as a "dialogic masculinity".

Peter *et al.* (2000 p. 216) describe dialogic masculinity as 'a broader understanding of what it is to be a man, more open to talking about making mistakes, to expressing emotions, to change and criticism, to a less controlling attitude toward machines and the environment, and to different measures of work and success'. In a world where hegemonic masculinity creates a sense of blindness to any other reality it is never simple to create conditions for our personal perspectives to be 'held to the light'.

Gilmore (1990 p. 1) defines manhood simply as 'the approved way of being an adult in any given society', but western society does not legislate for loss of perceived masculinity and manly identity for those men who have/had only that. Older men living on the margins cannot buy a new identity; the space to explore where their script for life generated from is difficult to find; we have to find ways to create the spaces and conditions for them to engage that are meaningful, dignified and respectful.

2.4   Class: Born into a defined, predetermined bubble

The journey to bridge the gap between the have and the have nots continues to occupy theoretical interrogation. Marx's argument of exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie was a starting point for others, including Durkheim (1858-1917), Weber (1864-1920), Gramsci (1891-1937), Bourdieu (1930-2002), and others, who went further by suggesting different layers of class, the concept of 'social solidarity' 'hegemony', the importance power, status, party, various forms of capital, Habitus, etc. Whether its nobility or commoners, aristocrats or servants, landowners or peasants, kings/queens of industry or factory workers, the structures established to serve society continue to perpetuate the status quo of societal inequality. All the participants of the study, except one came from an urban working-class background. Their class determined existence and life expectations was to a large extent a culturally 'done deal'.

The modern working class developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Marx (in Giddens and Held 1982 p. 23)

The passive embracing of the participants' life plan as the expected norm for how people should live their life gave the men no reason for outcry or revolt, as long as there was a wage packet and a possibility of a pathway to some resemblance of a happy ending, what more could the men want or expect? The hegemonic potion of believed constructed norms served by the establishment to blur the reality of class inequality is compounded by the structures and societal institutions that (in case the effects of the hegemonic potion begins to wear off) employ the force of law to affect compliance. Karl Marx, and his collaborator Friedrich Engels (1848), in their most celebrated work: *The Communist Manifesto* states that 'the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win' (Marx and Engels 1848). Unfortunately, the chains, that is the men's blurred reality, hides this grand prize.

The poison chalice filled with toxic, masculine-laden lumped broth is hard to swallow, but it is swallowed because the reward for us as men is domination and profit. We are un-questioning complicit enablers of inequality and societal wrong of un-fathomable proportion. But even now when our accumulative years renders the coveted elixir tasteless as its 'use by date' expires, we crave for its addictive content that made us men, as we trawl in vain through life's menu for one last swallow to allow us finish the course.

But the struggle for men goes deeper. The disconnectedness they experience at a private level and the sense of being trapped along with their inability to 'overcome their troubles', keeps them busy, confused, fooled and 'seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history' (Mills 2000 pp. 3-4).

Max Weber (1864-1920) viewed society as having several layers as opposed to Marx's two. Weber (2015) argued that *Power, Wealth* and *Prestige* were the building blocks of social stratification and that these three concepts were at the core of class division. Using

Weber's (2015) theory of stratification as a framework to locate men-living-on-the-margin's societal position puts them at the bottom of the stratification pyramid.

Power supply

Throughout our lives we struggle for power to control our personal circumstances; real or imagined situations threaten us, like poverty, witchcraft, physical or mental illness, drug addiction, alcoholism, etc. (Toombs 2016 p. 74). He also refers to the 'power elites' who he says; 'look down on the general public, the highly educated on the lesser educated, intellectuals on people of average intelligence, athletes on nerds, beautiful people on the homely, heterosexuals on gays, and gangs on suburbanites' (Toombs 2016 p. 75).

The weight of this world of power pecking-order weighs heavy when added to loss of personal identity. Lack of financial security negates against any possibility of purchasing the trappings of power and influence in the form of property, being cash rich, appearance, the sharing of one's success (with friends and family, which can generate attention and outward expressions of affection and even love), the sense of being perceived as a functioning male, and so forth, all contribute to a power outage that threatens the very existence of those living on the margins.

Dahl (1961 and 1963 p. 229) describes 'more familiar categories' of resources related to influence and power: 'the patterns of social standing; the distribution of cash, credit and wealth, access to legality, popularity, control over jobs, and control over sources of information' (p. 229).

Giddens, (2006 p. 845), points to Weber's assertion that 'power is about getting your own way, even when others don't want you to'. According to Weber the three categories or 'Ideal types of authority' where power can be located are: Traditional authority; described as power legitimized through respect for long-established cultural patterns, charismatic authority; power is drawn from the devotion felt towards a leader by his or her subordinates; who believe that the leader possesses exceptional qualities that inspire devotion, rational-legal authority; Weber argued that traditional authority was being replaced rational-legal authority, that is: power that is legitimated through legally enacted rules and regulations.

Bourdieu's (2000) concept of habitus in which the individual's resources is referred to as Cultural Capital (how we behave, knowing the right cultural codes, etc.), Economic Capital (money, property, etc.) and Social Capital (our networks, who we know, etc.). This amounts to Symbolic Capital, which we carry with us as we attempt to participate in society; it is a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behaviour people acquire through acting in society (Bourdieu 2000 p. 19). Bourdieu (1977 p. 86) refers to the 'internalised structures' and 'schemes of perception' that shape a subjects world view. He describes 'habitus' as 'a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class'. Habitus seems a relevant theoretical concept when applying it to men living on the margins. This culturally ingrained way-of-being moulds and compartmentalises citizens who then act out their place in society's hierarchy. Referring to the relationship between the individual and society Bourdieu (1986a p. 249) argues, 'The volume of social capital possessed by a given agent depends on the size of the network of connections that he can effectively mobilize'. He defines social capital as 'The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1986b p. 286)

Exacting any kind of agency is challenging when you are located at a negative societal level, and as for access to power at a very human level, you hardly register on the grid. The habitus reflects the different positions people have in society, for example, whether they are brought up in a middle-class environment or in a working-class suburb. It is part of how society produces itself. But there is also change. (Bourdieu 2000 p. 18-20)

2.5   Ageing, is this it?

2.5.1 Shut the door on your way out

After a lifetime of investment in the forms of career, family, reputation, community service, etc., the aged are forced to endure the ignominy of prestige loss, social and economic discrimination, poverty level subsistence, and social isolation (Dowd 1975 p. 593). The argument that Dowd puts forward in his paper explores the process of disengagement from society of older people and their declining ability to challenge the societal norms that determine their productive cut-off point, is that there is other factors at play outside of the usual 'failing health, lower income, widowhood' that 'stifle social

interaction' (p. 586). Dowd cites Blau (1964 p. 587) who argues 'whoever commands services others need, and who is independent of any at their command, attains power over others by making the satisfaction of their need contingent on their compliance'.

The reward for compliance can appear in the form of a state pension or social welfare/disability payment, causing Blau to sarcastically remark, 'where once the now retired worker was able to exchange expertise for needed wages socioeconomic status constitutes, in effect, a critical control variable in the relationship between age and power resources' (Blau 1964 p. 592). Dowd's argument that posits an exchange theory that uses the availability of power to the older person and the rewarding entity (State) as a means of determining rewards, and his assertion that 'the aged themselves have yet to develop any extensive awareness of their common social and economic plight' (Dowd 1975 p. 593), doesn't offer any solution to what seems to be the forced social isolation of the aged. The complicit dynamic of hegemony even in the face of those enduring unequal social relationships has to be explained and understood in order to be addressed. The ability of older marginalised men to cope depends on the weight they are trying to carry, while the disconnectedness hook continues to drag them deeper into isolation.

2.5.2 More time to reflect

Is it possible that we are reaching the end of this hegemonic masculinity cycle? The proportion of older people in Ireland is increasing dramatically, particularly in the over sixty fives. This age group has risen by 19.1% to 637,567 since the last census in 2011 (CSO, 2017). Quin (2008 p. 107) points to the increase in life expectancy that suggests that "many people can now expect to spend between one fifth and one quarter of their lifespan within the category of older people". The greater time allocated to us to wander the older people zone in the approaching years will afford us opportunities to both reflect on our personal history and question our constructed 'gendered schema'. We should use this time wisely by employing an informed community development approach to research, using methods and subsequent learning to generate important discovery that will at least challenge the discourse that maintains a masculinity way of being that is not fit for purpose.

2.6   Community Development

Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives

<div align="right">(SCCD 2001 p. 5)</div>

In this section I will refer to community development theory and practice, and relevant writings particularly in relation to the community work approach taken with the men who participated in this study. This research is interested in understanding the relationship between community development interventions that enable and encourage real participation.

Ledwith, (2007b pp. 8-13) calls for a critical approach to community development 'grassroots' practice that is 'inspired by a vision of social and environmental justice which starts in people's everyday lives. She refers to Freire, (1972 p. 41) in which he talks about 'authentic praxis' which Ledwith describes as the concept of delivering social justice outcomes in 'every project that we undertake', while ensuring that those projects are 'planned, delivered and evaluated within an emancipatory anti-discriminatory framework' (Ledwith 2007b pp. 8-13).

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), the Brazilian educator and theorist, grew up in oppressed and impoverished communities during the Great Depression, where he learned from his experiences, and subsequently led him to develop the concept of critical consciousness which he referred to as 'conscientization'. Kina and Goncalves (2018) describe conscientization as being rooted in Freire's reading of Gramsci's (1971) work on hegemony, counter hegemony, and critical consciousness. They also refer to hegemony as giving us a convenient vocabulary for understanding why people consent to and participate in relationships that are fundamentally unjust. Gramsci's analysis of consent and the concept of 'hegemony' in which 'the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules' (Gramsci 1971 p. 244) is a convincing argument. Ledwith (2020 p. 176) agrees with Gramsci and refers to the 'every day thoughts and actions', and the influencing ideas that is used as a means to

internalise 'the values, attitudes, morality and beliefs' of the masses so they believe their thoughts and actions are merely a consequence of 'common sense'.
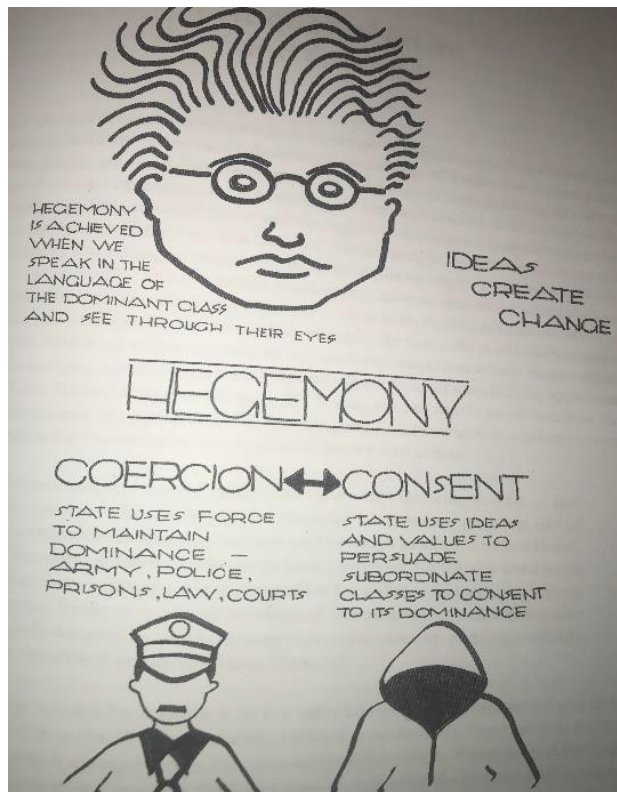
Figure 1: Defining Hegemony (Ledwith 2020 p. 185)

According to Ledwith (2020) community development can be the tool for change; she refers to Foucault (1980 p. 98) who suggests that power permeates at the 'micro-relationships of everyday life', and in this sense Ledwith (2020) argues that the process of community development with its emphasis on consciousness raising will bring us to the point of 'questioning our lived experience' and by doing so 'we expose the contradictions we live by, and by seeing the world through a different lens, we claim back our power as subjects in the world'. This thinking seems to lean towards an awareness in respect of individual consciousness raising as well as the collective perspective when working for change. Although Crickley (2003 p. 40), referring to the Community Development Support Programme, posits 'frequently individual outcomes are those that are sought and that are included into the understanding of community work. There is nothing wrong with such outcomes, but I would suggest to you that they are not the core of what community work is about'.

Freire's (1996) thinking in respect of raising people's consciousness in order to recognise oppression and work towards transformation is undoubtedly a useful tool of community work practitioners, and can lead to informed and purposeful engagement and participation which, according to Kina and Goncalves (2018), affords us the ability to 'reveal the hegemonic forces influencing everyday experience', which in turn allows for a reassessment of our relationship with the world, of a politicising of lived experiences, and of 'countering the beliefs and assumptions' that determine our daily lives. Crickley (2003 pp. 40-42) describes community work as being 'concerned – or should be concerned – with empowerment'. She also argues for empowerment through consciousness raising to active analysis, rather than just 'keeping the people happy where they are'. She also refers to 'creating the conditions' for community work such as personal development, training and education' to take place. Ledwith (2020 p. 82) also places a strong emphasis on the importance of personal development and education; 'Education is power, which is why community development involves releasing the potential for intellectual thought in everyone'.

Similar to Crickley (2003) and Ledwith (2020) the community development model of community work as described by Popple (1995) is also about creating an environment for community work by 'assisting groups to acquire skills and confidence to improve the quality of the lives of its members. With its emphasis on promoting self-help by means of education, this community development approach is thought to reflect the 'uniqueness of community work' (Twelvetrees 1991 pp. 98). This uniqueness is exemplified by Freire (1996 p. 45) where following the exploration of aspects of the lived experiences of the oppressed various characteristics emerge. Freire describes self-depreciation as a characteristic internalised by the 'oppressed'. He argues that this internalisation is born out of a constant rhetoric by the 'oppressor' that they are 'good for nothing, know nothing, and incapable of learning' resulting in she/he being 'convinced of their unfitness'. The uniqueness of community development that Twelvetrees (1991) describes allows for and expects the incorporation of theory into community work practice.

Ledwith (2007b pp. 8-13) argues that without theory, practice is in danger of being reduced, at best, to a self-help, local activity; she challenges us to 'get better at weaving theory into our practice'. According to Ledwith (2007a) the adoption of a criticalapproach to community development, which is informed by values of 'mutual respect, reciprocity, dignity, mutuality, trust and cooperation' keeps our practice on message in

the endeavour to achieve a 'just and sustainable future'. She argues that this well-defined ideological base connects with our vision and provides a 'framework through which to evaluate every stage of the community development process' (Ledwith 2007a).

Alinsky (1971) while also referring to 'dignity' describes participation as the 'heartbeat of the democratic way of life'; in order to achieve what he describes as democratic participation he reminds us of our obligation as workers to respect the dignity of the people we work with:

> *If you respect the dignity of the individual you are working with, then his desires, not yours; his values, not yours; his ways of working and fighting, not yours; his choice of leadership, not yours; his programmes, not yours, are important and must be followed.*
>
> (Alinsky 1971)

From consciousness raising to human autonomy

It is clear that consciousness raising is an important starting point and thread that is apparent throughout good community work practice, but Mayo (1975) cautions that our work will be of little value unless it is 'keyed into an embracing political strategy involving all the poor, all the ill-housed, all the deprived'. The raising of awareness that informs how we challenge the inequalities and injustices that affect our lives is key in exacting change. Part of our work as community development practitioners should be to promote a participatory approach to addressing the ills of society which includes both a process of self-reflection as well as a collective advancement and sharing of ideas and learning.

> *As women and men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena.*
>
> (Freire 1996 p. 63)

This participatory approach is captured well by Combat Poverty (2000 p. 5) who describe community development as including 'a process whereby those who are marginalised and excluded are enabled to gain in self-confidence, to join with others and to participate in actions to change their situation'. In gaining this 'self-confidence' it moves the individual

to a place in which the environment is created where their story can be told and subsequently their voice heard. This personal transformation allows for the possibility of individuals being able to reach a point where they can eventually act collectively for change. Ledwith (2005 p. 620 posits 'The simple act of listening to people's stories, respectfully giving one's full attention, is an act of personal empowerment, but to bring about change for social justice this process needs to be collective and needs to be located within wider structures.' It is clear that community development with marginalised people is in itself a unique developmental process that moves the individual to a place where they can act in the collective.

Lee (2003 pp. 48-58), referring to Combat Poverty's description of community development, suggests that participation is a process that gives people 'influence' over decision making processes that affect them, and that it is a 'right', arguing that 'community development is potentially a means or process whereby people can achieve this right'.

Mansuri and Rao (2013 pp. 10-16) point to how residents can use 'successful community development' as a tool for positive personal transformation that subsequently not only hold 'states and markets accountable' but also creates a condition to 'influence decisions that affect their lives'. They also place an important emphasis on participation and argue that even when communities have failed to achieve their objectives the fact that they were part of the participatory process they expressed 'greater satisfaction' (Mansuri and Rao 2013 pp. 10-16).

Bhattacharyya (2004) states that 'agency' (human autonomy) should be the 'ultimate goal' of human development. He leans on De Certeau (1986) and Giddens (1984) to explain that this autonomy gives people power to choose and live life according to their understanding and meaning of what life should be; people would then 'have the powers to define themselves as opposed to be defined by others'. Bhattacharyya (2004) argues that we need to define community in order to address its ills and affect positive change. He believes that redefining community as 'solidarity' (shared identity and norms) allows us the opportunity to explore the erosion of this solidarity which he argues takes us back centuries to 'pre-industrial social configurations' to locate causation. Bhattacharyya references Meranze (2001 pp. 110-111) who states that the process of solidarity erosion;

is visible all around us; in the closing of health facilities, the widespread stigmatisation of some recipients of governmental assistance, the transfer of fiscal resources from schools to prisons, long term attacks on labour unions and labour rights, the contraction of social commitments to shared basic rights, the tightening of social borders.

(Meranze 2001 pp. 110-111)

The challenge for community development practitioners within this toxic environment is that there is no quick fix for communities. The issues are 'deeply entrenched' and compounded by 'our habits of thought', as we struggle to address 'macro factors' while much of the time working in 'microenvironments' (Bhattacharyya 2004).

In meeting the challenges for practitioners in the community work field, the hard–to-reach, vulnerable and marginalised need to be heard. The power of narrative to give voice to this cohort of society and subsequently inform our practice, is presented in the literature described in the following section. In creating what Ledwith, (2007b pp. 8-12) argues as 'a vision of social justice' that 'starts in people's everyday lives', and realising Freire's concept of consciousness raising, stories of lived experiences need to be told and heard.

2.7   Let me tell you a story

The literature related to narrative inquiry methodology is broad as it is long. The multiplicity of components and off-shoots relative to narrative inquiry also drew this researcher far and wide in researching the literature. There was an inevitable narrowing down to the core writings that not only made sense and informed me, but also helped to guide me through the study. There was a sense of participating in an informed environment when collaborating with the participants. In the following section I will introduce the reader to the relevant writings that not only shaped and guided the study but also very quickly became a tool of engagement with the participants that created an unprecedented level of trust and connection between participants and the CDP, both during and following their engagement in the interview stages of the study. The rationale for the employment of narrative as my methodological tool of choice will be explored in greater detail in the following (Methodology) chapter.

Embedded in people's stories we hear their feelings, thoughts and attitudes, and the richness of the narrative helps us to understand how they understand themselves, their strategies for living, and how they make theoretical sense of their lives (Etherington 2004 p. 75). Turning to narrative inquiry as a methodology to research the lived experiences of older men was prompted firstly by my immersion in the literature that confirmed my belief in narrative inquiry as a fit for purpose methodology that would deliver rich data, and secondly the ability of the participants, to engage in a real way which allowed them through their stories, express their inner-most feelings, and desires. The best stories are those which stir people's minds, hearts and souls, and by doing so give them new insights into themselves, their problems and their human condition (Churchman 1971 p. 178). Generally speaking the participants of this study had fallen off the back of life's truck, which was trundling down the road to nowhere, and they landed in Swan's Rest, where at least they had a roof over their head and where they could shut their door and remove themselves from harm, harming others, and the world.

Freire (1996 p. 90) points to 'situationality', which he argues sees people 'rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark'. He continues, 'Human beings *are* because they *are* in a situation. And they will be *more* the more they not only critically reflect on their existence but critically act on it'. The participants of this narrative inquiry dipped in and out of the critical reflective space described by Freire as we journeyed through this study together, sometimes pausing to question the how and why of passages of experiences. But the very fact that they have participated in this study is their 'critical act' in practice. Some are also developing a new way of living born out of reflections of their storied lives. In her book 'Using Story', referring to story as a 'universal occurrence' which 'seems important to our humanity', Moon (2010, p.V11) states: 'we are story-telling beings and story-listening beings'. Elsewhere in her book she points to Engel's (1995 p. 23) definition of story (in the context of working with children), as having the ability to 'give us a new way to experience life, a second world, beyond the world of immediate action' (Moon, 2010, p. 23).

Elliot (2005 pp. 3-4) also refers to narratives as means to 'offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it' (in Hinchman and Hinchman 1997). Elliot goes on to describe three 'key features' that 'underpin the importance of narrative within sociology': that firstly narratives are 'chronological' ('they are representations of sequences of events'), secondly, they are, 'meaningful', and thirdly they are 'inherently social, in that

they are produced for a specific audience' (Elliot 2005 pp. 3-4). Restorying the elicited outpourings and presenting them back to the participants in and organized fashion that made sense and drew approval as being a true reflection of the narrator's intended meaning took some time to craft and perfect, but was achieved as the frequency of the 'back and forth' checking in with the participants grew and my awareness of their individual social perspective became more familiar. Narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (Czarniawska 2004 p. 17).

2.7.1 To capture the complexity of being

Clarke and Rossini (2011 pp. 214), cites Barthes's wonderful quote regarding the 'central role of narratives in social life', which reminds the reader of humankind's most precious tool of communication that has been with us since time began:

> *The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, (panto) mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's Saint Ursula), stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.*
>
> (Barthes 1977 p. 79)

Understanding the potential of what Barthes describes above is something we might miss as we take for granted the everyday narratives we construct as we live out our lives. Czarniawska (2004 p. 6) continues by referring to two perspectives that are 'especially

relevant: the first is, seeing narrative as a 'mode of knowing' and narration as a mode of communication.

It was through this research experience that the connecting power of narrative became familiar to me. 'If we understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000 p. 17).

While referring to societal shift towards a postmodern philosophical view that, places the individual front and centre by acknowledging the 'influence of experience and culture on the construction of knowledge', Webster and Mertova (2007 p. 4) argue that the movement away from the more traditional research methodologies is 'partly on account of the constraints of conventional methods and their incompatibility with the complexities of human actions'. The rush of the participants to embrace the narrative process and experience of same, following the initial tentative 'toe dipping', was quite revealing as to the power of the storying process itself. The realisation from the participants that they had been gifted with a vehicle that could transport them and their stories to a place never before available to them, a place where they were heard without prejudice or condemnation, valued as contributors to learning and understanding so that others can benefit from their journey and extremely importantly a place where their worldly everyday language was used to by both researcher and researched. The avoidance of unfamiliar language and terminologies relaxed the participants and contributed to rich data laden narratives largely based on an understanding of the content and context of the on-going conversations with the researcher before, during and following the interview process.

2.8   Summary

This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature used in addressing the research question. The significance of story as a tool for social change was explored as well as the literature in respect of aspects of masculinity including 'hegemonic' masculinity. Also referenced was the consequence of 'class', including power and various forms of capital with an emphasis on habitus and hegemony. This chapter also describes older people and their standing in society as well as the growing challenge for older people in the modern world. Community development with marginalised people is also explored in relation to creating the condition for change that involves moving from individual transformation to

employing a collective perspective. The importance of consciousness raising is also referred to, as well as the challenges for community development in respect of achieving solidarity and agency.

Chapter 3: Narrative Inquiry – A Relational Methodology

3.1   Introduction

Listening to the stories and 'words from the heart' from people who, as partners in the research, construct their own lived experiences, and their analysis, knowledge and aspirations, democratizes knowledge, and leads to a more complete and nuanced understanding of elements such as hunger, discrimination, social exclusion, stigma, and disempowerment.

(Mander 2010)

Mander (2010) refers to the 'knowledge and insights' that can be generated by employing a social science research approach, which he argues can be 'invaluable' in influencing the 'design and evaluation of public policy' while at the same time securing the 'human rights of disadvantaged and oppressed people' (Mander 2010 pp. 252-270). When we carry out research with vulnerable people (those who are living on the margins of society, isolated, struggling with poverty and addiction related issues etc., such as the participants of this study), the stakes are so high that we need to get it right. Hard-to-reach, hidden, and vulnerable populations often face heightened social, psychological, and physical risks when identified as a member of a particular social group, thus making them more hesitant to identify themselves to researchers (Ellard-Grey *et al.* 2015). As researchers we need to be sensitive to what lies beneath the symptoms that relegate the participants to society's margins; awareness of the risk to the present and future well-being of participants, because of the research process itself must be our default position. Our choice of methodology and the diligence by which we employ the good practice and expected rigor of the research design will determine or success, or not.

This chapter sets out to explain the rationale and criteria for choosing the methodology, selection of participants, interview process, ethical considerations and the importance of both researcher and participants producing a reliable and trustworthy research study.

A change of world view can change the world viewed.

(Pearce 1971 p. 2)

Creating the condition

McClintock *et al. (*2003 p. 723) introduce the idea of 'research as responsible', suggesting that an 'ethic of responsibility', rather than objectivity, is a more appropriate quality benchmark for research with people. This chapter describes the various elements of the methodology and how they were employed in practice. The structure of this chapter mirrors my own deep-felt responsibility to provide the reader with an understanding and appreciation as to the thoroughness and diligence in which this narrative inquiry study was carried out. Connelly and Clandinin (1999 p. 139), while emphasizing the rigour of narrative inquiry, also refer to the importance of making available to the reader 'criteria' for understanding the whole of the study.

The framing of the narrative in this way builds confidence in not only the study as a whole but importantly allows for confidence in the method of narrative inquiry to deliver important discovery. 'Narrative researchers are concerned with the representation of experience, causality, temporality and the difference between the experience of the telling of time, narrative form, and integrity of the whole in a research document, the invitational quality of a research text, its authenticity, adequacy and plausibility. Currently in narrative inquiry, it is important for each researcher to set forth the criteria that govern the study and by which it be judged' (Connelly and Clandinin 1999 p. 139).

There is an obligation and responsibility on us as researchers to allay any fears or obstacles that may prevent confidence in the research study. Honouring the participants' commitment and participation to the study and also creating the condition in which readers can navigate their way through the whole of the research with clarity and confidence is paramount. Just as important is delivering on the promise of integrity and ethical thoroughness that was made when beginning this epic collaborative journey.

As argued above, creating the 'condition' or what McClintock *et al. (*2003 p. 723) argue, 'creating a space for research is a partial step towards responsibility, where it is not the aim to change people's understandings *per se,* but to provide conditions where understandings can emerge'.

My approach

Moving from the transcriptions stage (which generally produces a forest of interview transcripts) of a narrative inquiry research framework, to the 'interpretive story' stage is challenging and extremely time consuming. McCormack (2000 pp. 282-297) refers to both the 'individuality and the complexity of a life' which contributes to the difficulty of constructing a 'meaningful story' outcome. She argues that because people use various 'lenses' to 'construct and reconstruct their identity and give meaning to their lives' so it follows that a multiple lens approach to the interpretation process is employed including; 'active listening, narrative processes, language, context, and moments.' The outcomes from employing these lenses are then used to construct meaningful stories.

Chase, (2005 p. 665) points to the researchers 'interactive voice, ("one that reflects the inter-subjectivity between their voice and the narrators' voice"), as a mechanism that allows their (researcher) voice to be truly representative of that of the narrators. In this respect the first part of each individual narrator's section will contain a brief biography and description of the narrator. The following section will present a chronological life journey story in narrator's own words (all of which will be illustrated in italic font), and supported by the researcher's words drawn from passages generated through transcribed field texts, observations, field notes, grunts, moans, outbursts, silences, into-space staring, and recorded interviews which will both create context and also prioritise an emerging theme.

Connolly (2007 p. 453) in recognising the difficulty and challenges in organising narrative research data in order to make sense and meaning argue; *'Research involving this level of human interaction and human relationship is going to feel messy'*. Multiple themes have emerged throughout the various individual interviews and to a large extent are also present in the collective. To address this messiness and create clarity, understanding and meaning for the reader I will draw on one specific and different theme in each of the named participant pieces. In other words, I will firstly apportion one primary theme to each of the participants (different themes in each case) and follow with an analysis of the themes in the collective across all the participants.

3.2   How we view the world

Our ontological and epistemological assumptions determine our thinking in relation to research design. The research question(s) is also an indicator to the possible design of the research study. The employment of narrative inquiry as my methodological tool to elicit stories from the participants predetermined the subjective framework that makes up the elements of the design of the research study. The participant led, unstructured questions and conversations that defined the interview processes are a clear indication of the qualitative nature of the study and the understanding of how knowledge is constructed and developed.

Using narrative inquiry not only creates an opportunity for seldom listened to voices to be heard, but also has the potential to create a new sense of meaning in relation to the participant's lives and possibly the researcher's as well. The engagement and connection between the researcher and participant is essential in delivering rich discovery, which is also greatly influenced by the confidence the participant has in the process; the belief that their contribution is valued and very importantly that their participation in the study has a platform from which their captured experiences can be communicated from, and subsequent rich discovery used to positively change people's lives.

This narrative inquiry has the potential to contribute to the outing of preconceived notions that relegates older men to be viewed through an ageing, dependency and non-contributory prism, and instead enable the development of a counter narrative based on a more informed human perspective, contributing to an understanding that all ages and genders bring attached challenges that can be addressed within a paradigm of an equality driven social model that values all humankind. This is an aspirational concept, but one which as a society we cannot ignore. Daring to dream of the possibility to re-invent the human persona and societal perception of the more vulnerable and forgotten members of our society is dependent on the provision of evidence that demands change, which is our human duty to seek out.

Delivering on the methodological promise.

Contextualizing the narrative inquiry collective by creating an understanding for the reader of not only the research process from start to finish, but also the social demography of both participant and researcher is imperative to creating a detailed and informed understanding of the narrative.

Narrative is emergent, it is fluid, reactionary and responsive, its shape and content change with the emotional imparting of lived experiences in the form of stories. The purposeful research design framework when combined with my on-going supervision, ethical considerations, reflexivity etc. serves to guide the reader, protect the participant, and deliver valuable discovery for the researcher. In practice this looks like the practical elements from the stated narrative methodology in the previous chapter, reflected in the form of the research questions, and continued through to the sampling process, ethical considerations (including consent form), conversational interviewing, pre-interview and post interview discussions and check in/out, recording process, note taking, relational appreciation and researcher/participant collaborative undertaking and ownership, and continuing through to inductive analysis, co-discussed findings and participant shared recommendations.

Narrative analysis framework was used to interpret the data and the Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM) of data analysis developed by Mauthner and Doucet, (1998 pp. 119-144) was used to enhance the interpretation of the data. This method is explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

3.2.1 Theoretical and methodological influences.

My culture, gender, education, experiences, challenges, victories and social background amongst others, determines my understanding of the world, and also informs my social perspective. Employing narrative as my methodology places me firmly in the subjective, socially-constructed multiple reality paradigm, which Denscombe (2014 p. 97). when referring to phenomenology, while, rejecting the notion that "there is no one universal reality", argues instead that 'things can be seen in different ways by different people at different times in different circumstances, and that each alternative version needs to be recognized as being valid in its own right'. Born into or developed over time the individual's social realities gravitate to other similar (but also different) social realities creating geographical clusters of socially created cultures and norms.

In his paper 'Narrative Knowing and the Practicing Psychologist', Polkinghorne (1985) points to the limitation of the scientific approach to research in gathering knowledge, in contrast to the knowledge gleaned "in particular" through narrative, which he states: 'Informs a wide range of our personal and interpersonal understanding and interaction' (Polkinghorne 1985 p. 5). Just like Clandinin (2013 p. 13), referring to (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 2006), who argue that: the development and use of narrative inquiry is inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Polkinghorne (1985 p. 14) also emphasizes 'experience' as being the essence of the power of the story in creating knowledge, when he states: 'in a real sense the person's identity is their story'.

3.3   Social research

My relativist ontological and epistemological position determines my subjectivist stance which acknowledges that as humans we interpret the world in a unique way creating a personal social reality. As researchers we access that reality and try and understand what that reality is by employing appropriate research methodologies. Born into or developed over time the individual's social realities gravitate to other similar (but also different) social realities creating geographical clusters of socially created cultures and norms. In his paper 'Narrative Knowing and the Practicing Psychologist', Polkinghorne, (1985 p. 5), points to the limitation of the scientific approach to research in gathering knowledge, in contrast to the knowledge gleaned 'in particular' through narrative, which he argues 'informs a wide range of our personal and interpersonal understanding and interaction'.

McDonald (2009), points to definition of sociology by Macionis and Plummer (2002 p. 4) as 'the systematic study of human society'. She also adds the definition of sociology offered by Restivo, 'A field of inquiry simultaneously concerned with, understanding, explaining, criticizing and improving the human condition' (cited in Tovey and Share 2003 p. 16). Clancy *et al.* (1995 p. 4), provide a brief but comprehensive overview of the development of social theories as a means to understanding social reality. They point to the emergence in the nineteenth century of theorists that grappled with 'the rupture of traditional society caused by the twin revolutions; the industrial revolution, which occurred between 1780 and 1840 and the democratic revolutions of the United States of

America in 1776 and France in 1789', which changed the fabric of society forever Clancy *et al.* (1995 p. 4).

While acknowledging Auguste Comte (1798-1857, generally referred to as the father of sociology) as the first to use the term 'sociology', in relation to the scientific study of society, Clancy *et al.* (1995) argue that the writings of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber have had the 'most enduring influence in the shaping of the discipline'. Marx and Durkheim were drawn towards the belief that social science could 'develop theories and laws in the manner of the natural sciences', adopted a structuralist perspective when studying society (Clancy *et al.* 1995). Society, argued Durkheim, 'is far more the sum of individual acts; it has a firmness or solidity comparable to structures in the material environment' (Giddens 2006 p. 106). This was in contrast to Weber's preferred 'interpretive' approach, which focused on 'patterned, subjective interpretations? Weber argued that 'the subjects of social research actively interpret and redefine their own reality and claimed that these active and interactive interpretations need to be part of any objective account of social life' (Clancy *et al.* 1995 p. 8). A sociological examination of social problems enables us to move beyond commonsense notions, to gain new insights into ourselves, and to develop an awareness of the connection between our own world and the worlds of other people (Kendall 2004 p. 7).

Research approach

We go about our day to day living in social researcher mode. We are constantlyevaluating, measuring, listening, making judgments, unconsciously or consciously observing how we interact with each other and the world around us. The non-passive nature of the participants in the research process, particularly when engaging at a deep personal level which has the potential for high emotional one to one exchange, must determine the 'design for life' methodological research tools that we choose.

Research with vulnerable humans gives us a once off window of opportunity to get it right; to not only employ the most appropriate methodological tools but also to create the environment that maximizes the potential and validates the employment of the chosen methodology. 'It is the business of sociological research to go beyond surface-level understandings of ordinary life' (Giddens 2006 p. 76).

When describing some of the essence of 'good sociological work' Giddens emphasizes: 'to achieve these aims we must know the most useful research methods to apply in a given study and how best to analyze the results'.

Freedman and Combs (2002 in Etherington 2004 p. 21) refers to the adoption of a 'not knowing' attitude when experiencing social constructions which Etherington (2004) argues is 'ideal' for researchers who are serious about discovering new knowledge generated from social research. This approach is consistent with Bryman's (2012 p. 24-27) description of an inductive and deductive theory approach to social research (See Figure 2, below) in which he places deductive research strategy under the positivist paradigm umbrella, referring to a 'top down' process which sets out to prove an established theory. Whereas the opposite is true with inductive research strategy (interpretivist paradigm), which employs a bottom-up approach in which data is gathered that will lead to establishing a theory therefore making inductive research strategy a good fit when employing narrative as methodological tool in social research.
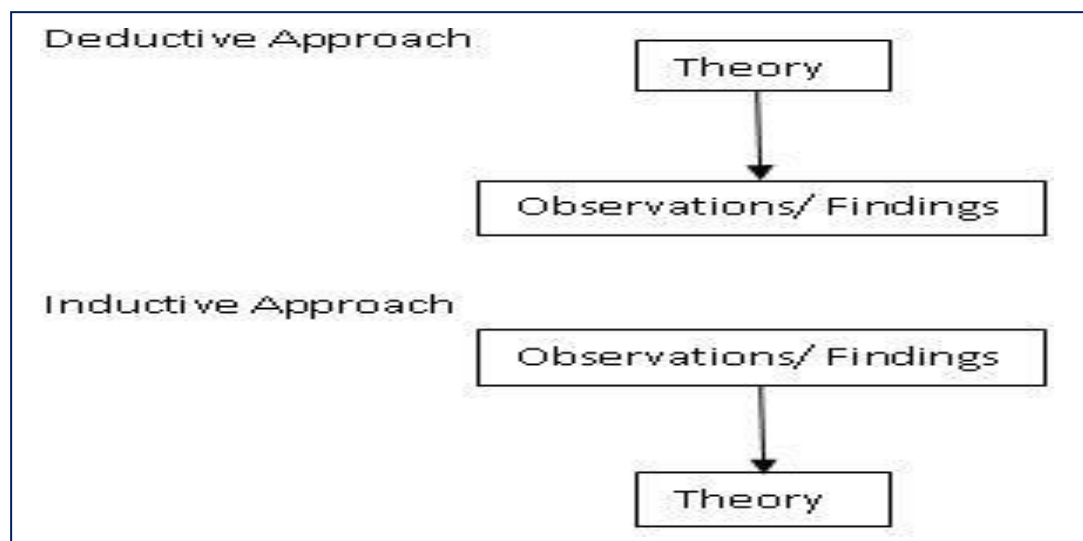
Figure 2: Deductive and Inductive Approaches to the relationship between Theory and Research (Bryman, 2012 p. 26)

While acknowledging the value of quantitative research in this thesis, particularly in relation to the demographics of older people and aging implications, etc., this social research study, which effectively gathers data in the form of stories, from men whose voices are rarely heard, and who often refer to themselves as being invisible, pushed me towards a qualitative research approach to the study. The more human focused 'qualitative' approach to inquiry employed in this research process was a better fit than

the more rigid 'quantitative' methods. The challenge for this researcher was to bridge the gap in my mind-set, from stories told as a means of entertainment and information, to one of reflective life experiences elicited through a storying joint journey that was conscious of the unspoken narratives, including gestures, silences, outbursts, and body-language that spoke volumes: you never mentioned your time in school or education? you started your story from the time you joined the army, was there a reason for that?

Outside of the spoken word (and even the tone of the spoken word), being alert to the various clues that put the narrative in context was an important and valuable part of the interview process and developed as we developed as co-contributors. The unfamiliar intimate environment that allowed for thoughtful release of the lived experiences of the participants left this researcher in no doubt as to the value of the collaboration between researcher and researched in creating this condition of intimacy which lends to the reliability and trustworthiness of the narrative.

Member checking

If the ambition of the study is to generate new knowledge when working with hard-to-reach older men, then the reader must have confidence in the research process to elicit truthful narratives and subsequently trustworthy data. In his paper on 'Trustworthiness and quality in Narrative Studies', Loh (2013 pp. 9-10) points to two issues that need to be addressed 'the first is that of verisimilitude, and the second is that of utility'. He refers to the importance of meeting the criterion of 'verisimilitude' when interpreting 'personal realities'. He describes Verisimilitude as 'the quality of seeming to be true or real' (Oxford 2005 p. 1698). While arguing that the study must 'resonate and seem plausible Loh, (2013 pp. 9-10) also insists that in order for the study to be 'relevant' it needs to be 'useful'.

The continuous checking and clarifying with participants in respect of their lived experience elicitations added to the trustworthiness of this study. This back-and-forth process described by Creswell (2009 p. 191) as 'member checking' became a reflective space for both the participants and researcher, as long forgotten histories were revealed by ever deepening conversational soundings that surprised, sometimes stopping the participants in mid-sentence to ponder on this almost new awakening. This member checking was apparent throughout the study; before, during and after the interviews; when

wrestling with the transcriptions and seeking clarity of the audio recordings; during moments of writing up the findings and needing to ask a question 'just to be sure'. The unhurried space given to the participants at the beginning of each interview to reflect, comment and if needed, give clarity on the previous interview(s) further tested the researcher's interpretation and subsequent reconstruction of the participants telling of a life lived.

This intimate and trusting collaboration was further validated by most of the participants offering to bring the researcher into their homes (a place seldom visited by others). In this space artefacts, photos, etc. were used by the participants to substantiate and provide context to their stories. The narrative inquirer may note stories but more often records actions, doings, and happenings, all of which are narrative expressions. This is the stuff of narrative inquiry for the researcher in for the long haul and concerned with intimacy (Clandinin and Connelly 2000 p. 79).

Using narrative inquiry as my chosen method of inquiry allowed for a co-inquirer research process that gave joint control of the process to both the narrator and the listener. The study brought both research travellers down the many pathways of life's experiences, some less travelled than others. In journeying together there was a sense of brotherhood and strength of understanding and assured resilience, this sense of collective purpose was cemented by a continuous checking-in as to how all involved were feeling and was there any concerns or issues that needed outing. Clandinin and Connelly (2000 pp. 72-73) describes the relationship between the researcher and participant as being 'tenuous' and as such is 'always in the midst of being negotiated'.

Both researcher and participants were well prepared as they made their way back along the track less worn, or even those pathways that historically were well trodden, but are now overgrown and strewn with time related barriers and dangerous sink holes that places those routes in the 'do not enter' life experience memory trawl. According to Clandinin, (2013 p. 51) narrative inquirers should be supportive of the participants 'both in and following' the research study. She goes as far as to say that relational narrative inquiry requires researchers to spend 'sustained time with participants, and possibly with their families, and/or communities'. Clandinin (2013) also refers to the fact that narrative researchers 'do not come with questions' so don't have 'final answers'; instead, these

'final research texts are 'intended to engage audiences to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others.

3.4   Narrative

Stories are the beginning and the end of everything; they tell the tales of human suffering and human wellbeing, and hold the political answers to change that we need to act on

(Ledwith 2020 p. 3)

Ledwith (2020) strongly believes in story and its power to 'draw people into them' in order to construct reality. She argues for the development of a counter narrative to challenge the current 'neoliberal' discourse where the poor are 'characterised as worthless' which when constantly repeated through the media is believed by the 'population at large' (and even the poor themselves) to be 'a real truth' (Ledwith 2020 pp. 3-7).

Blaikie (2006 p. 251) also believes in the power of story as he describes the seemingly 'minute and trivial details of social activity' elicited through a qualitative approach to research, which provides a 'backdrop' for life experiences of participants to be better understood. Some researchers view this to be all that is needed to 'provide an understanding of any aspect of social life' (Blaikie 2006 p. 251). In order to succeed in generating valuable data from a 'social actors' perspective, the researcher needs 'extended periods of involvement in the lives of the people, by means of participant observation and/or through extensive in-depth interviews' (Blaikie 2006 p. 251). Blaikie (2006) also argues that social researchers involved with research concerned with participants who are 'engaged in social process' and who view social reality in a particular way, those researchers 'should also view social reality in the same way' (p. 252).

It is a clear signal that using narrative inquiry methodology in this study evokes a subjective, interpretivist positioning that lent to employing a qualitative approach to the research study with the men. Using narrative inquiry was key to exploring what Clandinin (2013 p. 18) describes as, 'the social, cultural, familial, linguistic and institutional narratives in which individuals' experiences were and are constituted and shaped,

expressed and enacted'. This approach worked very well from a number of perspectives which will be discussed in detail in ensuing paragraphs and chapters.

Bryman (2012 p. 614) argues that 'research methods are more free-floating than is sometimes supposed', suggesting that the philosophical world view held, while positioning the researcher on a particular research approach pathway with subsequent default methods for carrying out research, should be regarded as 'tendencies rather than regarded as definitive connections'. Creswell, (2014 p. 3) while clearly employing a dedicated framework in his approach to research that involves the researchers 'need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, the research design that is related to this study, and the specific methods or procedures that translate the approach into practice', also believes that the 'qualitative and quantitative approaches should not be viewed as rigid, distinct categories, polar opposites, or dichotomies'. Instead, they represent different ends of a continuum (Newman and Benz 1998). The weight and depth of human, experiential discovery (that is the potential of narrative inquiry), cannot be counted or measured, and consequently is located within the qualitative paradigm.

Employing a narrative inquiry methodology approach combined with the skill set, knowledge and understanding that this researcher brings, maximizes the potential for this study.

Narrative Inquiry as a Research Process

Narrative inquiry is constructivist in its approach, which brings a subjectivist human element to the forefront of social research in a postmodern rejection (or at the very least the suggestion of a different approach), to the objectivist 'natural science' approach to research. The study employed an interpretive approach to social research by using narrative as its qualitative research tool. Storytelling methodology was used to explore the lived experience of older men (55+) residing in local authority sheltered housing units located in Dublin. The men participating in the study live on the margins of society, with some more marginalised than others. Most did not have an opportunity to complete their education and would struggle to various degrees with the absence of life skills, determined by the level of social disconnectedness endured. However, the conversational platform and ethical proofed framework of the narrative inquiry methodology gave confidence and a sense of valued involvement to the men, as witnessed in their active

participation and eagerness to continue with the study. I used narrative as the methodological tool to research the older men in what Wright Mills (1959 p. 9.) refers to as their 'private orbits'. Clandinin (2013 p. 18) argues, "Narrative inquiry begins and ends with respect for ordinary lived experience". The eliciting of decades of stories from lived experiences through narrative inquiry methodology is a fit for purpose framework that brings with it an ethical thoroughness that is required to oversee the unlocking of a life lived, in a respectful, honorable manner that bends and dips in a stop, start, stall, stutter and racing, mixed frequency of telling, that is both expected and prepared for.

> *If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings.*
>
> (Freire 1996 p. 69)

Voice in order to be visible

As we journey through our lives the weight of the experience of living demands a constant construction and reconstruction of our story. As we reconstruct our story, consequently we reconstruct ourselves. In doing so we call on our history of life coping and problem-solving experiences to be the 'new build', quick setting adhesive that prepares the new identity construct for the challenge of dealing with the ever-changing flux of living. Giving 'voice' to those who are seldom heard is a function that can be achieved through narrative inquiry.

When discussing the denial of the 'right to speak' and the 'dehumanization aggression' of this act, Freire (1985 pp. 76-77) states: 'word is not the privilege of some few men, but the right of every man'. Narrative inquiry commits voice to paper, and honouring that voice is an imperative of the process. Raising the voice of unheard (and in many respects invisible) men living in the sheltered housing units in Swan's Rest, creates an opportunity for them to reclaim a place alongside visible others. The co-inquiry experience of this research process contributed towards the re-emergence of the men, as the elicited narratives helped to make sense of their lived experiences and their world.

Etherington (2004) refers to stories as being structured in a coherent way that gives us the opportunity to reclaim ourselves and our histories and contributes to the formation of 'new selves' when our stories are told and re-told. Frank (1995 p. 9 in Etherington 2004)

offers some hope for those who are in danger of losing their way: "when we use our own stories or those of others, for research, we give testimony to what we have witnessed, and that testimony creates a voice". Chase (2005 p. 665), points to the challenge for researchers in 'interpreting and representing' the narrators voice in research. Chase (2005) argues that narrative researchers should 'begin with narrator's voices and stories' and then listen in the first instance to the 'narrator's voices within each narrative' while the researcher deploys a three voice 'narrative strategy' of:

(1)   The researcher's authoritative voice;

        ("speaking differently from but not disrespectfully of the narrator's voice").

(2)   The researcher's supportive voice;

        ("pushing the narrator's voice into the limelight, creating a self-reflective and respectful distance between researcher's and narrator's voices").

(3)   The researcher's interactive voice,

        ("one that reflects the intersubjectivity between their voice and the narrators' voice"), as a mechanism that allows their (researcher) voice to be truly representative of that of the narrators.

The narrative inquiry process gives the men not only a loud voice and a means to making them visible again in that space and during that time, with the promise of sustained visible presence, but also the inclusivity of the collaborative process gives shared ownership of the findings and subsequent theory and practice development.

Narrative, a fit for purpose methodology

In narrative inquiry we intentionally come into relation with participants, and we, as inquirers, think narratively about our experiences, about our participants' experiences, and about those experiences that become visible as we live alongside, telling our own stories, and hearing others' stories (Clandinin 2013 p. 23). Clandinin (2013) articulates a strong argument for narrative in a way that seems to offer a good fit for purpose methodology when applied to researching the lived experiences of the participants of this study. The joint journeying of teller and researcher creates a trusting shared environment where stories of love, loss and disconnection can emerge.

While exploring the concept of narrative, the myriad of theorists, writers, papers, journals and books helped challenge and shape my understanding of narrative inquiry as a possible fit for purpose methodology for this research study.

The decision to use narrative inquiry as my methodology of choice over others was influenced by the positioning of the inquirer in the process. The close relationship between the narrator and listener confirmed my personal belief that having this trusting relational experience created a dynamic that not only was conducive to the elicitation of stories laden with a deeper, fuller understanding of lived experiences, but also continued the storied re-construction of all previous re-constructions, based on new discovery that grew, strengthened and sustained. The co-storying trust dynamic created by a relational understanding, built on a reciprocated flowing of personal life experience sharing, created a forever bond of trust, caring, defending and protecting, forged over minutes to years of tea, treats and tear laden connections and conversations. Riessman (1993 p. 2), states: 'human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded in narrativization, how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean. Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives'.

I would argue there is a danger of flawed discovery in the researcher's restorying of the 'telling' if the relational is not at a level that outs the power imbalance in its many forms. The recognition and parking of the power imbalance is instrumental in allowing for a 'true telling' experience and the depth of discovery that this brings. Because of the level of trust and honesty of exposure, this narrative inquiry study promises new discovery and learning and the potential to inform our practice as workers in the field.

> *Storytelling is for another just as much as it is for oneself. In the reciprocity that is storytelling, the storyteller offers herself as guide to the other's self-information. The other's receipt of that guidance not only recognises but values the teller. The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story for the other.*
>
> (Frank 1995 p. 18)

Theory rises like a Phoenix from life's ashes

Creating the condition for the narratives to flow through, around and over the complexities of the narrator's cultural and socially determined world, demands a 'bottom up' approach which allows the researcher communicate to paper an interpretational narrative that is jointly constructed and agreed. This is achieved through a back and forth validation of the narrative process that creates real meaning for the narrator and deeper understanding for the researcher. This was helped in no small way by the awareness by the researcher of the individual participant's struggles and issues, and their returned nodded acknowledgement of those observations as we journeyed together.

Human beings are more than what's available to the naked eye; we generate new learning from the previously hidden narratives of challenged lives. Creswell (2007 p. 54), describing narrative states: 'as a method it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals Humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives, which is similar to what Connelly and Clandinin argue, 'people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and they interpret their past in terms of these stories, (2006 p. 477). The desire to be loved, connected, happy and successful, etc. is wrapped up in the emotional complexity of our DNA and cultural understandings.

Interpreting these subjective lived experiences can only be achieved by a respectful, empathetic, ethical and relational human determined research process. When referring to the experience of telling, and the connection to empowering participants and the gathering of narratives, Mishler (1986), argues: 'Various attempts to restructure the interviewer-interviewee relationship, so as to empower participants, are designed to encourage them to find and speak in their own 'voices'. It is not surprising that when the interview situation is opened up in this way, when the balance of power is shifted, participants are likely to tell 'stories. In sum, interviewing practices that empower participants also produce narrative accounts' (pp. 118-19).

Sixteen years after Connelly and Clandinin (2000) wrote about peoples experience being the starting point for narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Rosiek (2006 p. 42) broadened this theory to include the 'exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted'. The inclusion of the wider societal perspectives, presents a 'pragmatic ontology of experience'

and as such was a 'well suited theoretical framework for narrative inquiries'. The design and mechanics of the chosen methodology is described in the following chapter.

Relational telling

Merrill and West (2009 p. 162), argue that short term relational, minimal involvement, funding determined 'research activity' is, 'in danger of missing out on longer term relationships with people who can enhance a researcher's knowledge of the world'. The insider, relational understanding and besider co-journeying acceptance that this researcher brings to the study cannot be overstated in relation to the creation and development of new informed knowledge. Plummer (1983 in Merrill and West 2009) argues 'we need to know our informants from the inside'. The experience of this research study would tend to agree with this argument as the depth and intimate nature of the stories grew throughout the process. The routine checking in and out with the men during the interview process gave the participants space to revisit the essence of their stories which worked as a clarification mechanism not only to serve the tellers ambition for the message of their human experience, within and surrounding the story, to get through, but also as a reliable interpretive proofing tool that helped clarify any thoughts, doubts or further probing for the listener. This structured reflective space was also useful in creating a fresh starting point for the new interview, based on a clear understanding of the last interview finishing point. The strength of this researchers relationship with the men was also a factor in the emergence of honest co-constructed narratives that did justice to the men's lived experience; subsequently the narratives presented in this study are born out of a meticulous attention to detail process that was ethically driven, relational based and owned by the participants at all times.

Defined by what I possess

The deep relational connection between participant and this researcher was further enhanced by the unexpected introduction to their private photographs and artefacts which was a surprise addition to the interview process, and one that achieved further discovery in the study. The rich conversational generated stories were given more girth and temporal clarity by the introduction by some of the men of outside conversational agents that included photographs and various coveted objects. During the interviews recorded in the participants' homes, some participants would point to pictures or objects around the room as a way of explaining or describing a person, place or thing connected to their story. This

privileged access allowed for a more descriptive interview journey, and one in which a deeper understanding and insight into the lived experience of the men was achieved.

Silverman (2014 p. 356), states that earlier interest in visuals as a social analysis tool 'waned' as 'written word accompanied with numerical analysis became the dominant mode of sociological research'. However, Silverman (2014) points to anthropologists who 'retained their interest in photography', citing a study by Bateson and Mead, (1942) where they 'juxtaposed text and the visual' in a way that each would 'enhance the meaning of the other'. Bryman (2012 p. 546), points to the 'growing interest in the visual in social research' and refers to photographs in particular as being 'the most obvious manifestation of this trend'. Concerned with understanding the 'meaning andsignificance' of such images Bryman (2012 p. 455) refers to employing 'photo- elicitation' as a 'springboard' for discovery. Scott (1990) in Bryman (2012 pp. 546-547) in drawing caution to a context-less photo or object points to the 'prim poses and solemnfaces' that is generally associated with Victorian photography, but which conceals the 'reality of child labour' and the long hours endured by 'women factory workers' and thefalseness of which can only be revealed by the provision of 'considerable additional knowledge of the social context to probe beneath the surface'.

There was indeed a context and story provided by the participants as they ushered my eyes from photo to object in tones that represented the occasion of the memory attached. But the tone mostly faded to a low reverent trailing off, as if there was still historical discovery and further explanation available, but not yet. Objects and particularly the photographs were nervously but excitedly pointed to by the participants in a jigsaw-like picture completion revelation when joined with previous telling; there was a clear intention by the participants of this study to use their precious objects and images to not only validate their stories but just as much to show that there was a time when they were loved, useful, needed, belonged, and had (and maybe still have) a reason to live. Tuan (1980 p. 472), places a significant emphasis on the things we possess and revere, contending that 'our fragile sense of self' needs artefacts and possessions to reassert our identity within ourselves and subsequently, 'we not only reclaim the people and the culture of an earlier time, but also enlarge and enrich our general conception of the world, and thereby, inevitably, though unintentionally, a sense of ourselves'.

So what? Why is this study any different to others?

When carrying out research the need to constantly address the significance of our research claim is ever present. Asking oneself the 'so what?' or 'what's different?' question, is paramount in both working towards creating new knowledge and understanding.

This note presented as Figure 3 sits on the wall over my computer and is a constant reminder of the focus and vigilance needed to deliver on the interpretive claim we are making as researchers.
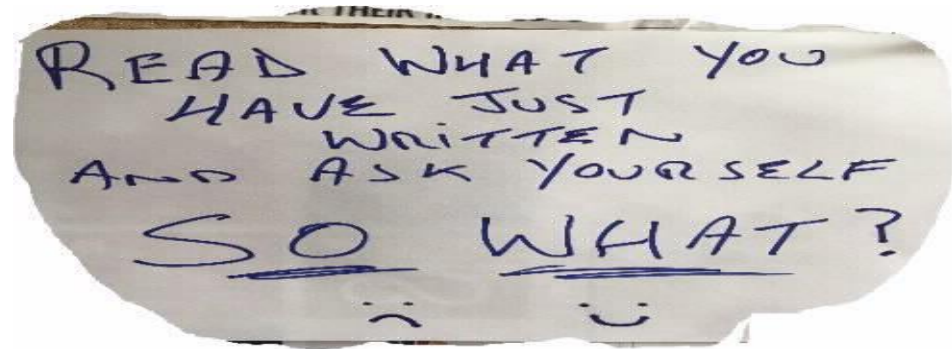
Figure 3: Note to Myself (a reminder of the focus and vigilance needed to deliver on the interpretive claim we are making as researchers)

Clandinin (2013) attends to the "So What" and "Who Cares" questions by offering 'at least three ways' of answering these questions:

> *Personally, in terms of why this narrative inquiry matters to us as individuals.*
> *Practically, in terms of what difference this research might make to practice.*
> *Socially or theoretically, in terms of what difference this research might make*
> *to theoretical understandings or to making situations more socially just.*
>
> (Clandinin 2013 pp. 35-38).

In attempting to answer the 'so what' question I would argue that this study is unique, as it offers narrative inquiry as the methodology for the research study, combined with the fact that the researcher is also an older man, with a similar social demographic history, working in the field, has worked with, and supported the men for a number of years (twelve years with two of the participants and more than eight with others), and who is also highly educated. The unique deep relational focused approach of the study offers the potential to create new knowledge, not only from a data findings perspective, but also

concerning the methodology process itself, from a planning, delivery and analysis perspective.

Trahar (2011 p. 50) refers to 'the extent to which the interviewer will share aspects of her own life and experiences is contingent upon the extent to which she sees herself and her own stories as contributing to the development, the "thickening" of other's stories'. There is no doubt that my willingness to share my personal life story, combined with semi-reluctant abandonment by the participants of theirs, led to (at first) a tentative trust building, low level non-threatening, guarded, flow of life encounters, which was then followed by a deeper outpouring of life changing experiences. This joint journey through story, gave voice to the men's struggle and will hopefully serve to let them be heard, and subsequently become visible again, initially as human beings and then maybe as their voice becomes clearer, as men.

3.5   Framework Design 'Nuts and Bolts'

Professor Nick Hopwood (2014), in his on-line tutorial on research design outlines a 'four and a bit' part framework when thinking about research design. Hopwood (2014) identifies strategy, sampling, methods, techniques, and analysis as key components in this design framework This framework is useful in helping the reader conceptualized an overview when thinking about this research study, and from a researcher's perspective the 'filling in' of questions that emerged from exploring the framework serves to deliver a critical almost quasi-quantitative interrogative approach to the research inquiry.

Employing the framework; design proofing

As previously discussed, I chose Narrative Inquiry as my methodological tool (strategy) to explore the lived experiences of older men living in sheltered housing units in Dublin, Ireland and their experience of engaging with the local community development project. Clandinin (2013 p. 17) defines narrative inquiry as an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honouring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding.

Sampling; bias, size and power considerations

Blaikie, (2006 p. 207) suggests 'two considerations when in selecting a sampling method', 'bias' awareness and appropriate sample size. My familiarity, knowledge and

relationship with the participants could be viewed negatively in respect of creating bias, power over, giving me favourable responses (what the participants think I want to hear), which I believe that is a valid observation. However being an older man myself with similar personal social demographics and being cognisant of these possibilities can create a positive experience from these subjectivities, which Merrill and West (2009 pp. 113-127) describe as a possible 'source of evidence and understanding'.

Merrill and West (2009) reminds the reader that achieving positive experiences in respect of these subjectivities, we must employ 'thought, self-awareness and transparency' in both the 'doing and reporting' of the research (Merrill and West 2009 pp. 113-127). While not diminishing the importance of 'good technique' Merrill and West (2009) describe the interview process as a 'creative act' with many important elements that lend to the elicitation of 'narrative material that is both rich in detail but also experientially inclusive and reflective in character'. Similar to how as community workers we attempt to create spaces and conditions to enable positive change to take place, they point to the awareness of the 'emotional qualities' and 'conceptual insight' of both participant and researcher, as well as 'the research relationship and the psycho-sociology of the interview' (Merrill and West 2009 pp. 113-127).

I am acquainted with most of the men in the sheltered housing complex through my work in the Community Development Project. I know some more than others, depending on their willingness, or not, to engage with the project. Thirteen men (from a total of 36) were invited to take part. This invitation was based on their address, engagement with the project, ability, and willingness to participate. It also took account of the men's age. I believed that the men not invited would, at the very least, struggle to participate in any meaningful way; this was because of serious alcohol dependency issues, and issues related to mental health, or both. From the 13 invited, eight volunteered to take part.

Choosing the right people for this study was essential in maximizing important discovery and learning. Six men were chosen for the study based on the belief that firstly the number of participants was manageable, and also that the criteria described below for those willing to take part, coupled with the fact that out of a possible eight men offering to take part in the study, two withdrew because of illness, which naturally negated against any researcher selection bias. Merrill and West (2009 p. 107) when addressing the 'choice of sample' which begs the question 'who to work with and how many times?' points to

Creswell's notion of 'criterion sampling' (1998 p. 118), which basically means selecting samples that meet a predetermined criteria specified by the researcher.

The six older men (55+) who reside in local authority sheltered housing units in the community and who at various degrees engage with the local community development project were selected to participate in the study. The men were selected because of their age, address, engagement with the local community development project, willingness to participate in the study, their cognitive and physical ability to participate, and their availability. It was mutually agreed that some men who initially agreed to take part in the study should not take part based on their state of mind (at the time), and inability to contribute in any meaningful way. I was aware that although the agreement not to participate was mutual, the men felt in some way they were letting me down, and a process of easing that worry through conversations that implied the study was over-subscribed in anyway so, 'not to worry', took place.

My experience of working with the men enabled a sampling process that was based on more than a surface knowledge of their individual strengths. The primary focus of the selection process was not only that the capacity of the men to engage safely was front and centre, but also that the men were constantly reminded of the counselling arrangement and because of the voluntary nature of their participation, they could exit the process and any stage without any negative consequences. It was explained that narrative inquiry is a voyage of experiential discovery and as such can bring to the surface long forgotten or hidden experiences that might delight as much as bring pain, hence creating an awareness of the potential for a negative awakening that might hurt and upset. Numerous discussions took place during the sampling process that created a trusting environment starting point, from which perspective participants were slowly brought through the research inquiry process from start to finish and encouraged to question and look for clarity at every point.

The relationship with the participants during the study was a researcher/practitioner one that created a trust- nurtured environment that over time developed into a collaborative co-construction of narratives of a life lived, that also grew us as human beings. In narrative research, a key theme has been the turn towards the relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both parties will learn and change in the encounter (Pinnegar and Daynes 2006). Also I have a long working relationship (over twelve years

in some cases) with the men; there is a strong bond of trust, honesty and solidarity between us.

There is clearly a power imbalance when you consider that as researcher, I am the one with the responsibility of the research process. As a practitioner the men are aware that I manage a project, that I am highly educated and that at some level I hold a certain status in the community. But I believe the relational journey that I have travelled with the men and their observation of me over the years has built a strong bond of trust and respect that separates and divides the power and places it in relevant spaces that leaves the human connection intact, limiting the essence of the study from damaging, power-based contamination. Providing this research study platform for the participants to tell their story that others might learn from is a mechanism for power transfer and sharing.

> *The simple act of listening to people's stories, respectfully given one's full attention, is an act of personal empowerment, but to bring about change for social justice this process needs to be collective and needs to be located within wider structures.*
>
> (Ledwith 2005 p. 62)

Methods: Interviews and observations

The term 'active interview' described by Silverman (2014 p. 169), where there is an active engagement between narrator and listener is a good description of the narrative interview process, and concurs with Gubrium and Holstein (2011 p. 150), understanding of interviews, 'all interviews are active, regardless of how neutral the interviewers and how co-operative the participants. No matter how hard the interviewers try to restrain their presence in the interview exchange and no matter how forthright interviewees are in offering their views, these are interactional accomplishments rather than neutral communicative grounds' (in Silverman 2014 p. 169). Creating awareness of the narrative interview process between narrator and researcher in which a reciprocal supportive joint storying environment is established, was key to generating an honest, flowing, trusting and ultimately generous outpouring of lived experiences that were captured and documented. The interview style changed as the focus of the interview changed, sometimes there would be minimal intervention from me and other times my voice is heard more, particularly if I were looking for the men to expand on a point or explain more clearly an important aspect of the conversation.

Kvale (2007 pp. 68-77) suggests that 'there is no correct or ideal interview form; the appropriate mode of interviewing depends on the topic and purpose of the interview, on the interview subjects and the epistemological conceptions of knowledge sought'.

Kvale (2007), refers to Mishler (1986) who argues that narrative interviews focused on the 'temporal, the social, and the meaning structures of the interview'. Mishler (cited in Kvale 2007 pp. 68-77) also points to how stories that emerge through the narrative interview process are the way in which individuals 'attempt to organise and express meaning'.

According to Kvale (2007 pp. 68-77), when seeking 'personal narratives' and following the 'initial request for a story', the interviewer must focus on listening while 'abstaining from interruptions, occasionally posing questions for clarification, and assisting the interviewee in continuing to tell his story'. The relational, co-journeying, insider, besider experience expressed throughout this chapter is also identified and captured by Kvale (2007) with his reference to the researcher as a 'co-producer of the narrative'. This co-production is best carried out through becoming 'familiar with narrative structures' and by informed 'questions, nods and silences' that may be employed throughout the narrative interview process. Because of the nature of narrative interviews where the spontaneous or elicited stories that emerge can sometimes be fragmented, non-linear and disjointed, the knowledge accrued and familiarity (of the structures) referred to by Kvale (2007 pp. 68-77) enables the interviewer to; 'take care to unfold temporal sequences, focus on who is the hero of the story, who are the antagonists and who the protagonists of the hero, try to ascertain what is the main plot of the story, the possible subplots, and elements of tensions, conflicts and resolutions'.

It was jointly agreed to carry out three unstructured, participant led conversational type interviews with each man, which quickly evolved into a gentle directional nudging conversational interview process that helped to focus participants (participant might suddenly switch to what was on TV previous evening or ethical considerations could demand a cautious redirecting back). During the course of the interviews, it became very clear that finishing the interview part of the study needed to be done in a thought-out respectful manner, and not a 'grab and run' scenario type exit. The deep joint storying journey of narrator and researcher demanded a winding down and agreed finishing point

which offered an ease of exit back to our lived realities. A final 'check-out' interview was arranged, which was more about bringing closure to all previous conversations, how participants were feeling, discussing 'what next' in the research process and importantly thanking the men for their valued participation.

The writing up of observational field notes was an important part of the data gathering process. The body language (relaxed, uncomfortable, agitated etc.), the long silences and raised or subdued voice, when matched with certain parts of the telling, gave a more complete understanding of the meaning behind the worded story. Creswell (2007 p. 57), referring to the challenges appertaining to the 'narrative approach' refers to the 'keen eye' that is needed when attempting to 'identify in the source material' the relevant stories elicited from the participants that will inform the study. He cites Edel (1984) in which he refers to the importance of uncovering the 'figure under the carpet', where every aspect of the elicitation process is recognised, considered, and acted upon. It is the multiplicity of viewpoints and observational lenses used by the researcher that serves to carefully roll back that carpet which symbolises the 'multi-layered context of a life' (Edel 1984 cited in Creswell 2007 p. 57).

Techniques and Analysis: Gathering the data *(Analysis will be discussed in section 3.5)*

With the agreement of the participants, I used a small digital audio recorder to record the interviews and covered the device with a paper towel to avoid any discomfort to the participants. We chatted prior to recording and I went through a process of reminding the men what they had agreed in undertaking this study (basically what was contained in the consent form). Following the first interview the subsequent pre-interview conversation gave me an opportunity to remind the men where we had left off and clarified any uncertainties I might have had when listening to the recording of the previous interview. It was also an opportunity for the men to ask me any questions they might have, now that they were well and truly immersed in the study and maybe a bit more confident in themselves as to the value of their participation, and also the importance of the research study itself.

There was also post-interview (recorder switched off, but observed and noted) conversations with the men that were used as an easing out of the more formal telling process. This purpose was basically a checking of how the interview went, particularly if

the interview had brought them (us) to uncomfortable places of experience that they seldom talk-out and might be less prepared for. I say 'us', as the co-storying also took me to unfrequented, half buried, hurtful times in my life, and the exit, post interview conversational strategy helped me deal with those exposed experiences. As noted previously I took extensive notes during the interview itself, and those notes were merged with other notes written from memory of observations in the pre-interview and post-interview conversations. These supplementary notes were written up as soon as possible following the interview to avoid time induced memory fading. From a broader observational perspective my work and relationship with the men, as well as my day-to-day conversations with the men over many years (outside of this research study), has given me a unique perspective that has contributed in no small way to the emerging narrative of the participants.

Location, Dates and Time

The men were given free range to choose the location for the interviews, two men chose a local hotel foyer for their first interview, others the restroom of their communal space (during closed hours), and one interview even took place in my office. For various reasons including primarily a growing trust in the process, lack of privacy, noise, and discomfort, most of the interviews subsequently were held in the men's homes. I believe the primary reason for this was the intimate and deep nature of the telling, and the safety of their own dwelling assured the safe passage of private experiences from narrator to researcher. Agreeing with the men the time, date and availability for the interviews proved problematic initially, as quite naturally the men were nervous of the interview process, but following the initial interview that nervousness dissipated, and the men began asking about the following one. There was a sense of eagerness in the men to continue with the interviews even when we finished the study.

Pics, bits and bobs

Situating the interviews in the men's home, in what Emmison (2004 p. 260) describes as 'the places and settings – the actual environments and locales in which humans conduct their lives' was instrumental in generating an unanticipated further interpretative detail of the narrative, and also led to further discovery as the various artefacts that held obvious importance in the men's lives by their very presence, demanded a place in the developing narrative. They led me to and talked me through their photographic collections, the

paintings they had on their walls, their ornaments, and their furniture. In doing so they were telling me stories about themselves, their lives, and their experiences. 'We should not treat the visual as an add-on, but as an integrated aspect of the experience of interviewing or interacting with participants' (Pink 2004 pp. 395).

3.6 Analysis

Our stories define us, they are our identity. We give others a lens to view us through by the stories we tell. Narrative inquiry strives to generate meaning and understanding from the elicited stories of peoples lived experiences. Bruner (2004 pp. 691-694) argues 'The stories we tell about our lives are our autobiographies', adding that 'telling stories is not an untethered process' in that they are 'shaped by cultural conventions and language usage and reflect the prevailing theories about *possible lives* that are part of one's culture'. Novitz (2001 p. 143) argues that

> *it is not just that we have "images", "pictures" and "views" of ourselves which are more or less "balanced", "colourful" or "unified" but that we also have "stories" and "narratives" to tell about our lives which shape and convey our sense of self.*
>
> (Novitz 2001 p. 143)

Our surface identity gets us through the day, as we search for our true self to become apparent, with hopeful anticipation of embraced acceptance. Clandinin (2013 p. 21), reflects Bruner's (2004) thinking as she refers to the "we live by stories" essence of Okri's (1997) poem. She points to the 'interconnected, nested' stories by which we live our lives and the thinking that stories reflect and suggest; 'who we are and who we are becoming'.

> *In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy.*
> *We live by stories; we also live in them.*
> *One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted knowingly or unknowingly in ourselves.*
> *We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness.*
> *If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.*
>
> (Okri 1997 p. 46)

Creswell, (2007 pp. 155-179) argues that when analysing the collected data, we need to be looking for the story that lies within, a 'chronology of unfolding events and turning points or epiphanies. He points to the way we write up the research stating: 'How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research' (Creswell 2007 pp. 155-179). Clandinin (2013 p. 49-52), while referring to data as 'field texts', describes the journey through the 'three dimensional narrative inquiry space' qualitative analysis and in particular, narrative methodology, and cites Clandinin and Connelly (2000): 'restorying the participants' stories using structural devices, such as plot, setting, activities, climax and denouement'. The narrative scholar (pays) analytic attention to how the facts got assembled that way. 'For whom was this story constructed, how was it made and for what purpose? What cultural discourses does it draw on — take for granted? What does it accomplish?' (Riessman and Speedy 2007 pp. 428-429). The Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM) which will be referred to further on in this chapter was also used to further explore the data.

Creating meaning from the data

The analysis of this narrative inquiry study which explored the plot and causality of hundreds of no-random sequential stories of lived experiences, where the participants connected their fragmented history while unknowingly exposing their social distinctions places that moved from deep personal emotive narratives, to a broader social, political and economic commentary was painstakingly slow but extremely thorough. The collaboration of the transcriptions, various field notes (including visuals), recordings and a personal understanding of the participants contributed to maximizing the findings which will be discussed in a further chapter. In analyzing the data, Trahar (2009, Art. 30) places great importance on the researcher to 'articulate transparently', how the data was 'gathered and analyzed', while conceptualizing the process of engaging in the 'interview or conversation' as being 'problematic and complex'. The imperative of adorning the pages with evidenced interpretations of awareness to the potential contamination of the study from, bias, power imbalance etc., as well as the thoroughness of the study from interview question through to the analysis and ultimately to the findings and recommendations, was crucial in convincing any outside observer as to the trustworthiness and reliability of the study.

Labov and Waletzky (1967) challenged the more traditional research methodologies and dominant theoretical discourses by suggesting narrative as a tool for social inquiry. In their article they identify five 'sociolinguistic features of oral narrative' that contribute to the argument for narrative inquiry, they are:

- Orientation: Which informs listeners about actors, time, place and situation?
- Complication: the main body of the narrative – the action.
- Evaluation: the point of the story.
- Resolution: the result of the action.
- Coda: which returns the listener to the current moment?

Riessman (1993 p. 69-70), referring to the 'natural narrative' inquiry methodology of Labov and Waletzky (1967), states: 'Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active agents', also insists that 'Individual action and biography must be the starting point of analysis, not the end.' As the nature of this study encouraged ongoing analysis and interpretation generated from the conversations, body language, field note observations, outbursts, silences, listening back and transcriptions, various narrative analysis readings were awakened and served me notice to pay attention in case I missed a clue to discovery.

Riessman (1993 p. 69-70) makes a case for 'other forms of qualitative analysis to be combined with narrative methods: 'science cannot be spoken in a singular universal voice' and 'any methodological standpoint is, by definition, partial, incomplete, and historically contingent. The qualitative analysis method that I refer to in the next section allowed me to stand back from the narrative slightly, to view the participants' stories from a more structured perspective, which almost seems to contradict the narrative analysis imperative that Creswell (2007 p. 155) refers to when he argues for 'data to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies; instead it allowed me to think differently about the data and if anything it strengthened my resolve and belief in the ability of a bricolage of narrative analysis concerned with human experience and meaning to deliver reliable and trustworthy data. *Creating an analysis safety net.*

I became interested in the development of a method of qualitative data analysis by Mauthner and Doucet (1998) – Voice-Centred Relational Method. Upon further investigation of this method I was convinced that it would enhance the narrative analysis

methodology of this study, particularly in relation to the transcriptions. Drawing on previous work carried out by Lyn Brown, Carol Gilligan and colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Brown and Gilligan 1992 1993, Brown *et al.* 1988, Gilligan *et al.* 1990), the Voice-Centred Relational Method (VCRM) allowed for a deeper investigation and subsequent understanding of the mountain of transcriptions generated from the recorded interviews. The four readings that are the kernel element to the success of this analysis method were extremely helpful in creating an operational platform upon which a model of analysis could be built that accommodated the uniqueness of this study while addressing the multiplicity of concerns, theoretical understandings/challenges, ethical considerations, power balance, personal narrative awareness etc. The following is a brief summary of the four readings:

First reading: (Reading for the plot and for our responses to the narrative)
Pointing to Riessman (1993) and Strauss and Corbin (1990), Mauthner and Doucett (1998) refer to the first of two elements in the first reading that focuses on the 'overall plot', main character(s) etc., being spoken about, while also listening for 'recurrent images, words, metaphors and contradictions' in the stories. In the second element of the first reading where the researcher is exploring her response to the narrator both 'emotionally and intellectually', Mauthner and Doucett (1998) prefers Brown's (1994 p. 392) description of the process: 'the researcher reads for herself in the text', noting how she is responding while considering her 'social location', biases and personal understanding of the world.

Second reading: (Reading for the voice of the 'I')
This reading explores how the participants view and represent themselves through their stories. According to Mauthner and Doucett (1998), 'spending this time carefully listening to the participants creates a space between the participants' way of speaking and seeing, and that of our own, so we can discover "how she speaks of herself before we speak of her" (Brown and Gilligan 1992 pp. 27-28)'. Here colored markers (pens) are introduced to trace the 'I' in the story, and the shift to 'you' and 'we', highlighting personal shifts and changes of experience and perception from an emotional and intellectual perspective. Mauthner and Doucett (1998) argue that taking time to focus on the 'I' gives the participants an opportunity to 'voice their sense of agency' while taking note of their 'social location'. They also point to the second reading of the data as: 'An

attempt to stay, as far as it is possible, with the participants multi-layered voices, views and perspectives rather than simply and quickly slotting their words into either our own ways of understanding the world or into the categories of the literature in our area' (Mauthner and Doucett 1998).

Third reading: (Reading for relationships)

The third reading allowed for a widening of 'interpersonal relationships' with the participants' partners, relatives, children, and the 'broader social networks within which they lived, parented and worked', again tracing the participants' utterings with coloured marker to draw out the 'relational 'experiences.

Fourth reading: (Placing people within cultural contexts and social structures)

In the fourth reading, the participants' accounts and experiences were placed within broader social, political, cultural and structural contexts. Mauthner and Doucett (1998 p. 24) refer to the 'Impossibility of creating a research process in which the contradiction in power and consciousness are eliminated', but I would argue that the level and depth of relationship between the researcher and the researched can have the effect of at least diminishing this power imbalance. I would also argue that the relational status of the teller's audience is the key determinant in the elicitation of true discovery. The journey through the storied lives becomes a joint reciprocal experience of remembered, rediscovered, and reconstructed outpourings. The honest (joint) 'leap of faith' scenarios lends to a deep harvesting of rich descriptive narratives that surprised, hit hard, brought pain, and at times, a sense of relief, but also gave joy, by making visible the forgotten or deeply buried experiences. The slow, relational, and delicate unwrapping of the multi-layered protective bandage of stories designed to deflect and hide, to reveal the human beneath is facilitated by the giving wholly of oneself, not only as the researcher, but more importantly as a fellow traveler. The close relational joint journeying of narrator and researcher gifted the researcher with the interpretive tools to explore the data.

The ability of VCRM to penetrate deep into the transcribed experiences of the men added to the value and reliability of the findings because it gave me clues which helped at me at times when the sheer volume of the transcribed outpourings pushed me away promising never to go back to these messy bundles of life puzzles. Working my way through the parcel of transcription laden paper sheets by colour-coding the main characters (usually

the participant), protagonists (also usually the participant), repeated important words, omissions, and contradictions etc.; was slow but helpful in creating an extra interrogation of the data. I followed the suggested framework described above and also colour-coded stand out elements of the readings. I physically used a scissors to cut and then group the various colours which allowed for a more manageable analysis process. Mauthner and Doucett (1998 pp. 22-26) refer to their awareness and importance of 'reflexivity' because of the possibility of influencing data because of personal 'theoretical stances'; they describe the process of hiding participants identity, choosing what text to use, quoting words, 'often out of context of the overall story which may result in 'appropriating their voices and experiences, and further disempowering them by taking away their voice, agency and ownership'.

3.7   Ethical considerations

As a researcher I have an obligation and a responsibility to comply with the ethical guidelines produced by national and international organisations as well as those standards set by Maynooth University. Standards, such as those encouraged by AIEB (All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training) and IACD (International Association for Community Development 2016), in which community practitioners and researchers apply community development values, methods, and practice, in their day-to-day work. These standards are based on 'principles of human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity' (AIEB 2016 p. 5). The ethical demands of social research, and particularly narrative research which places human interaction at its core, elevates the ethical considerations to an essential, consequential, sensitive, protective and awareness level. Bryman (2012 p. 134) emphasises the importance of not only being familiar with the ethical codes of practice of 'wider bodies' but also those ethical guidelines laid down by 'your university or college'. Developing a fit-for-purpose ethical framework that limited the potential for upset, particularly when referring to the more human ethical aspect of the study was paramount; best practice guidelines that addressed possible emotional encounters during the telling were sourced, understood, and vigorously employed.

The rigorous ethical examination by the 'Ethics Committee' attached to the Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University employed a thorough ethical interrogation process that contributed to ethically proofing this research study. In a broader context, Denscombe (2014 p. 309) points to four key ethical principles developed

by the international community in response to Second World War atrocities. The four key principles were based on the fundamental principle that 'the ends do not justify the means in the pursuit of knowledge'. This ethical 'bottom line' is guaranteed by researchers carrying out social research in a way that: 'Protects the interests of the participants, ensures that participation is voluntary and based on informed consent, avoids deception and operates with scientific integrity, complies with the laws of the land' (Denscombe, 2014 p. 309).

Do no harm

Ellis (2007) in an effort to convince her students not to let the research study impact negatively on the research participants states; 'strive to leave the communities, participants and yourselves better off at the end of the research than they were at the beginning'. She continues 'I tell them when possible to research from an ethic of care'. Avoiding the exploitation of participants in research has to be our priority. It is clear from the writings of many theorists and scholars that stories are deeply personal, human, and very importantly helps us function. Bochner (2001), argues that narratives help us to 'make sense of ourselves and our experiences over the course of time' and discloses 'the truth' in these experiences' which subsequently gives 'voice' to those lived experiences that have been 'shrouded in silence'. Bochner (2001) also points to the 'existential' elements of the 'personal narrative' which reflects 'our desire to grasp or seize the possibilities of meaning'.

The employment of a rigorous consent form (See appendix 4), support mechanism (See appendix 3), regular check-in / check-out interview guidelines and an acute awareness of the power imbalance and vulnerability of the participants are all default settings employed for this study; however, as human beings we are complicated with a unique lived experience and in this respect, I would argue that there is no 'one size fits all' ethical template that we can use in narrative research.

To lay the foundation in order to engage at the relational level demanded for quality research, the formal mandatory ethical guidelines had to be adhered to first. The discussions and agreement of the consent form was the initial steppingstone and was followed by the development of a wider ethical framework that was participant and researcher constructed and re-constructed as the narrative inquiry study progressed. One example of this re-construction process was where we had agreed to a maximum of three

interviews for each participant, but we renegotiated a fourth 'exit' interview to help both the participant and researcher to ease out of the interview process. Creswell (2014 pp. 92-101) makes similar observations by describing five stages in the research process where ethical issues may occur, including prior to conducting the study; beginning the study; collecting data; analysing data and finally reporting, sharing, and storing data. Creswell's position on the ethics of research is unwavering, as his writings guide us through the whole of the research study process from initial engagement with participants and college to final accreditation and acknowledgement to 'researcher, participants, and advisers' regarding ownership of study (Creswell 2014).

Building on the writings of Guilleman and Gillam (2004), in which they divide ethics into 'two dimensions': 'Procedural Ethics' (those procedures of confidentiality (see appendix 5), informed consent etc.) and 'Ethics in Practice' (procedures that deal with unpredictable moments or harmful disclosures that might present themselves during the interviews), Ellis (2007) adds a third dimension, 'Relational Ethics'. This advancement in the ethical consideration and methodological thinking by Ellis (2007) who refers to the 'intimate other' when writing about relational ethics in research, and the requirement to, 'act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bond to others and take responsibility for actions and their consequences' played a key part in the developmental aspect of the study, and what followed was a steady build of trust and familiarity that complimented and enabled deep relational life revelations and experiences. The ethical awareness (and gravity of same) that was generated throughout the close relational journey through the multiplicity of co-constructed stories of lived experiences placed both researcher and researched in unplanned and challenging situations.

Lopez states:

> *The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves.*
>
> (Lopez 1990 p. 60 in Clandinin 2013 p. 200)

The vulnerability of the participants was the over-arching factor in the ethical considerations of this research, and in reality, was my constant reflective focus. Bryman, (2012 p. 134) emphasises the need, not only to be familiar with wider bodies 'codes of practice' but also 'you should be acquainted with the ethical guidelines of your university or college', added to the day-to-day awareness of triggers that could signal a low or anxious demeanour with the participants; the ethical considerations are wide and demanding.

Taking all of this into consideration it is important to be aware of a possible default position captured really well by Ellis (2007), where she suggests that there are

> *no definitive rules or universal principles that can tell you precisely what to do in every situation or relationship you may encounter, other than the vague and generic <u>do no harm</u>.*

<div align="right">Ellis (2007)</div>

The Relational Ethic of the study

Merrill and West (2009 p. 4) points to the engagement of biographical researchers, 'frequently if not exclusively' with 'marginalized people' to: 'give voice and to challenge dominant assumptions, as part of a humanist project to build a more just social order'. The interpersonal connection between the researcher and researched is paramount in eliciting valuable data, but just as important is the time and attention given to the extremely important, minute detail and at times throw away remarks that might be missed as we journey with and alongside the men throughout the study. We tell stories in and about our work and we connect with the community we work with through story and conversation. The opportunity to carry out this research study with the men was a natural developmental progression that was rooted in a longitudinal relationship spanning ten years in some cases. My connection with the men had grown from been seen initially as the manager of the local community development project and a man of their generation, to one who has become an ally, confidant and a trusted advocate that can be depended on. 'What's the story?' is my every time greeting, responded with "Jasus wait'll I tell you what happened" or it might be, "you're not going to believe this" or maybe, "sit down for a minute". There was/is always a story.

This connection with the participants and researcher was built and strengthened over many years of struggle in which we challenged various bodies and institutions together to improve the quality of life for these men and others. Throughout the years we have faced many challenges together including addressing issues concerned with, anti-social behavior, inadequate housing, food poverty, lack of services, etc. We have experienced many victories and positive outcomes as well as disappointment, disillusionment, and disrespect, but the men always knew they had my support. As part of the development work with the men I have travelled with them both nationally and internationally; from industrial schools in Ireland to concentration camps in Poland; from decision making institutions in Dublin to the European Parliament in Brussels.

This close connection might also manifest itself in the observation of something that was not said: "you haven't mentioned your time spent in school?" (Interviewer), "that's because I hated school" (participant). The joint narrativizational process based on a positive relational dynamic pushed the interview to unexpected places of deep discovery and leap of faith utterings, which required careful stewardship and navigation. The awareness of, and deliberate light steering away from troubled, unconnected to the story, easily identified defamatory or libelous passages, served to keep the flow of the story, as well as protecting all concerned. This closeness and attention to detail, benefits not only the research process, but the sustaining and development of the day-to-day relationship with the participants. An example of this was when one participant spoke about exposing a member of his family for fraud to a national newspaper but after a joint reflective conversation, he agreed it was not relevant to our pursuit and could be libelous from several perspectives. The agreement to leave this part of the interview out was amicable and gave the participant a sense of the rigor of the ethical consideration.

This seems to agree with Riessman's (1993 p. 40) understanding of the interpersonal context, in which she refers to, 'the connections between teller and listener that are the bedrock of all human interaction, including research interviews'. Riessman (1993) also points to Bell's (2002) views about Scheff's (1990) 'micro sociological frame', where she gives "prominence to the conversation that creates and sustains social bonds". This cementing of the relational bond was experienced and captured on many occasions both throughout the interview process as well as the back and forth 'clarity checking' with the participants where deep emotional joint sharing was acknowledged with exaggerated nods and reciprocal reflection, which not only gives a sense of shared understanding but

also gives a kind of permission to take the sharing to a deeper level. Riessman (1993) adds, that attention to the detail of not only "what is said, but how it is said" is required for this kind of experience to take place. This attention to detail is extremely important, as important clues are often not picked up in the trawl through the transcriptions, but the combination of listening attentively to the interview recordings, exploration of field notes, transcription immersion, and a verification 'back and forth' process with each participant creates an almost seamless, truth laden interpretive understanding of the elicited stories.

Being aware of the perceived difference of power between the participants and myself is very important in attempting to avoid them telling me what they perceive I want to hear, to please me, not to annoy me, or saying something that might make them look bad to me. Each participant is different. As a valuable starting point, they entered the study process willingly. They understand what the study is for and where it will go. They want their story told. They believe that society might learn something from their learning. They also believe that the process will not judge them, but readers of the finished thesis might, but that does not matter to them. They believe that this is an opportunity for them to have a say, to be heard. Even if they do not know who will hear, they believe that I will finish this piece of work and that it might go somewhere, someplace, and someone might benefit from their story. Creating the environment for important narrative to emerge involves maintaining a constant watchfulness of the whole study experience for the participants, from participation selection to final thesis presentation. The advantage that this researcher enjoys is that this journey is just one of many we (participants and I) have travelled together over the last decade, in which trust and respect was earned rather than just spoken about.

3.8   Reliability and Trustworthiness

The reliability and trustworthiness of the findings is dependent on the professional thoroughness of the researcher, the appropriateness of the chosen methodology in relation to the research question, and how all this is evidenced throughout the pages and chapters of the study. This study is focused on the narratives elicited from the participants to be the interpretive outcomes of the research which will be further interpreted by different readers, differently, depending on their world view. Mapping the research study from idea to question, design, methods, analysis, and ethical considerations attempts to guide the reader and provide them with both a theoretical framework and lens, by which the study

can be interpreted and understood in a way that makes sense, and in turn earns the reliable and trustworthy seal of approval. The rigor of the mapping of the ontological and epistemological stance of the researcher, mirrored by the theoretical and methodological determined design and subsequent practical delivery of the research process is essential in contributing to, not only quality research outcomes but also to the readers of the study's understanding and trust in the research process itself. According to Morse *et al.* (2002 p. 18), this can be achieved through, 'methodological coherence, sampling sufficiency, developing a dynamic relationship between data collection and analysis, thinking theoretically and theory development'.

Travelling this narrative inquiry journey with the men compares to what Brinkmann and Kvale (2018 pp. 13-26) describes as involving oneself in a 'conversational approach to research '. Using what they describes as a 'Miner and Traveller metaphor' Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) draw a distinction between the qualitative and quantitative paradigms in which he points to the traveller as making 'observations and conversation with local inhabitants' as well as recognising the researcher's own input and experience from a subjective qualitative approach to research, as opposed to the miner who 'digs nuggets of data or meanings out of a subjects pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions or by the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee', reflecting an objective, quantitative perspective. The search for 'truth' in social research not only requires a methodological match for our ontological, epistemological world perspective, it also requires a methodology that fits the type of question we need answered, and participant we are addressing the question to. Using narrative as an inquiry methodology demands a certain rigour and responsibility from the researcher that maximises the possibility of ensuring reliability and trustworthiness.

McCormack (2004) refers to the process of 'storying stories' in relation to 'in-depth research interviews as exploring' individuals' understandings of their experience in the context of their everyday lives while simultaneously looking to the wider social/cultural resources on which people draw to help them make sense of their lives. She cautions against becoming the 'colonizer' by hijacking the teller's story and making it yours, or even omitting their 'telling' influence in the restorying process. As researchers we need to be mindful of 'whose story do we construct?' and that both the participant and the researcher can hear their individual and collective voices throughout the restorying journey. The awareness and delivery of a theoretically supported methodological

framework that is 'fit for purpose' in relation to delivering important reliable and trustworthy data is dependent on the level of professional understanding and subsequent practical delivery of the narrative inquiry process by the researcher. The study offers new possibilities for both researcher and participants, and indeed new discovery for the wider research community in relation to the stories told and methodology developed and employed.

3.8.2 Limitations of the Study

As researchers we must maintain a gatekeeper like diligence. Acknowledging the limitations of narrative inquiry prepares us for the narrative journey and adds to the rigour of care and thoroughness we employ. Connelly and Clandinin (1990 p. 10) suggest that we be attentive to our critics, they stress 'every criticism is valid to some degree and contains the seed of an important point'. Bell (2002 p. 210), argues that narrative has its 'limitations' and is 'not suited for all inquiries. She further makes the point that narrative is time consuming which makes it 'unsuitable for work with a large number of participants. She continues by referring to the challenge of 'ethical issues', the researcher 'imposing meaning on participants' lived experience', and because of the relational aspect of narrative inquiry, the 'disengagement' of the researcher when the study is complete.

My awareness of the relational and familiarity aspect of the study was ever-present regarding the potential for researcher contamination and bias in respect of the data. This was addressed by engaging in constant clarification at every opportunity, including at the beginning, during, and at the end of every interview, contacting the participants when listening back to the audio, and when I was interrogating the audio with the written transcriptions. As previously described in chapter three, pages 43 and 44, 'member checking' was employed to further interrogate and provide opportunities for deeper contextualisation, if needed.

From a cohort of thirty-plus possible participants only eight were interested in engaging in the study, of which six were selected for reasons previously explained in chapter 3, page 55 (last section). Although a small number, I believe six was more than enough to generate important data. As the interviews were often difficult to arrange and when completed generated multiple hours of audio recordings, which then had to be transcribed, bigger numbers would have been extremely difficult to manage. Crabtree and Miller (1999 pp. 33-35) describe researching 'field or documentary/historical' qualitative

research as seeking to 'uncover multiple realities and/or to create a deeper understanding'. They cite Patton, (1990 p. 185) who suggests that qualitative researchers 'typically focus in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases selected purposefully'. The vulnerability of the participants was also a consideration from a physical and mental health perspective. During interviews I constantly checked in with them to ensure ongoing consent for participation and how they felt about their own well-being and participation. We stopped as soon as they indicated and took breaks wherever needed. The pace of the engagement was slow to facilitate this. During this study sadly, one of the participants passed away (Sacky) and another (Popeye) became seriously ill. Sacky died following a very short illness and continues to be missed by all that knew him. Thankfully, Popeye has recently made a full recovery and is doing well. Because I had not finished the work on their elicited stories, I decided it would be unethical to include their narratives in the study.

It was difficult to pick a point in the life of the research study where I could draw a line and agree with myself a cut of point for gathering data. The back and forth checking in with the participants would sometimes become another unplanned interview as the participants wanted to share more of their lived experiences. Even when the interviews were finished and the process of delivering the findings was in hand, my work with the men continued daily. There were times when I was practically hiding away to write up the findings. The interviews (and back and forth checking in with the men as part of the research process) had created a deeper relational experience between us which was reflected in their heighted engagement with the community development project which subsequently created more opportunities for us to meet. I became more disciplined in how I managed my contact with the participants and eventually convinced them that the research had to be written up and that it required no further interviews until completed.

Outside of the field notes, reflective notes, and middle of the day and night *thought's* notes; as mentioned previously the audio interviews generated approximately twenty-eight hours of tape. This created a mountain of transcriptions which were both extremely costly (I attempted to write them up myself but was getting nowhere following two weeks of trying), and very time consuming to work through. Eventually I paid to get the transcriptions finished.

Limitations to the Research

Convincing others in respect of narrative inquiry being considered as a viable methodological approach is a challenge when confronted with traditional research methods that are based on scientific methods, and far removed from a human-centred approach. Ways of establishing truth in the findings and reliability and trustworthiness of the narrative inquiry process is a constant part of this process. As mentioned previously in this section ethical considerations are also a primary consideration in narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 170) suggest that ethical matters 'shift and change as we move through an inquiry'. They argue it does not end with 'ethical review forms' or 'university approval' but also we need to attend to ethical matters 'over the entire narrative inquiry process'. We need to take time to attend to these ethical challenges and responsibilities and this takes time and great effort. This means that numbers must be low and research takes a long time. This is a necessary limitation of this type of research, it is also a strength.

A further limit of the research is that we could not include women. Although there are a small number of women living in Swan's Rest, this research did not include them. As outlined below the experience of the men in this study was mediated by structural forces including societal understandings of masculinity. The experiences of women were different and differently shaped. Not only did I feel that there was not a strong enough relationship with them for them to participate in any real way, but I also felt it would not be manageable or the generated data reliable.

3.9   Conclusion

Knowledge is the currency of our time and the demand for informed knowledge has never been greater or more necessary. My epistemological stance and view of the world determined my qualitative, inductive approach which asserts that you can best know the world by being engaged with it. This chapter represented the thinking, rethinking, structuring and restructuring, which informed the subsequent rationale for the decisions that led to employing a narrative inquiry methodology with specific methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the data. This fit for purpose methodological research design delivered a conversation type, participant led interview process that set about answering the research question of how older men living in public sheltered housing spoke about their lives, and their engagement with the local community development

project. The deep relational co-journeying of teller and researcher demanded an ethical, reflexive approach throughout this narrative research inquiry which continually placed the participants front and centre. Employing this methodological approach was justified as it created the conditions for rich insights into the lives of the participants that will hopefully develop our understanding, contribute to the theory and inform our practice. The following chapter is concerned with the narratives of the participants.

Chapter 4: Fellow Travellers, a journey of discovery - Making sense of the data

4.1   Introduction

This chapter will reflect the interactive voices of both researcher and narrator, restorying aspects of each participant's lived experience in a manner that gives them a voice which captures their lived experience in a way that we can learn from and act on. As researchers, using this *'interactive voice'* points to an awareness of where we position ourselves in the world. Chase (2005 p. 666), seems to agree, and argues that researchers 'examine their voices — their subject positions, social locations, interpretations, and personal experiences — through the refracted medium of narrators' voices'. The chapter also refers to the major substantive stories and primary emerging themes of masculinity, redemption, family, addiction, disconnect and love and loss, which although individually apportioned to each participant, they will be subsequently explored in the collective in the following chapter in a way that binds the participants together. Exploring a particular emerging theme from individual participants first will hopefully create clarity of perspective and allow the researcher an informed platform when addressing the intersectionality of the collective themes in the following chapter. The following chapter will concentrate on the collective themes as well as the engagement by the participants with the CDP.

The four participants whose interviews were used for the purpose of the study chose their personal pseudonym (Teddy, Grey, Bip and Green) and although they expressed their willingness to forgo anonymity, three of the four participants enjoyed the restorying process when their pseudonyms were read or heard; *'It's like a cloak ... or a shield ... I don't need it but if it helps, work away'* (Grey). But Bip felt it was stupid and a waste of time; *'I don't know why you're bothering; I don't care who reads my story'*. All four participants, whose stories were used to elicit data, felt that they were contributing to something important. *'It's not every day you are asked something that might help others'* (Green); *'I enjoyed listening back to the writing up of the stories ... it brought me back ... I actually looked forward to the conversations we had'* (Grey).

Two of the participants (Popeye and Sacky) data was not used in the study. This is explained in their section of this chapter in which their contribution is respectfully acknowledged. The human thread that produced the tapestry of the participants' lives created similar and different life patterns and designs which were reflected in the narrative of their lived experience. To unravel this tapestry the analysis of the elicited stories required total immersion in the data, in which transcriptions were repeatedly read, field notes, artefacts and audio files were referred to in order to give meaning, and in turn a louder and different voice to the participants. The six stories presented and the analysis of the four named interviews, along with the referencing and knowledge accrued from the other two participants (whose stories were not included in the analysis), created a platform from which knowledge could emerge and normative assumptions of older men could be challenged.

4.2   Teddy

Being the breadwinner is important; it's what a man is supposed to do.

4.2.1 Who is Teddy?

Teddy is from Rialto in Dublin. He was born in the 1950s and was the fifth of twelve siblings (8 boys and 4 girls). His family struggled initially but his father managed to open a vegetable shop and then another four followed a year or so later and things got a bit better. Teddy speaks of his mother with a reverence of saintly proportion, while in contrast the respect he holds for his father that was largely born out of his father's *'couldn't give a bollocks'* attitude to life, was demanded. Teddy describes his life as a *'rollercoaster-ride of highs and lows, joy and pain, and happiness and soul destroying upset'*. Although he talked about some happy times growing up his memory of school was painful.

At first Teddy didn't talk about school but when this was observed and asked about, he spoke about the time his innocence was torn from him (referred to later in this chapter). Since moving into Swan's Rest in 2012 he has been slowly and carefully rebuilding his life to a point where he sees a future. His relationship with all of his children is getting better (some were slower to accept his leaving of the family home). He is involved in the regeneration process and has high hopes for been moved to a new development. *'I'm hoping for a new place to live, so I can be happier….a place where I am proud to bring*

my kids and my precious grandkids to….family is everything to me, but it always was you know?...when I look back, the happiest time of my life was when I was out fishing with my brothers and sisters and me Da'. As well as working in the CDP amongst many other things, Teddy is also a member of the Local Community Council's steering group, who are involved in a master-planning process to deliver a physical and social regeneration development for his community.

Teddy is the second youngest of the men interviewed for the study, his calm 'things could be worse' demeanour creates a sense of relaxed hope amongst his less equipped neighbours and friends. Most people that know Teddy love him. Teddy's calm exterior hides a present and historical struggle with fractured manhood, relationships, trust, regret, ravaged childhood, and sadness for others who struggle.

4.2.2 A Road Travelled

Teddy's initial agreement to take part in the study was accepted with the understanding that he was *'not a great talker'* and that he didn't have much to talk about anyway. His participation in the interviews, checking in with, and after the recorder shut-off, was engaging, informative and often lengthy. Teddy attempted suicide as a younger man when work dried up and his capacity to cope with a growing family began to wane. The deeply buried demons of screaming pain and life determining branding where released from the 'plenty' induced slumber that served to lock the demons away, with their release date unknown while things were good.

'I was sexually abused in school. The teacher fooled me...I trusted him and he raped me'. This sharing didn't happen easily. His hand wringing, navel staring posture helped steel him while the painful but needed elicited utterings stuttered and then flowed. Teddy drew a full chested sigh, *'It's been a long, long time since those words surfaced…Jesus Christ…fuck sake…now you understand why I didn't mention school in the last chat we had. You must have wondered why I started this story with life in the army…fucking mad'*

Teddy endured bullying in the army, and it made his time there miserable (referred to later in this chapter) and he deserted. He eventually gave himself up and retuned but endured further bullying while waiting for his discharge. *'I seem to attract fuckers that want to do me no good, I mind my own business Tommy...you know that Tommy…but for*

some fucking reason'; His voice faded, and he looked shaky as he drew a long breath. After the army he just wanted to settle down and enjoy life. Teddy met his soon to be wife and after no more than a year together, got married; he was twenty and she was seventeen. *'When our first kid was born, we had no cot…we put him in a drawer…I'll never forget that…it was brilliant. We were poor at the beginning and had to take money from her da. I hated having to accept his charity…. I'd take your fucking hand off now, ha'*

Teddy worked hard and built up a mobile video rental business and things got better. The family grew very quickly; babies arrived one after the other until there were eleven children. *'I began to panic a bit trying to make sure we had enough…I worked me bollocks off…But I couldn't take the pressure'.* Teddy planned to take his own life and swallowed handfuls of pills, but luckily his life was saved and following weeks in hospital he was signed into St Loman's Psychiatric Hospital. His recovery took a number of years, but he eventually his reliance on Prozac and other medication ceased. *'My wife caught me cheating on her and threw me out. I fucked up…If I could turn back the clock I would…only because I hurt so many people. I don't think that my head was completely right…I'm not making excuses but I had a lovely family and fucked it all away'. This was a dark time for me and I think I was drifting in and out of depression and I struggled…I think that was the saddest time of my life'*

It took some time for Teddy to steady himself and muster the courage to try and step back into society again. His journey back has been difficult, but the support from some of his children has helped him to step out of the oppressive depression darkness to begin to build again.

Teddy was homeless for a period and moved in with one of his sons for a while but yearned for his own place to ground himself in order to continue his journey to what he describes as *'getting my life back'.* When the Council offered him a much sought after one bed-room flat in Swan's Rest View he was delighted. '*I can't believe it, I thought to myself, things are going to be much better now...I prayed for three months every night to thank god for giving me the opportunity to have a home again*'.

Another major factor in Teddy finding his way back is his continuous engagement with the local Community Development Project (CDP). Shortly after moving into his flat in Swan's Rest, Teddy began to notice the daily routines of some of the men, winding their

way through the sheltered housing complex, carrying their load of carrier-bag disguised life enduring hand-grenades of cheap beer and cider, which concussed and blurred (for a time) the men's social reality. When asked about life in the complex Teddy was laboured in his response, *'I don't like to interfere but some of the men are really struggling, even the ones I thought were strong...I know I'm always saying things could be worse, but really some of the men are at rock bottom'.*

During our last interview Teddy broke down in tears when describing the struggle of one man in particular who is fighting cancer, alcohol and nicotine addiction, and the loss of his children through the breakdown of his marriage many years ago. '*Jesus Christ Tommy...It's so unfair...everything that could go wrong for him, has!*' Three years ago, Teddy (through his friendship with a neighbour who volunteers with the CDP) joined the project in a voluntary capacity and has since taken up employment with the project through a Community Employment Scheme (CE). Teddy is very much aware of his personal vulnerability but goes about his work with his neighbours in a 'slow build' relational manner: *'Trust is big with me, I love being here in the CDP, I believe the experience here has changed me. This work has created an opportunity for me to work with the men. I love being able to support the men (and sometimes the women) in our complex. It's good for your own well-being as well; it's great to see the men do well'.*

Teddy has established himself as the main point of contact between the men in the sheltered housing and the CDP. He is bringing some of the men on a journey of self-discovery as he stands his ground as a human being, claiming equality of existence rights from those who determine the hegemonic social, cultural, political and economic landscape that only serves to oppress those that don't fit. *'Why should we have to live like this, are we not entitled to a decent life? is it that we don't deserve it?...who fucking says we don't deserve it...they, whoever they fucking are, don't know me...who makes the decisions that creates the conditions for our existence?...fuck that Tommy'.* Teddy gets very animated when searching for answers; he knows what the reality of being on the bottom is like. Teddy's story has taught him how fragile we all are and that the struggle is difficult, and against the odds, but he also knows it's a struggle we cannot afford to lose.

Teddy believes that men should be strong, they need to be able to stand their ground against all odds: '*you get walked on if you're not strong and wide (aware)*'. Teddy would be described by others as a decent bloke, a man's man, but he sees himself as fortunate to have survived mid-life and come out the other side. '*There's a lot of pressure being a man, to always have the right answers. Sometimes it's difficult to always be capable; you can quickly be dragged down if you're not careful*'.

His reference during the interview process to his role as provider and protector for his dependents left nothing to be desired: '*I would die for my kids Tommy, I never left my family short, and I worked my arse off...sure, even my ex would tell you that! Nobody can deny that; I really mean that Tommy...nobody*'.

His fragile, emotional and sensitive side is rarely exposed as he works and lives in the sheltered housing complex. His caring nature defies his prescribed gendered role, his public outbursts of empathy fuelled challenges to staff of the local community development project (CDP) to '*not be so judgemental*' when they talk about the more seriously challenged men in the sheltered housing complex, '*there for the grace of god go all of us*'. He would often get emotionally choked when standing the men's ground in their absence.

4.2.3 Masculinity: Making of a Man

Teddy puts a strong emphasis on being a man, '*The truth is Tommy we are born into this world as men and you have to deliver.* Although some of his siblings worked in their father's grocery business Teddy was having none of it, '*I was offered a shop to work in by my Da but I joined the army instead, I thought that was the manlier job than a fucking vegetable shop*'. The army didn't work out for Teddy, He spoke about a Sergeant who was always on his case and seemed to have it in for him for no reason except the fact that he didn't like him. Teddy looked agitated when talking about this time in his life and as he spoke, he shook his head as if to give the impression that even now he still can't understand why, '*I was bullied there and eventually deserted. I always felt I had to prove myself, I could never figure what that was all about*'.

'*I met Mary and got married, I thought I was in love, but I knew she loved me, so I stayed, and as the kids came along, I continued to stay, and sort of knew I couldn't go anywhere, I had to stay. More kids came along and I was busy providing for them*'. Although there

was a sense of uncertainty about his true feelings for his wife, the belief that being a man has certain responsibilities, and being there for his family was a priority. The manly-thing-to-do overcame any considerations for himself and was reflected in Teddy's tone and demeanour as he shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows saying; *'It was down to me, end of story'*.

Teddy is a proud man, loves his independence and always looks to give rather than receive. *'I was offered a house by my father-in law but declined because I didn't want to owe him, or anyone for that matter….my family, my responsibility*. He talks about how this feeling of never asking for help or even admitting something might be wrong was nearly his un-doing; '*The time came that I began to struggle, but didn't tell anyone, and my fucking head crashed ….I was all over the fucking place….wasn't working and became dependent on others….I couldn't take that and tried to kill myself……would you believe my wife saved me….I was so bad, I hated her for finding me before the overdose took real hold of me'*

Teddy hid himself away and leaned on medication to numb his perceived failure as a man. He couldn't face the idea of people knowing what had happened. *'It was a poxy difficult time going through all that stuff…. The shame, I didn't want anyone knowing…. what a fucking disaster of a bloke, I thought everyone knew and looked down on me, but I was wrong …I know that now… but at the time everything was black…. I didn't want to live anymore…. if I couldn't sort my family, I wasn't any sort of man…. the pressure of being dependent and not depended-on was unbearable.*

During that dark period in Teddy's life he took the decision to leave the family home. *I was acting the bollocks, out drinking, not coming home, basically re-living the youth I thought I missed out on. My wife didn't want me to go, but I had to I felt I was smothering. My ex-wife is a decent woman who never done anything wrong, but there was something missing…. can't really say what that was but I knew it was best for me to go…for their sake (wife and children) and I know it sounds selfish but for my sake as well. I swear Tommy I fucking never put myself first but I really knew I had to leave.'*

Teddy speaks highly of his wife and they are still friends, but when he left the comfort of the family home, he believed he was going to struggle. But again Teddy's understanding of men's role in society determined his fate; '*When I left I thought that was the end for*

me but my kids helped me….they offered me support…..I moved in with my son for a short while, but had to leave, I felt in the way…a bit of a burden….I thought he was putting himself out for me and I couldn't take that. I was really struggling to survive and make my own way'.

Living in a variety of flats and bedsits in what Teddy describes as *'hell-holes'* was to follow for a number of years. In that time Teddy struggled to stay sane and many times felt like giving up. This difficult time was to be a pre-cursor to a life changing experience of been given a unit in Swan's Rest. Teddy was animated and his voice excited when talking about this time in his life. *'Luckily, I was old enough to qualify for Swan's Rest, and moving in here was the unexpected new start for me…. a home…. I really had a home……fucking brilliant. Meeting some of the staff from the CDP on their daily outreach walkabout, followed by volunteering in the project gave me an opportunity to support others and made me feel useful and, in some way, important again. Jasus I've come a bit of a way since then…. I'm in my third year now, working in the CDP'.*

Teddy took on various courses and classes while on the Community Employment Scheme (CE) with the CDP and is proud of the fact. *'It's mad where I am now…. I feel good. I have my bus driving test coming up soon and helping one of my sons at the weekend in his garage has given me a sense of purpose…. sure Jasus Tommy, you wouldn't get a minute hahaha'.*

Teddy considers himself lucky to have found his way back to a place where he can be happy at times. His learning from life has given him certain skills and a passion for fairness that he uses in helping others who are less able. Teddy constantly drew attention to the various needs, struggles and successes of his family. He expresses a huge need and obligation to make things right for them, no matter what the cost. He argues that being older lifts some of the pressure off what a man is expected to do but adds that you still need to be there for them. He makes the most of opportunities to see his children and grandchildren. He points to the love of his adult children, who he says understand how hard he tried to be there for them. There are a number of themes that are present in Teddy's stories including love and loss, family and redemption to name a few, but Teddy's dominant narrative is centred on his masculinity and his ideas of what constitutesbeing a man. Teddy's believed identity is a generational construct of institutional, cultural, familial, and patriarchal ideology that dominates his world. The identity that

Teddy presents as a man is honed by his life's journey, and the negative and positive experiences that he faced along the way.

4.3   Grey

'It's like a yard full of broken-down and wrecked cars where we live, and the CDP is down here trying to salvage them'

4.3.1 Who is Grey?

Grey grew up in Charlemont Street in Dublin and was the eleventh child of thirteen (7 boys and 6 girls). Born into poverty and ill health, Grey recalls his upset at leaving the hospital (after 7 years) to return home: *'I was happy there…they were my family…. I didn't know any of my siblings like I knew the other patients in the hospital…. I hated coming back home'*. He spent most of his teenage years in hospital suffering from meningitis and related issues. He can hardly recall a time in his life when he didn't struggle with ill-health and is presently wheelchair dependent. Grey's father was a painter/decorator and for a time so was he. But Grey's health was/is a constant impediment and eventually he could no longer hold down a job. Grey dreams of winning the Lotto someday and talks about sharing some of it with others who also struggle. Grey visits the CDP every day and carries out a small amount of volunteering. He is presently saving (€6 per week) to participate in a cultural visit to Inisheer (Aran Islands) with the CDP and twenty-two other men.

4.3.2 A Road Travelled

Grey contracted meningitis as a child. To this day he still suffers the fall-out from the infection that kept him in hospital for seven years. During that time, he slipped into a coma for a long period (he wasn't sure how long, maybe months, maybe more than a year), lost both his ability to walk and read and write. *'I can't remember much about that time in my life except that I have always carried the feeling that I wasn't wanted when I returned home from hospital...I think I still carry a bit of "fuck them I never wanted to come home anyway" with me...but if I'm honest...it probably started during the time I was in there (hospital), because my ma only came to see me twice...It's funny how I remember that and can't remember other stuff anyway. My brothers and sisters thought I was their cousin, not their brother as I was away for so long...I felt I never fitted in and wanted to go back to my friends in hospital and get away from this horrible place (home)'*. Grey

was almost angry as he spoke and was dismissive of his siblings' perceived rejection of him.

Grey never went back to school after his time in hospital and at thirteen years of age got a job in a glass and paint company. He was ten years there and felt he was really good at his job, and enjoyed what he was doing. *'I fell out with the boss and walked out following a blazing row. Even now I know it was a stupid thing to do but my pride wouldn't let me go back there...I think I would have got my job back, but I wouldn't go down there...fucking stupid. But you know what I was able to get a start with a garage shortly after that and they were prepared to train me as a mechanic after a while...they could see I was good with my hands like'.* Grey was proud of the fact that he was straight into another job and he emphasised that point. But Grey didn't last too long in the garage and numerous other jobs were tried before the family were forced to move to England to find work. England was where Grey found his true profession and he enjoyed this time in his life; he began working as a painter and decorator with his father. *'I was taught the trade (decorating) by my father and I was quick to learn. I enjoyed going to work...this time in my life was better. I was earning great money working with my father and doing nixers (extra undocumented work) as well'.*

Grey spoke about the many jobs he worked on with his father and how good he was at his job, but it didn't last long. Grey's family moved back to Ireland when work began todry up, but their father stayed behind. *'I don't know why he stayed, I often wonder about that...maybe it was to try to get work...but the next time I saw him was a couple of years later when he came back to Dublin to die...his liver was rotten I was told...can't say I missed him when he died...I didn't really know him'.* This statement by Grey seemed to contradict the sense of pride I felt that flowed from him during the conversation about his time working with his father.

Back in Dublin Grey built up a busy decorating side-line for himself, as well as working steady in the Glass and Paint Company (the same one that employed him as a young boy). He was proud to be able to support his mother and had a very busy social life. *'A few of us lived at home (3-bedroom social housing in Crumlin, on the Southside of Dublin) but I made sure we were never short...I enjoyed being able to do this...it made me feel really good'.*

Grey was in his late thirties when he married. He moved away from the family home to a '*nice flat'* on the outskirts of the city (Dublin) to begin a new life. *'I thought this was it, this is where my real life starts...we were making a life for ourselves, but after four years it all ended...how fucking wrong was I...what kind of a fucking gobshite did I turn out to be...she cheated on me...got pregnant by someone else...I couldn't have kids...that was all checked out before I got married...she knew it was over...she destroyed my hopes and dreams...and would you believe she done the dirty on me with my best friend, imagine that...despicable prick...that was the end for me...I went downhill after that...that's why I am the way I am now. That whole few weeks and months is a total fucking blur...all I remember is how I felt...and that's enough'.* Grey's demeanour during this passage of the interview was one of anger and huge frustration, as he grappled with this dark re-emerging history. My offer to put on the kettle wasn't welcomed or dismissed; it was ignored, as he seemed to search for some magical words that might neutralise this toxic scenario and make it just a bad dream instead. With a heavy sigh and a shake of his head grey eased himself back deeper into his armchair signalling the disappointment of his failed search for release.

Grey Moved home to Crumlin and his health began to deteriorate. He was attending hospital with heart problems, and severe arthritis in his joints but he managed to have a social life and was out most weekends. '*I was doing a few odd decorating jobs (although getting down to paint skirting boards was a killer), and I met a lot of women over the next few years but I just stayed with them for very short periods and moved on. Before I ended up here, I moved in with a woman would you believe...was living with her for more than five years...don't ask me why or how it happened, it just did...another fucking fuck-up'. It was like we just put up with each other...I was in the hospital a lot...she would go out a lot. It was ok but it wasn't love or anything like it. She was from Cavan...she actually passed away a couple of years ago...she wasn't the worst...that other fucker was (ex-wife). I had a stroke and was left with a bit of a twist in my face...she didn't like it, and told me so...I left her and eventually ended up in this kip...but I should have stayed and sent her back to Cavan...I left myself homeless.*

Grey is in his late sixties and has been in Swan's Rest for more than ten years. He arrived around the same time as I started work here. His mood swings come often depending on the severity of the pain in his joints and in his head, but he quickly became a man that engaged with the project. Although in the early years Grey would have gone missing for

weeks (hidden away in his flat or in hospital getting treatment) he is now a constant presence around the project. '*My life is gone…this is the end for me here. The only respite I have is when your crowd knock on the door, but that only happens Monday to Friday, the weekend is like a fucking morgue around here, a ghost town.*

Grey often mentioned being lonely and yet he would be known for pushing people away with his angry outbursts and dismissive demeanour. But I always had to remind myself of the acute physical pain he endured daily as well as the emotional fall-out he had to deal with from a difficult life lived. *It's like this, before this fucking pain took over you could be busy doing stuff during the week, meetings, game of cards, even slagging each other...and during that time you forget about the pain running through you, but then the fucking weekend arrives and you stop being busy and the pain comes back…That's why I put on a film, turn the volume up so it will go in there somewhere and find a spot to keep me sane, if you understand?...Otherwise you're fucked.* Grey very much wanted me to understand and searched for my eyes as he tried to make a point*; It's hard to understand what I'm talking about; you have to experience it yourself to really understand. It's so fucking lonely here at the weekend that I plan my week Monday to Friday, skip Saturday and Sunday and start again Monday to Friday, so there is no weekend involved, brutal isn't it? Fuck sake there should be something for us to do.* Grey was highly critical of the absence of resources which would have allowed for more staff, initiatives and interventions to be employed in Swan's Rest. *That's why so many men drink here…they're drinking themselves to death out of boredom'.*

4.3.3 Longing to Belong

Grey feels sorry for some of the other men that live in Swan's Rest and feels there is not enough done for older people who struggle. *'I want my story to be heard. I'd like people to understand my life, so they might understand me. It's good that someone might read your thesis in twenty, thirty or even a hundred years from now and learn something from it, but it would be better if they read it now so maybe they could understand how people end up in kips like this and do something about it'.*

Grey hates where he lives, he is waiting on word back from Dublin City Council (DCC) about moving to a more modern unit only two minutes away from where he is now that has a separate bedroom. '*How could you bring someone into this dog box that I live in, and not be embarrassed? They (DCC) don't see that maybe you might want to bring*

someone in; they think you should be grateful. We are the forgotten people living here; they do fuck all for us. We should stop paying rent until something is done and they start treating us fairly. Can you imagine me saying that to the lads in the club...no fucking chance. When I moved here I thought it was not bad...at least it was my own place...but then I realised that there is nothing left for me...what's the point in planning anything...there's nothing to plan...this is my last stop before heaven or maybe hell. That's when I decided I wasn't going to live in this kip until I die...I want a better place...fuck that'.

During the interviews Grey regularly spoke about his life being *'over, gone, finished'* He believes that nobody understands what it's like to be him. *'I'm not happy, I'm in pain from my knees to my head, but that's only what people can see...most of the time I can hide that and pretend that it's not too bad like...people don't like people moaning all the time. It's the pain inside, that's a different story...You have to get inside my head to know what it's like...it's a feeling of total fucked up thoughts, mostly about everything I've missed.* Grey believes he has missed out on much of what life has to offer because of his illness, particularly having a family of his own and being a father. *I've missed out on being a Da, being part of a family that goes out together like, to weddings and things...even funerals...the fact that you're part of a family like. It's that stuff that really fucks me up'. It's those times that I feel so lonely and left out...many times I've thought about over-dosing on pills, but I promised god I wouldn't; it's against my religion...But I swear I don't know how long I can keep that promise for.*

Grey describes his life as 'shit' and that he doesn't expect much from it. He blames his long sickness as a child that allowed his siblings to push him away and points to how close some of them are to where he lives and they still don't visit. But his words often betray his one-sided blame as he freely admits to being very stubborn having *'blow-outs'* that just happen. Grey gets agitated when the conversation hits a pressure point and pulls himself up and forward in the chair when he needed to make a point. He can talk fifteen minutes and longer without stopping, and often did. *'You know the way people say "there's always someone worse off" well that's bollocks...it's supposed to make you feel better...well it doesn't work for me because I don't know anyone worse off than me...so I must be at the very bottom'.*

Grey is emotionally scarred and this is reflected in stories of being let down by people, particularly those who he felt close to or had some kind of relationship with. *I sometimes feel you are better off on your own in this world...well I think I am anyway...It's a fucking joke...because when you get to close to people like family members you might say stuff to hurt them...I told my sister that I wished the whole fucking lot of my family was dead...to be honest with you Tommy I didn't really mean it but she said stuff that annoyed me...she told them all...she hasn't spoken to me in years...none of them speak to me...I hate her.* Grey's telling was often contradictory and his frustration could easily be misconstrued as anger. He yearned to be popular, liked or maybe even loved. The emotionally daily rollercoaster that he described seemed an unbearable burden to me and left me breathless at times and often sad as I listened back to the audio recording. He regularly referred to his sister; *I'd pass her in the street like a stranger...but at the same time I wish it didn't happen...I know it's fucking stupid carry-on but I'm like that...I won't give in...I don't care if some of them don't like me...people don't understand. The thing is...when you're in constant pain it's hard to be nice.*

At times it seems Grey has no filter when he talks, he hated authority but held deep mistrust and contempt for hospitals and all those that worked there. *Those doctors in the clinic haven't a clue, they keep giving me relaxers, but that just makes my brain numb, it's my body that's the problem, not my head. They even fucked me out of the hospital, because I complained that the pain from me knees was getting worse and that they didn't know what they were doing....but they said it was because I was cursing and rude to the doctors....they just wanted me to take medication and fuck off, so they didn't have to sort my problems. Even the consultant in the hospital got security for me...I was arguing with him about the constant pain and he was not listening to me...all I said was "doctors differ and patients die"...now my GP isn't speaking to me either and is suggesting I go elsewhere with my health problems.*

At times the frustration laced words poured out of Grey, and there was a sense of hopelessness and disappointment in how he was treated by others who he felt should know better. *With all this stuff going on I think I'm not far away from madness. Hear Tommy...maybe you might call one of your meetings and get all the people I've upset together and try and get them all to forget about the past and start again, hahaha'.* Grey laughed heartily for a while with this thought but his insistence on making the point that

it was others who were the major contributing factors in creating the problems in his life and not him was very evident.

Grey yearns to be loved *'I don't like the fact that people hate me...I think if that part of my life was fixed things would get better. Maybe someday I'll meet a woman and we'll move down the country and enjoy whatever time we have left. I believe it's going to happen, because I dreamt it'*

There was a point in the second interview when the conversations was focused on friends and friendship that Grey sat back in his chair and spoke openly but in a trance like state seemingly trying to figure out and make sense of his situation and the reason(s) things are the way they are with him. There was a sense of Grey yearning to explain and rationalise why sometimes he might be at fault, and that really that's not how he wants things to be. He is pleading for understanding and longing for people to think that maybe if they were in the same situation, they would act no different.

Grey clearly wants to be a part of a collective but his life history gets in the way '*Most of my life has been a fuck-up...I mean I seem to only remember the sad times...I don't know when it happened that I gave up talking to people, I don't mean I don't talk to anyone, I mean I just don't bother unless I need to. I think my head started to shut down when she (wife) fucked off on me; I was in my late thirties then. When my ma died it was like the end of contact with my family, and if you haven't got family to call on, who have you got? 'I often think that maybe there's something I can't see about myself that pushes people away…. Being in hospital for so long as a kid, no real contact with my Ma or Da, missing a lot of school, betrayed by my wife and my best friend, getting sick when in the prime of my life, my family ignoring and distancing themselves from me, and then ending up in this kip looking over my shoulder in case I've offended someone, maybe I have good reason to be a bollix, because I'll tell ya…this is no fucking way to end up living your life. But I'm not a bollix all the time and when I am there's normally a good fucking reason.* Grey often ended up debating the situation with himself as If there was nobody sitting opposite him, I felt this was a sign that he was comfortable and possibly safe in this interview environment.

'People take me up wrong a lot of the time, so I say little, but if I'm in pain I do get snappy and probably give people the wrong impression. It's hard to be nice when your knees are the size of your arse. Is it too much to ask, to be happy, and to have people around you that you like, and that like you? It would be brilliant to have good friends that you could go out with and have a laugh or even slag....I don't drink anymore but I could still go to pubs with them (friends) or even to a club...to chat up women.....I wouldn't be doing much dancing with these legs hahaha. That doesn't sound mad, does it?

Having friends or the absence of them was something Grey referred to frequently, but he constantly referred back to the time his marriage ended.

'If I had good friends they wouldn't leave me here. With these fucking knees I have it takes me ages to get down the stairs, and if the pain is too much to bear, I don't bother trying. At the weekend I sometimes sit for hours trying to think of something to do but there's nobody around that talks to you, so you just sit and continue to think. I sometimes move the furniture around and then maybe put it back the next day just to occupy myself. The life was sucked out of me long ago and this is all that is left...fucking hell...that sounds pathetic...this is the path that is meant for me and that's just the way it goes...Jasus...and that's it, it's fucking sad though'.

Towards the end of the interviews Grey spoke about life in Swan's Rest and his ambition to move to a better unit down the road. He is one of the founder members of Swan's Rest View Residents' Association and Social Club. Grey acknowledges the CDP has been working together with the residents of the sheltered housing units to improve their quality of life for over ten years but he thinks more should be done. *'Stop paying rent, chain ourselves to the councils' railings, boycott the meal service...the food is poxy anyway'*.

Despite some of the residents having no time for Grey he still wants to support those that are struggling in the complex. *'Some people in here hate me, I don't really care but I've never done anything to make them hate me. I was told by Joxer that I was a cheeky fuck and he'd punch the head off me. He wouldn't say that to me if I wasn't so fucked up physically. Most of them that moan about stuff don't turn up to anything...meetings like. That fucking eejit Mick who never stops giving out never even turned up when we were looking to open a games room in the back of the kitchen...fucking waster'*

Grey struggles with being disconnected, lonely and not being accepted. He describes how he has lived his life without much contact with others; he talks about not being accepted. *'Yeah...being loved by everybody...that would be great...but I don't want to be accepted as a sick person, that's not the real me'.* The ever-present thread that runs through Greys interviews is one of longing to belong; whether it's through the love of a woman, family or having good friends. He talks about finding someone special, reconnecting with some of his siblings, having a circle of friends, and very importantly of being accepted by people around him. Greys emotional needs are great while his ability to change his lived reality is a real challenge. Almost pleadingly he stresses his need for a break from worrying about his health to having *'some sort of a decent life'.* He loves to talk, but unless you understand him, he is hard to hear.

One evening while trawling through the transcriptions of this study I thought of Grey and felt a compulsion to ring him to see how he was, only to discover he was in hospital and had been there for twelve days with a constant bleed from his nose. I felt so guilty, as I had been really busy and never thought of him. His face lit up when I walked into the ward but he shielded this by proclaiming *'Have you nothing better to do Tommy?'* His loud attempted bravado was lost on his fellow patients as they tended their personal misfortunes. Grey tries to be funny, he wants people to like him, but very often the pain over-rides his attempts at connecting with others. I spent a couple of hours in the hospital with him that evening and promised to drop up the next day, but he told me there was no panic as a woman he met some weeks before calls up regularly. He smiled, and folded his arms, *'I think she likes me, although I don't know why, so what do you think of that Tommy?'*

I decided against questioning Grey as it ran the risk of his exposure, instead I said 'she must be mad' which was greeted with, 'Yeah Tommy, mad about me'. He laughed out loud while waving goodbye. The times when Grey seems openly happy are few and far between, but he was happy that night. Maybe this was the woman of his dreams, or just a woman he dreamed, or maybe having a visitor that night was all he needed.

Grey would offer you the coat off his back and has. Despite his social disconnect and on-going health issues he is still hanging on, engaging with the project, but Grey is fragile.

4.4   BIP

If you could wave a magic wand and make things right that would be great,
but I don't believe in magic.

4.4.1 Who is Bip?

Bip was born in a flat complex in Dublin in 1958, but the family was evicted and put into Keogh's Square, which had the reputation of being the bottom rung of public housing in Dublin at that time. For a time, he believed he was third oldest of his siblings (all boys) but later in life discovered he had an older brother who was given away by his impoverished mother and father to a family in Australia. Bib has never met this brother and doesn't even know his name. Bip's mother died when he was three years old and immediately the three middle boys were put into an industrial school, while the youngest was taken into care by an aunt and the father held on to the oldest. Bip and his brothers spent twelve years in that school, where the endured appalling abuse. *'When we left that place my granny adopted the three of us to stop them putting us into Artane (Industrial school for older boys)'.* Bip joined the army at eighteen.

'*I stayed in the army for six, maybe seven years and got married during that time, but left before my time and legged it down the country to hide'.* Bip couldn't take the responsibility of being married with a child and left them behind and headed to England where he stayed for twenty seven years; *'In that period of my life my Da joined me in England, we were neighbours in a council complex, I came home a number of times to see my boy but never stayed long. I became an alcoholic, abused drugs, had a number of children with different women, had a couple of small businesses going, and was making plenty of money. My Da was sick for a while and I looked after him until I buried him and I hit the drink harder than ever before. I lost everything and decided to come home to Ireland'.* Bip eventually ended up working for the local Community Development Project (CDP) and was supported by the project in getting housed in Swan's Rest. He has contact with his son and sees his grandchildren often. Bip is presently volunteering with the CDP and is also active making a case for equal rights for the older people in his community.

4.4.2 A Road Travelled

Growing up poor and being incarcerated in an industrial school as a young boy where he suffered physical and sexual abuse, separation from his brothers and the prospect of a childhood lost, Bip developed and grew into a hard, teak like individual with an uncompromising presence that is still evident today. '*I make decisions for me, it doesn't matter what anybody says to me, or does to me. It is absolutely not going to happen unless I say so. I have always been like that. I am strong inside. I had to be because of the way I was brought up as well as all the shit that happened to me in there (industrial school). He (father) had no choice but to let them put us in that home when my Ma died. Jasus we were only babies, but he couldn't look after us. I often wonder what life would have been like if we didn't have to be put away*'.

As the interviews took us through the dark (to my knowledge, never spoken about) world of his and his brothers' incarceration in the religious institution that was the home for abandoned, parentless, difficult, or wayward boys, to begging and selling 'holy' pictures of Jesus and the Virgin Mary on the streets of Dublin, Bip's demeanour moved from relaxed to nervous anxiety. *'The way we were treated in that home I couldn't begin to describe...filthy fucking bastards...I couldn't do anything to stop them hurting my brothers...swear to Jasus Tommy, it does my fucking head in thinking about it. Every day I waited for my Da to take us out...every day for more than twelve fucking years...that's fucking brutal...brutal'.*

This time in Bip's life is difficult for him to deal with, and dark memories regularly push their way into his thoughts and nightmares. Bip and his brothers were eventually taken from the home by his Da and granny to prevent them being sent to 'Artane' which was a similar institution for older boys with a similar menacing reputation. At one stage I suggested; *"Don't forget Bip you can avail of immediate counselling and support if these conversations are bringing stuff up for that you find difficult to deal with"*. I had barely finished the offer of support when Bip, jerking forward from his comfortable armchair (and nearly breaking the small coffee table where the recorder was placed), almost shouted; *'Jesus Christ Tommy, do you think there's something wrong with me? You've told me that about ten fucking times at this stage'.*

Realising that, what I was offering was only a reminder of our agreed 'safety net' strategy, Bip pushed himself back in his chair, throwing his head upwards, and with closed eyes he released a deeply held breath; *'I'm ok Tommy, if I need help I'll let you know, thanks anyway'.* He seemed embarrassed by his outburst; he started to assemble another roll-up. *'It's mad how the very thought of that horrible fucking place triggers me off...go-on and stick the kettle on...where's those fig rolls you promised...is that tape thing* (recorder) *ok?'* I have never heard Bip say sorry, but I felt he was that day.

Bip enlisted in the Irish army at eighteen and it didn't take him long to settle. *'I loved the routine of the army, it was organised, I got my food there, hung out around the barracks mess-hall...started a life-time of drinking there. I met my missus around that time and moved into a small house five minute walk from the barracks...life was good'.*

After a couple of years living together they decided to marry, but Bip felt that being married changed his situation, he was expected to stay in more and not be always available for his friends. Many rows ensued but when they had a baby boy the pressure of fatherhood and married life became too much '*I had to get out, get away, I felt I was smothering. I wanted the good life; I wanted to do what I liked. I legged it to England and didn't look behind as I stepped on the boat, and believe me I am not looking for excuses...it was all down to selfish fucking me...I made the decisions in my life, nobody fucking else, it was all down to me. I chose to leave my wife and kid, I chose to drink, I'm to blame for every fuck-up that contributed to this mess. Sometimes when you think of the damage that's created when you fuck up, it weighs heavy, and there's no way to reverse the upset you cause...D'ya know what I mean? I made some bad decisions that hurt people, but you can't turn the clock back. People are still suffering for the way I carried on...I have huge regret for my fuck-ups'.* This was a deep and hurtful sharing by Bip and my attemptto ease his burden by describing my own similar type 'fuck-ups' was met with a slow nodding, groan-like murmur, but he remained in his own deliberation, as if trying to findan answer that would serve to ease his guilt.

Bip spent nearly thirty years in England, and came home a *'handful'* of times to visit to '*drop in a few presents'*, but he never stayed long and always returned to England where he had built a life for himself, particularly since his father moved over, followed by his brother. Bip's drinking got worse over the years, but when his father died the drinking

spiralled out of control. Bip lost everything and ended up getting his fare for the ferry paid for him, and he returned home.

'I worked hard, drank hard, and eventually lost everything. When I had my Da living beside me it was great, but when he was no longer there I had nothing...I fucked it all away...I had thought about coming home...but not like that...I was broke, homeless and almost fifty. I knew my ex would take me back even after everything...but we are no good for each other...every time I see her, she offers me drink...maybe she thinks that will get me back and things will be better...that'll never happen'.

Bip slept rough for a while and eventually ended up in a flat on the south circular road and that's when he stumbled across the CDP. '*The woman in the Job Club mentioned that this local CDP do a lot of good work around this area and it would be good if I got a start there. She arranged an interview and that is when I met yourself and I will be honest with you, it is probably one of the better days I have had in a long time'.* Bip is an alcoholic and shortly before coming to the CDP stopped drinking. Bip had always been busy; he wanted to work and desperately needed something to occupy his mind. '*It was great thinking that I might have a chance of actually having something to do for a while. I'm still like that you know...I like being busy. Jasus I was desperate at that time...you asked me why did I want to work in the project...and do you remember what I said...because I do...I told you that a man should be busy and I needed to do something before I went completely fucking mad...although I don't think I cursed. You said, "Ok we'll sort out the paperwork and get you started as soon as possible". I nearly fucking shit myself when you said that...things got better for me after that...well I think they did anyway'.*

Bip worked in the CDP on a CE Scheme for three years and to this day still volunteers with the project. He loves the work, complains a lot about the slowness in getting basic things done, but understands the struggle of the work. Bip tells everyone that might listen the importance of the work of the CDP and encourages others to engage, particularly new residents that barley set their foot inside their new home. He is a committee member of the residents association of Swan's Rest and continues to work tirelessly in addressing the needs of the residents. '*The CDP saved my life you know, living here* (Swan's Rest) *and helping those that are not as strong or able makes me feel good. Situations happen in life that can fuck you over and leave you with nothing and nobody. When you look around Swan's Rest you see men with no hope of a future, nothing to look forward to and*

nobody that gives a fuck about them. The CDP offers them a way out of their shit…even if it's only a chat over breakfast on Friday, or a knock on the door to say howya doin'…it's a start'.

Bip has a lot to say when it comes to the issues related to Swan's Rest. He is constantly raising awareness concerned with younger people using the complex to deal drugs and abuse alcohol. He keeps busy and is very much considers the struggle of others as he goes about his day to day activities. I *help out in the kitchen when I'm free…. I used to struggle as well, just like some lads down here...Jasus some of them struggle really badly. But against that I have to say working here (CDP) has changed me...maybe I'm getting soft.* Nobody could accuse Bip of being soft. He is very proud of his work with the CDP and is often heard talking about the various initiatives and projects he was involved with during his time with the CDP. *Those marches against the cuts...and the water charges...who would have believed that I would be in the middle of all that? Marching up and down O'Connell Street...I never before had time for any of that...actually it never occurred to me that I could do anything to change some of the shit we have to put up with...it was great being part of something like that...although I often wonder did it make a difference, although we won the water war...didn't we?'*

4.4.3 In Search of Redemption

Bip was one of the first men I interviewed for this study and initially the most enthusiastic. As we travelled together through the twists and turns of Bip's life journey I had noticed a low tolerance with himself of his own perceived failings, particularly when talking about his marriage and his only son Peter. *'My young-fella is a prick but I love him...he has kids with different women all over the country and doesn't give a damn. I tried talking to him...but he's doing exactly what I done.* Bip is trying to fill the gap caused by his sons neglect, and although he places a lot of blame on himself, he is also very angry with his son. He spoke about how different live would have been if he had stayed and helped to bring up his son. *'I have kids in England...but they are sorted, because I wasn't married to anyone over there and they just moved on with their lives...I think about them sometimes...but it's my boy here that upsets me. He has a great job and plenty of money but doesn't seem to give a fuck about any of his kids. I remember the good feeling I experienced when I was with my Da and that upsets me, because my boy never had that feeling; maybe if had been there he might have turned out different'.*

Bip tries to do as much as he can to support his grandchildren. He is managing serious health issues (as a result of his alcohol abuse) and is also getting counselling support for his alcohol addiction. During this study our interviews were fitted in around addressing his health needs and supporting his grandchildren and their mothers. '*I visit the grandkids and stay overnight and longer sometimes, and they visit me...I love them all, but they should have their Da around...it's not fucking right...I fucked up big time, I know that...but I wish things were different for the sake of my grandkids...it's hard on them you know...I do what I can to help, but they need their Da. I'm heading to Belfast this weekend to do a bit of work for Mary and young Michael, I borrowed a few tools from the project, it'll probably take a couple of days, young Michael loves helping me*'.

Bip described the feeling of love that he gets in abundance from his grandchildren and it is very apparent the love he gives in return, and contrary to his persona he has no problem saying it. '*My grandkids call me all the time...even though it's only blah, blah, blah...but it's great. I visit them as often as my few shillings allows. The little one called me yesterday and said "do you not love me anymore granddad?...that's because since finishing official work in the CDP I don't have the extra few bob (euro) to get down as often as I did...you know what I mean?...That there's a killer Tommy...her birthday is coming up in a few weeks and I swear to Jasus I will do my best to sort her something even if I have to starve for a week. When I look at my grandkids, I squirm to think of them in any sort of pain...I love them all*'.

Throughout the interviews Bip was unforgiving of himself about his mistakes and constantly reminded me that he made the decisions in his life. But outside of the blame he sometimes pondered why things happened the way they did. During one of those reflective conversations he spoke about the three generations of hurt that existed because of an absent father. '*When you think about it I had no father growing up, my son had no father growing up, and my grandkids have no father growing up...This has to fucking stop...there's no way this can continue...I hope that my boy will wake up and see what he's missing; I never stop reminding him of how important it is to be there for his kids. I wasn't, and I tell him what that still feels like for me, thirty years later*'.

Bip physically shakes with frustration when talking about the hurt and abuse of his early childhood and the resulting fall-out. He deeply regrets the bad decisions he made in his life. '*The bad memories haunt me daily, things I did...things I said*'. Bip does not let many

people into his world. He talks about the need for trust, *'if that's not present, I don't want to know'*. When he talks you know it's his truth; he is uncompromising and brutally honest. Bip describes his past mistakes and the longing to put things right. He blames his son's abandonment of his responsibilities on himself, and is constantly looking for ways to ease his grandchildren and their mother's passage through life in any way he can. Bip is a very proud man who is prone to angry outbursts; he is also strong and considerate, gentle of heart and kind to a fault. He describes his demons as being ever-present.

4.5   Green

My father sent me to a boarding school in Co Cork; I was fifteen at the time. He left me off at the station and never said goodbye or anything…"just get on the train" and that was it. While I was away, he died, and you know I didn't even want to go to the funeral…I absolutely hated the man actually.

4.5.1 Who is Green?

Green grew up on the family farm, located in a small parish in county Limerick. He was the second youngest of nine siblings (8 boys and 1 girl) all of whom were sent to boarding school despite the prohibitive cost and pressure it put on the family finances. His memory of growing up is of a house that was ruled uncompromisingly by his father. His mother was a very quiet, subdued, unassuming kind of person who kept herself to herself. *'I could say, Tommy that there was no love in our house, sure how could there be. My father was an obnoxious man who wouldn't listen, just gave the orders and it had to be done like'.* There was nobody to challenge his father or tell him any different.

Green's mother didn't go outside the house much, if at all. *'We didn't realise then but she had a nervous disposition and when somebody knocked on the door, she'd go and hide, you know, sure we thought it was an ordinary thing you know'. We didn't have much contact with our wider family, and I found out later that this was down to the fact that we were being deliberately shunned because my step-sister (from my father's first marriage) got pregnant out of wedlock and moved to England...where she still is today. There was huge shame attached to that kind of thing in those days'* No such shame was endured by Green's father *'he was always visiting our neighbour's farms at night and would not be at home'.*

Green at one stage leaned over and touched my arm; *'My father sent me to a boarding school in county Cork, I was fifteen at the time. He left me off at the station and never said goodbye or anything…just get on the train…and that was it. While I was away, he died, and you know I didn't even want to go to the funeral…I absolutely hated the man.'* Green looked for a reaction, but I had no words, just thoughts of his pain and struggle. *'Things were bad like, there wasn't a lot about kind of thing. If one heifer died or something, you know, something like that would knock you on the chin. The children walking to the school and some of them in bare feet at that time, you know'.*

Green married a university lecturer and they had four children (2 boys and 2 girls). He went to work in England and was self-employed and worked supplying the construction industry with a number of trucks and more than two dozen men employed by his company. Green was a gambler and is an alcoholic. *'I made lots of money but gambled and drank it all away. I upset many, many people especially those you're not supposed to...I wandered around England and then Ireland drunk, drunk, drunk'.*

Green voluntarily cuts the grass attends to the plants and paints the garden area of Swan's Rest. He believes the men living in the complex do not appreciate his efforts. *'I love doing the bits around here...they don't notice what I do around...some of them walk on the plants or wait for me to paint the white surround, only to walk all over it. But I'm as happy as I think I can be at this point in my life...I think I'm lucky to be here at all'.* Green perseveres, he religiously appears with his wheelbarrow and tools and tends the green spaces. Green takes part in the various outings and trips organised by the CDP and would be keen to recite a poem or lengthy monologue whenever the opportunity allowed. He gets the pool table ready, puts the kettle on and organises the biscuits for the social club in the evenings. *'Having something to do is good, it gets you out. I love coming over and turning on the light; when they (men) see the light some of them come over. It gets lonely in the flat Tommy'.*

4.5.2 A Road Travelled

'It's hard not to look back and long for what was lost. My wife couldn't do any more for me I choked her love for me until she put me out. There is a constant sadness with me and I look back as if it was yesterday and I can see my young wife and children…I can almost touch them'. Green is a soft, educated, slow moving gentle man. *'Tell me about your life is a hard question for me to answer because I don't know where to start...I suppose you*

should start with your childhood but the truth is Tommy I don't remember much about it...I must have had some happy times, I think I got on well with my brothers and sisters...but I don't remember...I remember being afraid though...my father was a bully...I mean he was a brute...He was an alcoholic as well. Green (who was in his late seventies at the time of the interview) has recently begun thinking that maybe his father did his best considering the negativity an unhappiness of his own up-bringing. *'He made sure we all were all educated and was constantly telling us, "Work for yourself, don't work for anyone else if you want to succeed in life". I think everyone did well for themselves; it was only me that failed...so maybe he wasn't that bad.* But Green was not comfortable talking about his childhood; *'We never discussed our childhood as a family, never...not a word...I had two brothers and a sister in their fifties who passed away within a week of each other, one within an hour...It was in the newspapers...to be honest Tommy they would never discuss anything with me; sure I was always drunk...my brothers were shrewd they drank when there was an occasion and were able to stop...I could never stop'*

We all left when we were able, I have family all over the world. Grey went to London with his young wife and worked in construction. He then got a job in Cornwall (UK) and things improved. He started up his own building company and had trucks and twenty five men working for him. '*It got to the stage that I hadn't that much to do just organise the trucks and the men which gave me more time to drink. My wife went home to Ireland and I worked away in England and slowly drifted away from my family. I was drinking non-stop at the time and I was seldom in contact with home. I was coming home an odd time. Eventually I didn't come home that much at all.*

Much of Green's life at that time and for many years following remains blurred. His income disappeared as his business failed and his addiction took over and became his primary life determinant. He soon returned to Ireland. *'My world went completely mad after that. I crashed cars drunk, broke every bone in my body, and fractured my skull….my brother signed me into a locked ward in Ennis and left me there for twelve months…. I hated him for doing that…. he could have just sent me away…. twelve months in a mental ward with people pissing on the floor, you name it, went on there……bastard. I escaped back to England; I worked all over and drank all over, and drank every shilling I could lay my hands on….came back to Ireland and continued to drink….I never went back home to my family'*

What followed was years of homelessness, close to death scenarios, sleeping rough, and time spent in hospitals and with rehabilitation services. He finally ended up in Swan's Rest, where he remains today. '*I tried to do away with myself, I was homeless living on the canal, then in digs down near the meat packers (Dublin)…got a nice room on the north circular road, and when the owner was selling the house he went and spoke up for me with the corporation (DCC) and I got a place here.*

Green has been involved in every initiative and programme introduced by the CDP concerned with Swan's Rest. He has also taken part in protest marches and numerous meetings and sees himself as a helper of the CDP rather than a volunteer. He is resigned to living out the remainder of his life in Swan's Rest and believes he's lucky with his life as it is. '*I get on well with my children now and I know if I met my wife at a funeral she'd say hello, she's a lovely woman, very quiet and respectable you know Tommy. I really missed out Tommy…You know, like Tommy…Living down here like…so many people have lost so much and can't cope…I am beginning to deal with what I've lost…. The one thing I feel bad about is having to be an old man before I learned anything about life. You know as I said before, I knew everything about nothing….and nothing about everything. I wouldn't listen and I lost everything. But now it's like a constant pining in my heart and busyness of ever-present thoughts in my head...I regret the fact that I missed the experience of being a father.* Green manages to hide his struggle from others.

4.5.3 Addiction; It's Not the Drinking, it's the Living

> *Alcohol was my biggest problem...otherwise I was ok.*

Green, who for close to twenty years has tended the grounds of Swan's Rest sheltered housing complex in a voluntary capacity. He is described by his peers as a perfect country gentleman and a Trojan worker. Hailing from the west of Ireland, Green describes himself as not being happy with his own humanity, having an over active brain, and being lucky to have survived an alcohol fuelled life which destroyed his relationship with his wife and children. '*Drink got a hold of me, what it does is frightening, I lost everything; my business, my family, my home and my self-worth. I don't know how I managed to stay alive; I was taken out of the Liffey, other rivers and canals with absolutely no sense of how I got there, I was a total disaster. My head is always active. Many years ago my long-*

suffering wife packed my bags, and when I woke from my drunken stupor, I was shown the door, and so I left, never to return'.

Grey constantly drew attention to the part alcohol played in determining his passage through life. *'I wanted to see my wife one time after I won a lot of money on the horses so I made my way home, but I was drunk when I arrived, and all the time I was there. It wasn't long after that trip home that my wife gave up on me…. she just couldn't take anymore…. She told me…" I loved you, I needed you because I loved you, you loved me because you needed me", do you get my point Tommy, and I suppose I needed someone to be there for me.*

Green carries a heavy feeling of guilt for not being there for his wife and children. He doesn't blame his wife for putting him out and deeply regrets the pain he inflicted on his family. *'My children didn't want me in the home, my son looked at me once and I remember him saying, we got on a lot better when you weren't here. The damage I inflicted on my wife and children was so great, there was no way back for me, I lost everything'. 'I had a beautiful wife that lectured in university and after twenty years of my drinking she said "that's it, no more". I couldn't blame her...the more I drank the sicker I got, the sicker I got the more I drank. The last ten years were very bad...I had to go.*

Green spoke about the love he had for his wife: '*Love is very important, but when the damage and hurt is so great, there is no way back, you just have to move on and make the most of your life, but I wish things had been different, my wife brought up our four lovely children on her own, I missed all that, I regret that terribly'. When I look at my humanity, I don't feel good, I'm haunted by the bloody thing, you know. It's like I have aremote control but I can't switch off, it's always there, I am constantly seeing things thathappened in the past. If only I understood then what I understand now, my life would havebeen so different'.*

Green often brought the conversation back to his remorse for the hurt inflicted on his family particularly his wife. *We are still married, you know that Tommy, but I remember her saying to me 'I have a family to raise here, and I can't do this anymore'…hard to think back on those words Tommy. There was no love in our house growing up and when I met my woman I thought I had it made…and I had.* Green speaks softly about his wife

and shakes his head when expressing his remorse for his behaviour during their marriage. *I still have this guilt and remorse thing, it never leaves me, I have it terrible, you know ....of not being there….I wasn't any sort of husband…..of not being a father…you know… I regret the fact that I missed the experience of being a father…yeah, I regret that…*I have a big problem with self-worth...I'm haunted with that, absolutely haunted...*I remember years ago when I started doing something about me, like when I put the glass down (stopped drinking), I thought everything was going to be rosy in the garden, you know. I was told that, by putting the glass down you have to take the good with the bad…I asked the man what does that mean. He said well, the good news is you get your emotions back…I said what's the bad news, he said…you get your emotions back.*

Over the last few years Green has had contact with some of his children and recently attended a family occasion. He describes the mending process with his children and wider family and friends as '*slow, very difficult, and sometimes painful',* but he is very happy that things are changing for the better.

'*Alcoholics Anonymous has really helped me. Meeting other people with alcohol addiction struggles and the sharing and support process of the meetings is important in dealing with your addiction'.* Green attends his AA meetings regularly; his belief in the principles and programmes of AA to address the 'obsession to drink' is often 'put out there' in conversation, particularly when there is a focus on addiction. Looking over his glasses at me, he banged the table with his fist; '*They won't come out….no matter what you do, they are just not interested, some of them are not ready to stop drinking...they are not low enough yet...some die you know'.* His statement about the men was more of a question than an observation. Green is constantly suggesting ways to engage with the men with addiction issues in Swan's Rest and gets quite animated (when years ago he would be visibly angry) when describing the challenges facing them. *'They haven't a chance because the screaming for alcohol is so strong Tommy...I often think it's a miracle when I see some of them turning up to something organised by the CDP...nothing short of a miracle'.*

Green has mellowed over the ten years I have known him, particularly in the last twelve to eighteen months, in which he has got to know and understand the men living in Swan's Rest better, through the various initiatives, trips etc. that they have jointly participated in.

'Getting out of this place for a few days is great, but the conversations and sing-a-longs are brilliant really, and allow you to see others in a different light'.

4.5.4 Comment

Green is the wise and gentle man of Swan's Rest. He is the man that, when he speaks, is listened to. His gentle tone is calming and informative. Over the years I've noticed a greater connection with Green and the project, but since the interview process his participation in various elements of the work of the project has been significant. Green is over twenty-five years alcohol free and has paid a price for his history. He offers a lonely stooped demeanour as he makes his way around the complex attempting to ease other men's negative history fall-out. Green points to the absence of love when growing up and the hatred for his father. He recalls the damaging role alcohol and gambling played in his life and the subsequent fall-out from their influence.

Green has little 'self-worth' and states that he is unhappy with his humanity. He refers to the daily troubled occupation of his mind in respect of self-blame and remorse he feels for the hurt he caused to his wife and children by not being there for them; the pain of the rejection by family and friends, and the belief that at this stage in his life the opportunity for redemption has passed. Green talks about the positive experience he has achieved through his participation with the CDP and describes the need for the men living in social isolation to engage in the various initiatives delivered by the CDP as a way for them to come in from the margins. He argues that the opportunities for participation and conversation available through the CDP could create new starting points for men that are struggling.

4.6   Popeye & Sacky – Less we forget

4.6.1 Popeye

> *'Me Da was an alcoholic, I was fifteen when I heard him beating me Ma, so*
> *I gave him a slap….I regret hitting him to this day'*

4.6.2 Who is Popeye?

Popeye was born in the early 1950s and brought up in a two bedroomed house in Crumlin on the Southside of Dublin. He was the fourth oldest of twelve siblings (6 boys and 6 girls). He left school at eleven years old to work as a 'nipper' (messenger) on a building site. Popeye's father had a nervous breakdown in his forties and, following some shock treatment in St Fintan's Mental Health Hospital, was never the same again. *'Me Da was lost to us after the treatment in that fucking kip of an institution…he went quiet and hardly uttered a word'.* Popeye got married at twenty-one and immediately joined the Irish navy and moved to Cork (Naval base in Cobh, County Cork). He acquired a taste for alcohol while away at sea and became a chronic alcoholic. He has three children that he hasn't seen in over thirty years. *'There came a time when she threw me out because of the drink…. she always got her money…every week, but I was never there …and even when I was there, I was drunk...I couldn't control it. I had a lovely house and lost it…I lost everything Tommy…I was a fucking eejit'*

4.6.3 Looking for a way back

Popeye struggles with alcohol dependency issues but had been volunteering in the CDP for over six months, initially only working Fridays but then progressed to working Mondays also. Popeye is in his early sixties with grey hair and a slight build, who lives in Swan's Rest View, sheltered housing units and had been unemployed for over fifteen years. His reward for volunteering with the CDP was the offer of a 'community employment scheme' (CE) with the project and his Garda vetting form was duly filled in and sent off. The prospect of becoming a paid member of staff was a badge of honour that Popeye wore with great pride. We all knew that this was also going to be a big challenge for him, as did Popeye; *'Does that mean I'll be in work five days a week instead of two?'* Popeye asked one morning, the reality of the commitment threatening his resolve and questioning his ability to deliver.

Popeye had come a long way since his first engagement with the project in 2008, in which he attended an information meeting for all residents in Swan's Rest organised by the CDP. Popeye was drunk at the meeting but still spoke about the neglect of the complex and turned up to the following meeting (sober) where he was elected on the residents committee. In all the time I have known Popeye he has never attended a meeting (and there has been many) drunk since that first day. Although Popeye loved the work with the project and revelled in his newly found purposeful demeanour, his struggle with alcohol

was ongoing. He was always sober Monday and Friday while volunteering with us, but outside and in between those days he often slipped back. Popeye blames his life at sea with the British Navy on his alcohol and cigarette addiction and subsequent marriage breakdown. He spoke about missing his four children and that he hoped that someday '*they would come and look for me and forgive me for leaving them'*.

Bumping into Popeye one morning was fortunate as I was concerned as to the reason for his absence the day before. The previous Friday Popeye looked a little agitated and complained about having a toothache but finished his shift and seemed ok as he headed home. Picking up Clare (his beloved Jack Russell) and stroking her coat as he explained; '*sorry Tommy, my tooth was killing me yesterday I couldn't even get out of bed with the pain. My sister called up to see me and brought me to her dentist straight away. He wasn't happy with my gums so he's hoping to get me in to see a specialist before Friday. That's quick isn't it? Hopefully it's not that serious, god is good, that right Tommy?'*

Popeye had agreed to be part of this study and was delighted to be asked. His promise to be sober for the interviews was believed, but the organised interviews were set aside with the shocking news that followed. What was initially thought to be a nagging toothache, turned out to be malignant tumours located in his tongue and lower jaw? The diagnosis ruled out surgery as it was deemed too invasive, so a combined treatment programme of radiation and chemotherapy was agreed, we were all extremely worried and upset.

I called in to see Popeye late one afternoon about a week after the news on the advice of Jeff, one of the CDP's outreach workers who had developed a really good relationship with Popeye. '*He's in a good place today; he's even talking about our planned away trip in October'*, Jeff spoke softly and with a reverence that the gravity of Popeye's condition demanded.

Popeye took a couple of minutes to answer my knocks, which were measured to be loud enough to hear if he was awake, and not so loud as to wake him if he was sleeping. He was unshaven and tired looking with a grey (one time white) dressing gown wrapped around recently bought 'hospital' pyjamas. Popeye's voice was croaky and he half coughed as he greeted me, *'ah, good to see you Tommy, come in, the place is in bits, dozing all day, no energy, know what I mean?'* There was no air in the flat, the sweet smell of cheap cider was still apparent even though the residue of a million cigarettes

lingered in the air and matted the walls and ceiling. Popeye gestured to me to sit on the armchair as he returned to his couch calming his constant companion as she quietly snarled without lifting her head from the bed cover strewn across the couch, '*she keeps my feet warm*' he chuckled as he reached for a smoke. '*I suppose you heard the news Tommy, brutal, isn't it?*' Popeye started to cough as he lit up, '*your man Fergus across the way reckons it's these cheap cigarettes that did the damage; sure, how could you afford to buy smokes from the shops?*'

I couldn't find words to answer Popeye; I just nodded and met his gaze. We chatted in small talk bursts for over an hour. Popeye recalled the visit of RTÉ's 'Prime Time' to the complex as they explored urban isolation in relation to older people. '*Jasus your woman that came here from RTE was lovely wasn't she Tommy?*' Popeye was smiling unconsciously as he remembered his moment of fame' '*The lads still slag me about her'*. Miriam O'Callaghan (Prime Time's anchor presenter) had shown a particular interest in Popeye and his puppy dog demeanour which he portrayed while in her presence. His attempt at flirting was witnessed by many who never miss an opportunity to remind Popeye in banter, to his slight embarrassment and very obvious approval.

I didn't mention the interviews to Popeye, as a matter of fact the research study never entered my head until Popeye caught me by surprise: '*Probably have to put those interviews back until after the treatment Tommy',* he suggested, just as I was preparing to leave. '*I was looking forward to sitting down with you though"* he nodded as if to agree with himself. Leaning forward to stub out another cigarette he let out a heavy sigh; *"what can you do Tommy...no point moaning about it, is there...stupid isn't it Tommy?*' His questions weren't meant to be answered. *Ah not to worry Popeye, plenty of time to get the interviews done, no panic'* I said while slinging my haversack over my back, hoping he wouldn't see through my casual reply. Popeye looked so tired and frail as he sidled up the hallway ahead of me towards the door to let me out, '*yeah, should be grand in a few weeks*', he spoke without turning around. I left Popeye with Clare and felt powerless, selfish and lucky as I made my way out of the complex and home.

4.6.4 Comment

Popeye is a quiet man who struggles with his personal history. He will sometimes talk about the pain of losing contact with his children because of his addiction to alcohol and the many mistakes he has made in his life. Popeye's social reality is not of his making.

The space to grapple with and explore the social construct that determines his daily/hourly living experience is not available to him. His social reality is about meeting his daily/hourly challenges of addiction, loneliness, poverty, disconnectedness and apathy. It seems that Popeye is just there, he believes that his presence doesn't matter and it has no impact...that he just exists. Despite the weight of his world he is still trying to find his way back; *'the draw on me to drink is crushing Tommy, I get embarrassed sometimes when I see people looking at me drunk, and there are other darker times when I wish I was dead'*. (It upsets me reading this back; the stark reality of the pain of those deemed worthless unsteadies my breathing and hurts my heart).

Popeye made a full recovery after lengthy treatment and is back (one day a week) volunteering with the project. He insisted on completing one interview for this study: *'I don't care Tommy; I said I'd do it and it would really make me happy to do it'*. I informed Popeye that I wasn't going to use his data in the analysis because of the lack of opportunities to verify the narrative, but locating him in the writing up of the study might help create a better understanding for the reader in relation to the life experiences of men similar to Popeye living in sheltered housing. Popeye looked over the above section and agreed it was a fair reflection of our interview and was happy that his contribution was to be included.

4.6.5 Sacky

> *'Me mates gave me this nickname because they said I have the shape of an*
> *eight stone bag of mill flour with a head on top? They all used to laugh but I*
> *didn't mind, as long as I was in the gang.'*

4.6.6 Who is Sacky?

Growing up in the late 1940s Sacky shared a three bedroomed house in Ballyfermot, Dublin with twelve siblings (there were seven boys and six girls in total), and his mother and father. His Father was very religious, and all the family prayed at an altar he built in one of the bedrooms every night. Sacky identifies himself as being 'a bit slow' and puts this down to his hatred of school as a child. *'The Christian Brothers used to hit me on the back of my legs because I was very bad with numbers…they ridiculed me'*.

Sacky left school at fourteen and made pocket money by selling firewood door to door gathered from broken pallets. He had numerous jobs that never lasted long, and spoke about being picked on and bullied because he was *'quiet'*. He never married, or was never in anything that resembled a relationship, and shyly stated that he *'wasn't great with the girls.* The work dried up as he entered his late forties, so he turned to volunteering in the local school and dining hall of an older people's complex. He loved having something to do and described his voluntary work as being; *'Very important, as these were places that had no money to pay for workers and might shut if I wasn't there to help'*

4.6.7 Longing for Acceptance

Sacky was a harmless, unassuming quiet man who went about his various daily chores and routines with an unshakable regularity. Every day was mapped out and nothing got in the way of his daily plan. The importance he placed on delivering his agreed (with himself or others) etched in stone, structured arrangements was not negotiable. '*People depend on me, I'm expected to be there, I'm a man of my word',* were his default reasons for turning down requests (that might interfere with his commitments) from others to get involved in activities in the community. His commitments didn't get in the way of him becoming a member of the committee of the social club of Swan's Rest which gave him some status in the complex. On his return from volunteering in a local school Sacky would open the social space, turn on the heating and fill the kettle. *'The lads rely on me to get everything ready, there's a lot for me to do, and it's important, but sometimes I feel that others could help but they don't bother. I wouldn't say anything though; the shit would hit the fan and I'd get into trouble'*.

Sacky moved into Swan's Rest View from what he described as: '*a dungeon of a bedsit'* four years ago. The local community project was made aware of his desperate living conditions and made representations to the council on his behalf. Sacky cried when he first viewed the bedsit in Swan's Rest View: '*Moving in here was like finding heaven'* he told our staff as they helped him move in. Sacky avoids trouble, '*I move to the back of the room when a certain man comes in to the club, he hates me, for no reason, just because I'm easy going I suppose'*. Sacky loved volunteering in the school, they gave him a white jacket to wear and he loved the importance that it gave him. Another man that worked there bullied him, but his perceived status gained from fulfilling his duties helped him overcome the abuse. '*I swear Tommy, if I wasn't there, I think the school would shut, the principal as much as told me that a few weeks ago'*. Sacky's insecurity stemmed from an

unhappy childhood where he struggled to fit in. "*I hated school, the Christian Brothers beat me and made me out to be a fool, one in particular always exposed my failure to grasp numbers in front of the class to get a laugh from the other pupils*'.

Sacky described himself as a bit of a coward, he was afraid of his father who he said was a bully, and who made the family pray at an altar constructed in one of the bedrooms of the family home, at six o'clock every evening. '*Although there were thirteen of us, my Da would send me (and only me) out to pick up horse shit from the road and bring it home for the garden. My friends and even my brothers and sisters would laugh at me. I would beg him not to send me while it was bright, but he'd push the bucket into my chest and turn away*'.

'*My Ma loved me, and would always say, don't mind them son, sticks and stones and all that. I looked after her when the rest moved out and my father died. My Da actually smiled at me from his coffin, I think he was sorry for the bad things he had done: maybe he wasn't the worst?*'

Sacky's enthusiasm to take part in the interviews could be seen in his desire to continue to tell his story long after the recorder was turned off. He invited me into his flat following a marathon interview session (two hours) to show me some photographs and artefacts that gave further insight into his lived experience. His late mother's memorial card was perched in pride of place for all to see on a shelf packed with photographs, souvenirs and pictures from happier times. Attending to this shrine of love helped him resist the pressure to succumb to the negative life elements that contrived to limit or worst, deny him happiness. His greatest desire was to be a father*; 'You know when kids get to a certain age where you have to bring them off for a walk or like, I sit on the bench sometimes and look over at people with their own kids and pushing them on the swings or playing football with them in the park. I look over and I say to myself, Jesus, that could be me, you know? That could be me there, you know? Ah the feeling of, um, the feeling of you know, of being a father. That responsibility like, you know? Just the electricity goes up and down through me...my son calling me daddy, and running to me when I'm collecting him from school...Jasus that would be heaven Tommy, ahhh Jasus just heaven*'

4.6.8 Comment

Sacky died shortly after his last interview. This loving, soft-spoken, man who yearned to be valued and understood was ambushed by a tumour which took no heed of his dreams or desires. Within a few weeks of the malignant diagnosis, he passed away in his usual quiet, unassuming, 'no trouble to anyone' way. Sacky was a beautiful human being who was only beginning to find his way to a place where he might have had a chance to reach his potential. My journey alongside Sacky during this study was a privilege and an amazing learning experience in which I saw the insurmountable struggle of a lost boy who became a lost man, but who fought a brave fight to be like everyone else. Had he only realised that those that branded him as a fool, coward or whatever tag that promoted them above him, were the flawed ones. Sacky was a special human being, who deserved to flourish.

'I missed out on being a father, never had kids. I used to mind a little boy for a woman friend. I would sometimes bring him to McDonalds in the square for a 'Happy Meal' and show him off, pretend that he was mine, you understand, don't you Tommy?' I do understand.

4.7   Conclusion

All the participants' stories were referred to in this chapter. A brief biography and chronological overview of the life experience of all the participants, was also described. There is a balance to be struck when engaging with the lived reality of others, particularly with the more vulnerable in society. Detaching oneself from the participants following the interview process in order to complete the research has to be negotiated so it doesn't become a smash and grab experience for the men. The stories of the men's lived experience elicited through a back and forth deep sharing process between the teller and the listener has to be respected and seen to be appreciated. In order for the men to willingly let go of the bounty, that is their story up to now, they should believe that (as promised) their contribution to the research will be taken away and written up in a way that honours and values their stories.

The interview process has raised the relational understanding to a new level, creating an unbreakable bond between this researcher and the men. Riessman (1993 pp. 40-41), points to the relational component in the interview process which: 'the connections

between teller and listener that are the bedrock of all human interaction, including research interviews'. She continues, referring to the importance of the collaborative, relational nature of the interview journey: 'the reciprocal actions of teller and listener in the beginning and ending of a story, and the listener's needs to encode and interpret it'. The understanding of the lived experience of the participants generated from the interviews grows as the interview process continues and is combined with the outcomes of the total immersion in the resulting data; the richness and importance of which depends on the quality of the relational component. The journeying alongside the men as they told their stories, and the reciprocated acknowledgment of understanding and impartment of similar life events and experiences created a powerful condition of trust and honesty, which in turn helped to negate biases and power relations, resulting in a gathering of valuable and important data.

This chapter briefly explored the major themes and issues that emerged from the participants' narratives, focusing on one emerging theme per participant as a means to creating clarity of understanding. There was also a reference to what emerged from the data regarding the participants' involvement with the CDP. The following chapter will explore in detail the collective findings of the study and will be followed by the discussion chapter and finally the conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter 5: Collective Findings - Collective theorisation and intersectionality of findings

5.1   Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the individual stories of the participants, while apportioning a specific emerging theme to each participant. Monkey told stories of Redemption and Family, while Teddy spoke about his responsibility as a man and what being a man means to him. Green's story referred to the impact of alcohol on his lived experience both historically and present. Finally, Grey revisited his experiences of love that was lost and his subsequent disconnection from people, particularly family and friends. The multiple themes that emerged from the participants' stories were common to all of the participants but in various ways and to different degrees. The combination of the individual apportioned themes in the previous chapter and this collective finding's process contributed to a greater interpretation, understanding and analysis of the elicited stories and subsequently delivered important findings.

This chapter in turn brings together the collective major findings from the four participants in seeking to answer the research question concerned with the lived experiences of older men presently residing in public sheltered housing accommodation in Dublin. The findings are also concerned with and relate to the participants' engagement with a local community development project. The chapter will focus on the findings from the analysis of the collective major themes that emerged from the participant's individual stories, with reference to the relationships and intersectionality of these findings. Their individual life pathways that led them to their shared location of Swan's Rest were as different as they were similar. The elicited stories from the participants of how they navigated their life journey from individual starting points and various degrees of life influences to their present reality, exposed and gave life to emerging major themes of masculinity, alcohol, disconnect, love and loss, and redemption. All of which had varying degrees of similarity in their impact and influence on the lived experience of all the participants of the study. In order to create better clarity and understanding for the reader the actual words of the participant will be illustrated in Italic font with a specific colour dedicated to individual participants (as indicated in Table 1, overleaf)

Table 1:   Font Colour used to Quote Individual Participants within the Study

Participant	Colour Code
Bip	**Red**
Teddy	**Orange**
Green	**Blue**
Grey	**Green**

I chose to use Italic font to represent the actual words of the participants as I felt this would be easier for the reader to relate to. Italics which are slightly slanted to the *right* give a softer less upright feel to the text that I believe allows the words to flow, as experienced in actual conversation. In answering the research question; 'How older men living in sheltered housing in Dublin talk about their lives and their engagement with the local community development project', the following sections contain a summary of what the research revealed:

5.2   Masculinity

Introduction

The relevance of traditional masculinity and the gendered stereotypes related to it is a major factor in the lived experience of all the participants of the study. The participants' belief and willingness to conform to the socially constructed masculine ideals that expects them to be providers, protectors, winners and controllers is unflinching. Their understanding and beliefs in the behaviours and characteristics associated with being a man was imbedded in their cultural inheritance. This social construct determined their conformity and subsequently created a normative social environment which provided no wriggle-room in respect of what makes a man. Being unable to achieve or deliver their believed manly script was viewed as having failed as men by all participants. It follows that the inability of participants in fulfilling some of their expected roles would be a major negative factor in their lives; and failure for most of them (if not all) would be catastrophic.

Collective findings

Bip spoke about the main thing in life is the '*need*' for a man to work. '*I worked hard, drank as hard as anyone I knew, but could always hold my drink, and was always up for work the next day*'. He insists that men are the providers and strongly stated '*if a man is*

not working, he is useless'. For Bip it is more than the money, it's the fact that you have a job '*you're supposed to have a fucking Job, whatever happens*'. The weight that Bip carries of not being there for his son and wife constantly surfaces throughout the interviews; he talked about always wanting to be out with the '*lads*' and not caring about the consequences for anyone else. Although he sounded disappointed in himself when describing his departure from the family home and taking the ferry to England, he enthused about the early years of his life in England where he joined men from similar working-class backgrounds who worked hard and drank hard together.

Bip spoke about the opportunities he had to really do something with his life but chose '*drink and womanising*' instead. Throughout the interview process he regularly took time to mention that time in his life; it was as if he found it difficult to explain. But he always brought the conversation back to his failure as a husband, father and a man; *'I let them down…it was me, nobody fucking else…I have to live with that'.* Bip takes full responsibility for all the negative things in his life and will not entertain any arguments concerned with 'agency' or that 'circumstances' might be an explanation.

Teddy is similar in his belief of what makes a man; he felt in the way and a '*fucking nuisance*' when his daughter took him into her home after his marriage failed; '*we are born into this world as men and you have to deliver*'; he is fiercely of the view that men must be strong, independent and hardworking. He pointed to how hard-working his father was and how he built a little business so that his sons would have a good living. He reflected on how it never entered his head to ease up, he was always '*trying to get ahead*'. But Teddy also talked about some of the difficulties of attempting to deliver what was expected when you are a man; he felt he could never stop working and providing for his family. '*There's a lot of pressure being a man, to always have the right answers. Sometimes it's difficult to always be capable; you can quickly be dragged down if you're not careful'.*

As referred to in the previous chapter Teddy attempted suicide when he couldn't deliver what he believed was his obligation and duty as a man; '*if I couldn't sort my family, I wasn't any sort of man'.* Teddy worked for his son selling cars at the weekend and an odd day during the week and was quite animated when referring to the work he was doing and how he felt it '*greatly*' helped his son. Teddy mostly hides his emotions, but there were times during the interviews (particularly when describing family scenarios, or other older

men that may be finding life difficult) that he broke down and took a moment to compose himself; he would always apologise. Teddy gives the impression to others of a happy go-lucky man, but that belies the deep-thinking and emotional rollercoaster that happens inside his head which he describes as being 'cabbaged' sometimes.

Green believed he knew what a man's role was, and how he should act and what he should do. His father had instilled in him and his brothers to be their '*own man*' and work for nobody only themselves; '*but I couldn't live up to those expectations. I failed all down the line*'. Green's perceived failure as man haunts him to this day. He talks about how all his siblings are doing well and have made good lives for themselves, while he finds himself with the constant struggle to understand why he failed; '*maybe drink was the cause of my failure as a man…or maybe it was my failure as a man that made me drink*'.

Like other participants Green is consumed by guilt for his believed failure as a father and a husband. He refers to the amount of spare time he has these days, and although he tries to occupy himself with various gardening projects in and around Swan's Rest, troubled thoughts of a life lived are never far away; '*Much of my time is spent thinking about my failure in life and I will take this to the grave*'. Green makes it clear that he doesn't want pity, he insists that he has come to terms with the fact that there is no way of '*fixing*' his situation, and that he doesn't blame anybody only himself. Grey insists that being employed is the biggest factor in what it means to be a man; '*If you lose your job your life is over...everything goes...it's no joke...it's like a failure only bigger…I don't work anymore and that's a load of bollocks*'.

Grey also uses the term '*failure*' to describe the non-delivery of expected masculinity norms. He makes a distinct difference between not being able to work and not having a job. '*I used to think that when I got married, I'd work me balls off to give my kids the best chance and then when I got older and wasn't able to work they would remember what I did and look after me and their mother...it didn't work out that way though*'. He talks about having a job and being able to go out and socialise, and the fact that '*unemployment*' is not a very good '*chat-up'* topic when you are out. He insists that you need to work to have any kind of life, but it was clear that he also put great store in '*doing the job properly*', and walking away from the job knowing it was a '*good piece of work*'. Grey described how he felt more of a man when he was employed and believes that it's because you're actually doing something '*worthwhile*'. At one stage he seemed to contradict this

view of being employed by describing a '*good time*' in his life when (although he wasn't employed) he was fixing his friends cars or doing them a favour by painting or wallpapering; he felt he had credibility and would '*never take a shilling*' from them.

Grey liked to talk about how much he earned and how he '*looked after*' people he was drinking with if they were short of money for drink. '*I used to be able to drink buckets of gargle...there was no man around could drink like me...I often drank thirty pints in one night* '. Grey also spoke about the many women he went out drinking with and the fun he had with them. He insisted that following his marriage breakdown he never took a woman serious again, and treated all of them as a '*one-night stand*'. His capacity to drink '*everyone under the table*' was his badge of manly honour that was regularly referred to; this served as a reminder of how important the ability to drink large amounts of alcohol was to Grey, and he made it very clear that if he was healthy, he would be '*back drinking*' without a doubt.

Failure to deliver on the many varied and different pages of their perceived masculinity script was, and continues to be, a major contributing factor in the life struggle of all the participants. Stories of relentless pressure to achieve a constructed manhood ideology are told with sometimes shameful and often painful recollection.

5.3   Alcohol

Introduction

There are major issues regarding the abuse of alcohol in Swan's Rest. These issues are ever present, as the participants of this study live and try to manage the consequences of alcohol abuse in their lives. The participants' narrative reflects both a personal and wider representation of the influence of alcohol on their lived experience. They describe alcohol as being a key determinant in their lives both historically and in the present. Three out of the four regard the abuse of alcohol as a problem and hate the very thought of it being a dominant factor in their lives, while the other doesn't; he looked upon alcohol as an enjoyable way of coping with life's '*shit*', although he admitted that alcohol brings only a temporary blurring of negative lived reality experiences and requires regular '*topping up*'. In the wider perspective of Swan's Rest all participants expressed concern regarding the daily abuse of alcohol by many residents which seems to be a real problem and one that residents including the participants are left to deal with themselves.

Collective findings

Bip insists that alcohol is the main reason he feels '*broken*' most of the time. He was close to death on a number of occasions because of his addiction to alcohol and considers himself lucky to be alive. He struggles with ill health and is awaiting a liver transplant '*When like your heart stops in hospital and they give you bleeding electric shock treatment and the doctor says to you "Right Bip you need to stop drinking now or you're not going to be here"…you know what I mean?…it's time to stop*'. He believes some of the men living in Swan's Rest can't stop drinking because they are weak and others don't want to stop; '*I am strong enough to say no to drink...as a bloke you have to sometimes grow a set of balls and fucking man up*'.

Bip believes he will never drink again and describes the times when he was '*rock-bottom*' and how that felt. He talks about seeing himself in some of the men living around him and insists, '*that could be me shuffling around, drinking was part of my life...I **was** just like them…they've nothing else…they live for drink*'. Bip talks about a time in his life when the grip of alcohol meant he had to have a bottle (whiskey) to start his day. He refers to many drunken scenarios that he is not proud of and is only a trigger from the TV or radio away from reminding him of the '*shit*e' he caused. '*I hurt a lot of people particularly my family, and most days that fucks with my head*'. Bip has ambition despite his on-going health issues and is constantly planning ahead for his grandchildren's birthdays, communions, etc., and argues that's what keeps him going. His view of most of the men that are struggling with alcohol issues is they have either gone too far with no way back available to them, or they haven't plummeted low enough to make them try harder to stop drinking.

Teddy drinks socially, it's the addiction of others to alcohol that concerns and upsets him. Just like Monkey he '*hates what alcohol does*', but unlike Bip he doesn't blame the men he witnesses abusing alcohol every day. '*Shortly after moving in (Swan's Rest) I noticed a lot of lads, you can see them every day with their bags, shopping. I mean that's not shopping, it's mostly cans it's fucking awful...fucking sad*'. Teddy is generous in describing his neighbour's predicament; he believes his '*story*' is barely significant compared to that of some of the men in Swan's Rest. '*Poor fucking Sam, I love him to bits, I really do, I think he's…you should hear his fucking story…I just pity him, I fucking really pity the man. A lot of people say it's his own doing…but for fuck's sake, you know.*

His cans, you can nearly hear them (imitating can opening noise), *ah God love him, you know…he can't help it'*.

Teddy points back to the time in his life when he felt he 'had to' go to the pub with his wife and father in-law and he resented that. '*I didn't want my life to be centred around alcohol, but they would drink for fucking Ireland and I wasn't getting sucked into that…I've seen it* (alcohol*) destroy good decent families'*. Teddy believes that he doesn't have an addictive nature and wouldn't get drawn into the alcohol fuelled life that some of the men lead. '*I think I have avoided all the negativity that abusing drink brings because I always want to know what I'm doing; I never want to depend on someone looking after me because I can't hold my drink…I'd fucking hate that'*.

Green, similarly to Bip, talks about his abuse of alcohol as the '*absolute*' reason for his life turning out the way it did. He explained that just like his brothers he had every opportunity to have a decent life but drank practically non-stop for thirty years; '*drink was always present'*. Green felt shunned by others because of his drinking which only made him drink more; '*It's hard to explain that I knew like what was happening … but couldn't stop…wouldn't stop…shameful, bloody shameful*'. Also similar to Bip and Teddy he has observed the effect of alcohol on some of the men in Swan's Rest and believes that at least half of the men abuse alcohol. In his later years he has moved from '*giving out*' about the men's drinking to adopting a more understanding demeanour; '*who am I to talk about what they do or how they behave … I finished up in a park drinking surgical spirits and it's a hell of a way to be Tommy…and I don't…I can't…this is straight like, the feeling of nobody wanting you, nowhere to go'*.

Green insists you have to want to stop drinking, *'otherwise it won't happen'*. He believes the men are so far gone that they can't cope with their reality and that the drink '*blurs*' all before them and what they left behind, and helps them get through the day. '*That's what my life was before I stopped drinking…There are times when I don't like myself…you just have to keep occupied…you can never get your life back*'.

Grey, like Green, believes that alcohol is a way of '*easing your mind*'. He can't drink these days because of heart problems but talks of '*drinking every night a few years back*'. Grey drank to hide from reality; just like Green the thought of a life that couldn't be borne could be buried in the fog of excessive drinking, but reality had to be constantly

addressed. *'Your problems were always there though…like the next day the problems were right in front of you…and maybe you had no fucking money to go to the pub…so you borrow a few shillings* (euro) *and buy some cans…but I hated drinking in the flat'*. Unlike the other participants, Grey did not refer to the plight of others drinking in Swan's Rest except to say *'this place is full of dipsos* (heavy drinkers)'. Grey didn't think there was anything particularly wrong with being a *'dipso'* and talked about the social aspect of drinking alcohol and the many friends he had when he was *'having a session'*. Grey spoke about feeling ashamed of not being able to drink as before and how all his friends disappeared when he got sick and couldn't get out or drink like he used to; *'You feel stupid asking for a glass of water or a coke…people in the pub are looking around to Walter* (a reference for being gay)*…I think that's why me mates legged it…they didn't want to be seen hanging around me'*. There is no doubt that if Grey could drink, he would, but his fear of aggravating his heart problems keeps him away from alcohol, for now.

The presence of alcohol in the lives of the participants blurred realities, fuelled downward spirals and tore families apart. Finding a way back from alcohol induced carnage has proved difficult for the participants of this study and in some cases impossible. What once was seen by the participants as a badge of honour and an escape from negative life scenes, alcohol became life's dark elixir that gripped tightly and although some have finally turned away from its taste it waits patiently until heartbreak or history creates the condition for its return.

5.4   Institutional abuse

Two of the participants endured horrific institutional abuse and I feel it needs to be documented so that greater understanding and contextualisation can be elicited from the narratives of their lived experiences. Both participants took their time when sharing this dark time in their very young lives and spoke about those trigger moments when the memory of that time catapulted them back.

Bip has had countless hours of counselling in an effort to even *'dim the memories'*, and can sometimes manage to put it to the back of his head. He believes his excessive drinking was a symptom of the abuse he suffered. *'Alcohol took the pain of those times away most of the time'*. Bip's demeanour when referring to the abuse is one of apathy and battle-weary controlled anger. Small outbursts occurred throughout the interviews and were

accompanied by apologetic frustrated shaking of the head, leading one to understand the past is ever-present in Bip's present.

Teddy handles the horror of his abuse differently; it is never discussed and it was clear from the interviews that very few people were trusted with the knowledge of his life burden. Teddy referred to his close family ties and his initial mistrust of people he doesn't know. Although he is polite to everyone he comes into contact with, he keeps people out of his tight family and friends circle. He talks about '*out of the blue*' flashbacks to that time in his life when his innocence was taken away, and the heavy feeling that descends on him, without a scheduled departure date; '*I disappear until the feelings pass, and that could be days and has even lasted weeks*'.

5.4.1 Bip

If I was to like tell...fucking tell you everything that's happened to me over the years like, you know what I mean, it would fuck my head up completely, you know what I mean. I know I told you I was raped a few times...Like I have no fear in telling people like what happened to me in that place...and being battered and fucking all sorts of crap like but I don't go too deep. He didn't only do it on me, he done it on a group of other lads and whatever like, you know what I mean, but as I said to like, you know, other people were in the same boat as me, were molested and whatever. They held it and held it and it fucked their heads up to this day...where I have this thing, it happened to me, it was fucking bad when it happened, I have been through treatment and shit and then I came to a stage...there's fuck all I could do about it. I just have to either put it on a back burner or just get it out of my fucking head but you know what...it's never out of my head, it's always there.

5.4.2 Teddy

The Christian Brothers down there were fucking bastards, they really, honest to God, they were bastards, they were. If you didn't answer them quick enough for the thing, they had a leather belt at the side there and you'd put your hands out like that and they'd whack it on the side. Or your face, you know, or the back of your head, wherever suited them. I knew I was in for it then walking up them stairs. I just said look we went on the mitch (didn't turn up to school), I told him straight, but it was pointless, and he battered me anyway. And Then the other time...when that man...that other thing happened to me,

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you know, remember I was telling you about...and so that was my kind of schooling as such, you know.

I don't like walking into people's spaces until I get to know them, do you know what I mean, and I've been conned before and I don't like being conned, you know. I have to really trust people you understand...trust yeah, oh it's a lot to do with trust, do you know what I mean. And that fella that raped me that time, he took away an awful lot of trust...Yeah...yeah...yeah...and that like so I'd be very, very careful, like, you know, who I fucking say anything to like, you know what I mean.

The horror of institutional abuse perpetrated on these participants continues to percolate not far from their emotional surface and keeps them on-guard to betrayers of love and trust. The stories told are as shocking to hear as they are painful to tell. But with the telling came a sense of relief as the sharing was embraced in a comforting understanding and caring manner. The sharing also pointed to the strength of trust in the researcher which allowed the participants to tell their story from a seldom if ever spoken about starting point.

5.5   Love/Loss/Disconnected

Introduction

The emotional journey through the experiences of the participants in relation to love/loss and often a disconnection with loved ones was difficult for both narrator and researcher. The stories were often long and deep in detail. The longing for a 'normal life' is a constant across all the participants, but not available to most. All participants have either attempted suicide or contemplated carrying it out. They all have also experienced love and falling out of love (or love falling out with them) and the isolation and disconnection with society that followed. They witness the negative effects of a disconnected life in their day to day experience of living in Swan's Rest. Although most participants long for a normal, even loving life, they don't see the possibility of it happening. Across the four participants they talk about being invisible, not being noticed, disappearing, and feel they don't really matter to the wider community, and have no value in the sense of status and related capital.

Collective findings

Bip feels he's at a stage in his life where he '*can't take any more hassle*'; he refers to people being '*better off*' without him around '*sometimes*'. He keeps himself busy by helping out in the residents' communal space and kitchen; delivering meals to a number of residents that can't/won't come to the dining area. Bip doesn't usually have conversations with people (only a select few), his daily rhetoric is one of short remarks and quips. '*I'm not really interested in people… I don't trust people until I get to know them…and I haven't got the energy for that shit anymore*'. There is not much that Bip is interested in apart from his '*grandkids*', although he spoke openly and often about wishing his son would '*get some sense and realise what he has*' (family, etc.). He believes that if his son '*stepped up*', and acted in a responsible manner, life would be better for everyone, including Bip himself, although after seemingly letting his guard down, dismisses this apparently unmanly thought; '*sometimes I think about what it would be like to have a normal life...that's sounds a bit soft though*'.

Although constantly standing his ground and promoting strong masculinity ways of being, Bip spoke about triggers that stirred him emotionally bringing to the surface thoughts of abuse, his brothers, his father, etc. to such an extent that he would be a '*complete mess*'. He had no control over his emotional outpourings; '*some days you couldbe sitting in the house and something would come on telly, and like that* [Clicking Fingers]*…there's a thing* (film) *called "the nun's story" or something, that movie, I fucking bucketed tears when I watched that and I still do and I still watch it and I'll watchit again and I'll watch it again for some fucking reason but when I'm watching it I do bein fucking tears*'.

There were many stories in which Bip talked about his father. These stories were presented in a way that gave one a sense of his longing to be back there, back in a world where he could give love and receive love; '*Ah I loved me fucking aul-fella*'. He described many scenarios involving his father all of which were positive and presented his father in a heroic light. In contrast he seldom mentioned his siblings except when describing his childhood, and present-day connection with them happened very occasionally, was organised, and meeting up wasn't a natural occurrence (they wouldn't just drop by, and either would Bip). When he did mention his siblings, the conversation was reserved and limiting, and he alluded to problematic '*issues*' and suggested we '*don't want to go there*'. Bip spoke passionately about the disregard and disrespect of older people and how they

seem to be invisible to the wider community as well as to their '*fucking landlord*'. '*We don't exist and are not even noticed, I can tell you, no more than two people would ask about me if I was away seeing my grandkids…fucking invisible I am*'.

Teddy also talks about '*not being noticed'* and refers to individuals walking by the complex (Swan's Rest) and not seeing the people who live there; *'People don't look beyond the railings, maybe they think there's no need …all is great in here…well it's fucking not*'. Teddy is happy with how his children adjusted to his marriage breakdown and how they (including his siblings) also dealt with his personal breakdown and attempted suicide. '*I'm in a good place these days but it wasn't always that way*' During the darker period in his life he felt '*lost and adrift*' from friends and family. '*It's fucking awful Tommy; you feel nobody cares…you're a useless bastard…so what's the point*'. Teddy points to the many of the men in Swan's Rest and finds it difficult to comprehend why they are '*abandoned*' by family and friends. He unconsciously uses his personal value base to question why others don't act on the plight of some of the residents in Swan's Rest; '*If you're a half decent human being like wouldn't you reach out and help people*'.

Teddy gets very animated when talking about the isolation of some of the men in Swan's Rest. Before, during, and after the interviews there were times when he showed great empathy for the struggle of the men, and his emotion spilled over to a point where we would stop the interview and take a bit of time out; '*I know what it's fucking like to feel you have nobody, we should do something to help these men*'. Teddy feels that creating some kind of space where you can have something that resembles '*a family*' might stop the men slipping further into their self-imposed isolation; he talks about having to '*nurse it along'* (relationship)*,* which will allow trust to be established and maintained so that a better understanding of the men and their struggle can be established in order to '*do something'*. Teddy insists that the residents of Swan's Rest are part of the community and should be treated as such. He feels that people in Swan's Rest are abandoned because some are old, lonely, sick or struggling with addiction, and this is seen as problematic and costly for society; '*sure they have a roof over their heads, and people check on them every so often…what the fuck more do they want… you know that's bollocks Tommy*'.

For Green what happened in his life is beyond repair, and there is an acceptance that Swan's Rest is where he will end his days as just '*another old man*' who died in the old folks' complex; '*I lost everything, I had it all and I let it go…I was a fool Tommy, and I have settled with what I have here* (Swan's Rest)*, because something got broken inside me and there is no fixing it*'. Although his wife, children and siblings have moved away (all around the country and beyond), he has some contact with his family at present; he believes that his relationships with family and friends are better than before, and appreciates the fact that his wife will acknowledge him at funerals and weddings, etc. He is disappointed that one of his daughters remains '*very cool*' with him, but believes you just have to move on and accept it. Green is almost eighty years old and reminds me often of this fact as he seemed to look for some kind of acknowledgement that maybe it's time for people to forgive and re-connect.

Green talks about the length of time it took to '*put some of the pieces*' of his own life back together, suggesting how impossible it would be to do the same for his wife and children. Similar to Bip, Green talks about '*problems that won't ever go away*', things that happened and things he did; '*I have to live with these problems every single day*'. Just like other participants he also refers to '*triggers*' that set him back, stop him functioning in any real way; he refers to blasé remarks like, "forget the past and move on", and gets very annoyed with such a lack of understanding; '*Something might come onthe TV and I will immediately get upset and my day will shut down…you mightn't see mefor days…it's like you are ambushed…there's no escape...those are the times that the pain is worse…you really want to die*'. Green, similar to other participants spoke about the many times he wanted to end his life, about the dark loneliness he feels much of the time, and the interventions that helps him pull back from the brink; '*through AA I have learned to keep my side of the street clean and hopefully that will allow other things to happen'*. He also spoke about how, over the years '*the lads from the CDP banging on thedoor and not going away until they were answered*' helped him and forced him to get upand face the day; '*I always say that Tommy…you and your people are still with us and that's a blessing*'.

Grey also struggles with living, he spoke about most days having feelings of '*wanting to die*'; he described disturbing situations that occurred over the years in Swan's Rest, including one particular story where '*old man Lee*' was found dead in his flat and he was possibly there, undiscovered and not missed for more than a week; '*well that'll be fucking*

me…I disappear for weeks and nobody misses me…what does that tell you?'. Grey insists he'd be better off dead, but as mentioned in the previous chapter he promised god he would not kill himself, although like other participants he has thought about ending his life on several occasions. Grey talks about '*pushing people away*' over the years, but doesn't know why; he thinks that maybe he doesn't want them around to witness how '*fucked up*' he is. Grey feels ashamed of himself sometimes; '*I can't fucking walk, my joints are inflamed and sore, I can't even tie my own fucking laces…would you want people looking at you in this fucking state?*'. For Grey isolation is painful and having no friends makes him question his own presence in the world; '*I think I can call Larry my friend, and he's a fucking nut-job, but that's it… how bad is that…that's my complete circle of friends, one. Those clowns that I call my family don't even want to know me…so why would you even bother to get up in the morning…to face another shite day*'. Like other participants, Grey questions his very existence, but sometimes he can be seen edging his wheelchair closer to conversations, hoping to be included. Maybe his promise to god (not to kill himself) will hold long enough for him to realise his longing for relational connection.

The participants spoke about how the pain of social isolation and disconnect is constant, whether it's self-imposed or inflicted. The ability of the participants of this study to clear a pathway back from society's margins in an effort to try and rebuild a life was extremely difficult. The feeling of being invisible to others because of who they were or where they lived was debilitating and life choking. Mostly the participants blamed themselves for their plight; mixed with outbursts of two finger gesturing and pointing to family members or friends that did not help particular situations.

5.6   Redemption

Introduction

Al the participants felt different levels of remorse for their part in exacting hurt on individuals during their life (particularly family and loved ones), and would like somehow that this could be fixed or at least their side of the story explained. Across all four participants there was a yearning to put things right; there was a need also for them to be heard and for others to understand their struggle. There were different levels of blame that participants held against themselves, and although the approaches employed

concerned with easing this emotional burden were unique and varied the expected outcome of redemption was the same.

Collective findings

Bip blames himself on his son's absence from his children's lives '*people's lives were affected by me, big time…I have lots of regret*'. But there is a contradiction in his thinking or maybe it's more confusion than anything else as (as well as blaming himself) he also describes his son as a '*useless prick*'. Bip travels the length of the country to see his grandchildren, trying to make amends for his son's neglect '*I can't turn the clock back...so I do my best to make it up to my grandkids and their mothers*'. Teddy also tries to put things right with his family, and argues that he '*never wanted to hurt anyone*'. He feels that maybe he expects too much from his children, but he hopes they understand what happened during the '*fuck-ups that hurt everyone including me*'. He believes that all you can do is '*show them you love them*' and hope things turn out ok.

Teddy tries hard to be '*available for the kids*' but sometimes feels he's '*not really appreciated*'. He presented a hurtful demeanour and seemed agitated with their lack of understanding of his personal struggle. Teddy referred to the '*guilty feeling*' that washes over him sometimes when '*certain thoughts*' surface and how he finds it hard to get through the day. '*I just want to stay in bed and have no energy to face the day*'. In contrast Green feels that the hurt he inflicted is '*too big to fix*', but like Teddy he thinks he should continue to '*do the right things now*' and hopefully things will get better.

Green believes that things are slowly getting better between himself, his children and wider family and is very thankful for that, but he also talks about a longing to '*find peace*' for himself. He also talks about times when demons of a life lived come back to haunt him and he '*signs out for a while*', and disappears from view and contact for a few days and sometimes more.

Grey doesn't think he will ever have a relationship with his siblings or wider family. '*Of course, it would be great if we were a happy family but we're not and never will be*'. Although he talks about the '*hate*' his siblings have for him, Grey would still welcome an opportunity to explain his side of the story; he has '*strong reservations*' whether they would listen, and believes he would be wasting his time and it would not make the slightest difference to their relationship with him. He puts their deliberate disconnect from

him down to a lack of understanding of '*his fucked-up life*' and of the pain he has constantly had to endure. Grey knows he was 'hard to be around' at times but blames the circumstances of his life and not himself for this.

MASCULINITY

REDEMPTION

The multiplicity, intersectionality and overlapping of the emerging themes from this study created a weight of the world for the participants that became too much to carry. These themes which co-existed at various times and to various degrees served to crush the participants; who to a man searched their script-for-life for answers, only to find those pages missing.

ALCOHOL

LOVE/LOSS/ DISCONNECTED

Figure 4   Emerging Themes of the Research

Common themes

As referred to previously all the participants took responsibility for causing hurt and upset to others and there was a deep yearning to right this perceived wrong. They spoke about missed opportunities during their life when they either couldn't bring themselves to address these wrongs or when they did try they messed up. The collective findings, as depicted in Figure 4, above, point to the emerging themes of alcohol, redemption and love/loss/disconnected as being symptoms, as opposed to masculinity and institutional abuse (Teddy and Bip) being causations. The sense of duty and responsibility to deliver societies expectations brought all the participants to contemplate, and in some cases attempt to take their own lives. The participants suffered in silence, their physical outward manly demeanour hid their true thoughts emotions, feelings and scars. As they aged they

continued to suppress feelings of worthlessness and loss with no ability or understanding of how to reach out for help.

The support offered by the local community development project has created the condition for change and has worked towards building the confidence of the participants of this study (and others) to explore possible scenarios of self-repair and development which they have embraced.

5.7   Engagement with the Local Community Development Project

Introduction

The CDP attempts to engage with all the community. They are very successful engaging with the older population of the community, and in particular those older men who are more difficult to work with. Understanding why this is will inform the work. Across all four participants there was a sense of personal gain from their involvement with the CDP. It was very evident that the work of the CDP is seen as been really important from a wider engagement of residents in Swan's Rest by all participants. From an individual perspective all participants had different experiences of engagement with the CDP. There were several commonalities shared by all the participants, including: involvement with the CDP grew as did their own development; engagement with the CDP has given them a voice and they have gained by having the CDP with them and amongst them; all participants agreed that the wider community of Swan's Rest greatly gained in many ways by their involvement with the CDP.

Collective findings

Bip spoke about how the CDP turned his life around; '*Being here and involved with the CDP has made me stronger. I'll put it this way, from the time I first came here, and I didn't know the ins and outs of like the outreach work and all the work that CDP done for the community...and outside the community as well for that matter. It's like a family...and I'm an important part of it...I'm involved in most things...especially around here...I have been at meetings all over the city...people know who we are now...sometimes my health gets on top of me and I disappear for a while, but that never lasts long...luckily I came home (from England) when I did and the CDP like turned my life around. I'm not saying it because you are just sitting there, like it has, and it did.*'

Teddy talked about his love of '*helping people*' and when he witnessed the outreach staff of the CDP knocking on doors of Swan's Rest he was fascinated that there was such an initiative available to the residents; '*when I moved into Swan's Rest first I thought yous were the Corpo* (Dublin City Council)*, and then I found out yous were definitely not ha-ha*'. Teddy worked with homeless families and individuals in Dublin's inner city and has experienced much inequality and struggle by those who have less and holds great empathy for people who struggle at the lower layers of society; '*Only for the CDP working with residents down here* (Swan's Rest) *the place and those in it would be fucked...They wouldn't have a voice...I know that because I see what's going on. People are low here...they need the support of the project...you are thought very well of Tommy and your staff are brilliant...I'm fucking serious...look at that other kip at the back of the rugby pitch* (another sheltered housing complex)*...it's fucking desperate there...they have nobody helping them...it's a fucking kip with people left to fucking rot...we have little here but they have nothing...nothing*'.

Green insists; '*the people down here* (Swan's Rest) *are OK you know, there's no vindictiveness in them...they might have a few drinks and that, but there's no bad people down here'*. Green talks about men that '*can't be bothered*' no matter what the CDP does. He believes the work the CDP carries out is '*invaluable*' and without it he personally 'would be lost'. Green looks out for people, he would suggest to staff of the CDP to call in and check on individuals he was worried about…he pushes people to get involved in the various initiatives delivered by the CDP; '*it's much better down there now* (Swan's Rest)*, people like yourself Tommy, you stand up for us…you done good things...and there are great things happening with the trips…the club and all that*'. Green often drops into the CDP to have a chat, and importantly to discuss possibilities in respect of improving the quality of life for the residents of Swan's Rest.

Grey feels very strong about the importance of the work of the CDP; '*my life is gone…this is the end for me here. The only respite I have is when your crowd knock on the door* (outreach workers)*, it's good to have your crowd around during the week but that only happens Monday to Friday, the weekend is like a fucking morgue around here, a ghost town*'. Green used to be able to get around to resident meetings, music lessons and more but his deteriorating health has slowed him down. '*The CDP gives me something to do…I kinda feel good when I'm doing something with the lads, and even the girls…since I got this wheelchair I can help out with bits of voluntary work…I always slag the staff but the*

know it's only a joke…they even fixed a puncture on my wheelchair… It's like I said before, if the CDP wasn't here with us it would be game over.' Grey has become more involved with the CDP despite his bad health. He is an ever-present in the project and is glad to use his electric wheelchair get him around, helping staff with fundraising, leaflet dropping or even collecting from the shops. He has recently agreed to take part in a men's initiative;

> *I always wanted to go on the trips away but I was a bit shy about getting in the way and being a nuisance but did you know got your man Paul to put my name down for the trip...I'll drive yous all bloody mad ha-ha.*

(Grey, participant)

All the participants spoke very highly about the value of their engagement with the local CDP. It is clear from what the participants say that the CDP has played a pivotal role in their re-emerging back into society. Some of the participants also spoke about how they have been instrumental in the personal development of other older men who were also struggling. Each of the participants told stories of the many CDP initiatives, supports, programmes and projects they have been involved with and some they are still active in. They all agree the environment created by the CDP is conducive to building confidence, personal growth and belief, which offers them possibilities and hope for new beginnings across the wide expanse of life's landscape, which they thought was no longer available to them.

5.8   Conclusion

The findings generated from the research question concerned with the narratives of older men living in sheltered housing in Dublin and their engagement with their local Community Development Project are presented in this chapter. The intersectionality and comparative findings of the multiple themes across all participants were explored and ultimately presented. The findings were presented in such a way in order to maximise clarity and true representation of the many hours of audio recordings, subsequent forest of transcriptions, as well as field notes and observations that would have led to much more pages of writing that this thesis allows.

These findings pointed to older men struggling with a lifetime of gathered experiences and various levels of ability to manage these experiences, particularly those experiences that produce negative fall-out. The different life trajectories of the participants determined how they navigated, managed and coped with their different and similar life experiences. All four participants experienced various levels of impact in respect of the intersectionality of all the major themes that emerged from the study. The major themes of masculinity, redemption, alcohol, disconnect and love and loss represented serious challenges for the participants and for those in the community development/work field. What we can learn from these findings including the relevance of the social class of the participants as an over-arching factor, and the relevant associated literature will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings of the study. I will refer to the importance and correlation of masculinity, alcohol, love/loss/disconnection, redemption, institutional abuse and engagement with the community development project. The research findings presented in the previous chapter will also be discussed and the intersectionality explored in relation to the key literature concerned with poverty, habitus, cultural hegemony, and the relevance of class. This is followed by a focus on the ability to give important 'voice' to the participants that was generated by the special relationship between the participants and the researcher which was the major contributing factor in eliciting the wealth of stories which delivered the rich bounty of data for this study.

The limitations that were quite challenging at times are discussed in the next section followed by the recommendations and conclusion of the chapter.

The objective of the study was to answer the research question of: 'How older men living in sheltered housing talk about their lives and their engagement with the local community development project'.

Participants of this study told expected stories grounded by culturally determined social norms and expectations, but also shared revelations that went deeper than they or this listener anticipated. The findings informed and challenged this researcher and created a learning that I hope to share with other professionals and educators in the field.

6.2 Masculinity

> *What ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by their private orbits in which they live; their visions and powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood; in other milieu they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.*

(Wright Mills 1959 p. 3)

The 'private orbits' that Wright Mills refers to can be compared to how the participants of this study moved in social networks as adults that were centred on their immediate family, education, relationships, work and social life. The journey to later life and the absence of any (if not some, or all) of these identity creating connections has the capacity to generate serious negative life experiences and consequences. All the participants acted on their culturally inherited, socially constructed masculinity script from boyhood and throughout their adult life to a point that accumulated perceived failures and the weight of their world determined their route to Swan's Rest. All the participants at different stages in their lives felt ashamed of who they were; they spoke about failing as men, as human beings, as husbands, as providers; of not being there for their children; of their weakness in becoming an alcoholic and of hurting those they loved the most. The emotional rollercoaster created in attempting to meet gendered defined standards throughout all the participants' lives is still present as they struggle with navigating later-life scenarios that are both uncharted and unscripted.

As referred to in chapter two, Adams and Coltrane (2005), describes the family as a microcosm of society. This observation is broadly consistent with the findings of this study, particularly regarding the socialisation and establishment of cultural roles and norms. Establishing gender norms was reflected in the various chores that might be given to siblings; participants spoke about them having to bring in the coal, dig the garden, or even ordered out to play football while the girls were expected to wash-up, iron clothes and go to the shops. Grey remembers the shame attached to being told to carry out any aspect of hanging out or taking in the washing from the clothesline. The fear that you might be seen doing this kind of women's work could be overwhelming; the stomach churning feeling and emotional upset state he felt during those times (although infrequent, were always instigated by his mother; never his father) is vividly remembered to this day. This gender specific role divide was also apparent in my own life growing up in an inner city flat complex and particularly in respect to Grey's reference to the hanging out or taking in of washing; it was only the threat of dry clothes being rained upon that this gender no-go zone would ever be breached and even then it would only take place if there were no females available. In more than twenty-five years living in the flat complex I never saw an adult male at the clothes line.

It was in those family spaces that the participants began their initial socialisation as boys and then men. The expected norms that needed to be carried out and achieved were reflected in the seemingly natural and inevitable structures and guidelines of hegemonic masculinity. There was a pride associated with the participants' sense of being a man, of being the provider, of being stoic; there was never a question of a different way of being. The participants lived through their individual family experiences and witnessed the dominance and control their father exerted in the family home. They referred to the manly work (with their hands) they were expected to undertake while their sisters and other females were sent to the sewing factories or maybe the hairdressers to work.

The participants upbringing and cultural socialisation which sustained and endorsed a specific way of being and acting in the world was also validated and endorsed by their observed replication of these social norms by others in their working-class milieu. With this in mind it is important to reflect on Hegemonic masculinity is the idealised form of masculinity at a given place and time (Connell 1995). The struggle for the men in realizing their culturally inherited, hegemonic determined one size fits all societal plan for men is that there are no instructions for being old. Courtenay (2000 p. 1388), describeshegemonic masculinity as 'the socially dominant gender construction that subordinates' femininities as well as other forms of masculinity, and reflects and shapes men's social relationships with women and other men; it represents power and authority', but this cultural framework does not apply and is not fit for purpose when employed in respect oflater life.

The men worked at various jobs in their life to date, including building labourer, sawmill labourer, army, council road-sweeper, painter, and dustbin-man. Participants referred to times when they felt they fitted into society. Although they may have been drinking heavily or struggling with relationships; it was the 'being part of something' that fuelled their life momentum and sustained their gendered view of the world. When this momentum (because of addiction, unemployment, failing health, etc.) stuttered then stalled and eventually stopped, the participants, without the ability or inclination to look beyond themselves to the structures, ideologies and institutions that determined their perceived agency in order to explain their apparent failure as men, took this unbearable weight on themselves.

To different degrees the work took a toll on the men's bodies. Working-class men's bodies are often the tools for their work (e.g., men who work in construction and other trades, manual labour, and the like); and so their ageing may differ from nonworking-class men's in important ways (Calasanti 2009 pp. 27-31). The visible physical manifestations of a working life of physical endeavour and associated social norms attached to this work journey is clearly evidenced by the general poor health of the participants, who spoke of difficulties with their heart, liver, arthritis, mental health, and more.

All the participants struggled with achieving the status that hegemonic masculinity promised. The dominant identities of hegemonic masculinity referred to by various writers particularly Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) were shaped and bent at different junctures and times by the participants in an effort to fit whatever life determining socioeconomic location they found themselves in. But it is different now for the participants of this study; they have reached late adulthood with little or no resources. They are not too concerned about their financial position, it is their low self-esteem, health, their sadness generated from a life lived, poor living conditions, and lack of future ambition that informs their demeanour. It is worth noting that Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) focused on people no more than fifty years of age (with the majority in their twenties) and therefore did not capture or theorise about the crossing over to older age by men in the 60-90 years' age bracket.

Recognising the challenge of age-related masculinities Hearn (2011 p. 95) states: 'Hegemonic masculinity has limits as a framework for taking on board all the complexities of ageing (men)'. He argues that accommodating men advancing to old age and also being 'marginalised' can be a 'difficult fit' and hard to make sense of in respect of their place in the hegemonic masculinity framework. The participants of this study don't have a map or a framework to guide them through later life, because there isn't one. They were fooled but also complicit as they embraced the dominant hegemonic ideology that determined their place in the world. They enjoyed the status that placed them above women and rewarded their youthful endeavour as long as work was available, and consequences of their class did not get in the way. The conversational and unpacking nature of the interviews of this study generated an explorative curiosity and questioning of the 'complexities' that Hearn (2011) may have been referring to. When describing their lived experiences, the participants believed that how they lived their lives was natural, it

was the way of the world and was never questioned. They found it difficult to entertain other possibilities concerned with what they regarded as the natural order of things. As the interviews finished and back and forth conversations regarding how the narrative elicited from their stories was been put to paper, this researcher noticed a significant shift in the 'never questioning' rhetoric.

In symbolising Traditional Hegemonic Masculinity, it is clear that when generating my graphical depiction (Figure 5, below), I have not considered later life representations in the chart. As stated previously, there is no framework available that applies to the participants of this study.

Born into a Society that normalises a Patriarchal way of being

Boys and then men's inevitable socialisation and naturalisation into hegemonic masculinity that determines their life journey

TRADITIONAL – HEGEMONIC -MASCULINITY

The socially constructed, generationally reproduced, institutionally and structurally embedded hegemonic masculinity creates positive gendered hierarchal outcomes for complicit men at the expense of women.

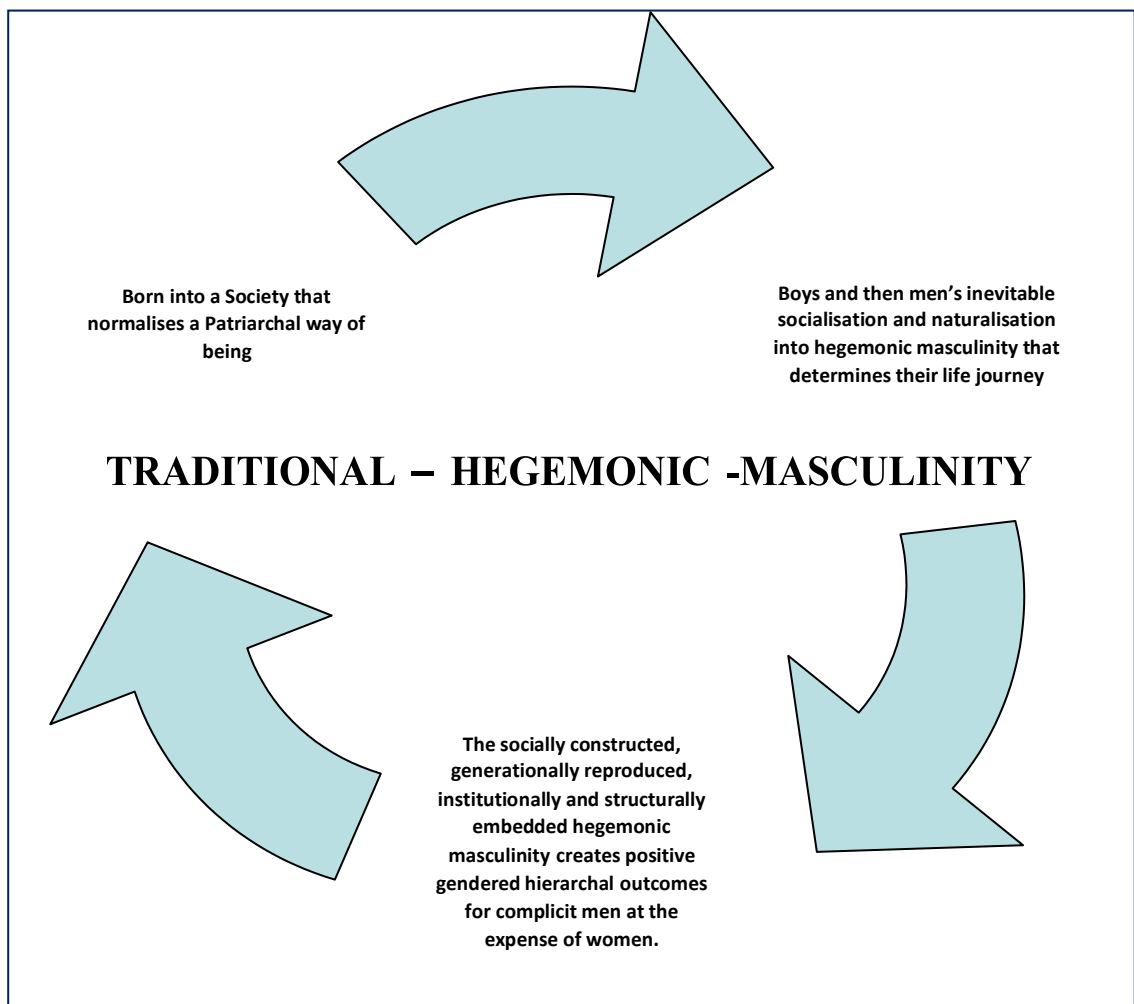**Figure 5:** Depiction of Traditional Hegemonic Masculinity

Bartholomaeus and Tarrant (2016) referred to men's 'positionality' within gendered relations, citing various contributors concerned with linking the transition to old age and the subordination and or complicity of gendered practices of the men as they consider gains and losses depending on their sociocultural and socioeconomic standing, health,

family, or whatever patriarchal advantage they could utilise to establish a new identity that would ease them through later life. All of the participants longed for, and it seemed unknowingly searched for, a credible platform or identity that would allow them to live with integrity, and be seen as having something positive to offer other than a failed dependent demeanour. Although the participants still maintained a 'manly' persona, throughout the interviews they would sometimes exhibit a softer side; particularly when referring to family or the struggle of others, especially other men in Swan's Rest.

The traditional masculinity script that determined the participant's individual pathway through life also created the environment for various and similar challenges and experiences to take place which will be discussed in the following sections.

6.3   Alcohol

Ireland has one of the highest levels of alcohol consumption in the European Union. Alcohol contributes to an array of personal and social difficulties, both acute and long-term. Binge drinking (substantial intake of alcohol during a single episode of drinking interspersed with periods of low or no intake) carries with it a particular high risk of behavioural and health difficulties.

(TILDA 2011 p. 85)

In Tilki's (2006) study and subsequent 2006 paper which explored 'problematic alcohol consumption' by working class Irish people who immigrated to the UK to find work during the 60s and 70s she argues that amongst others, alcohol problems contribute to poverty, social isolation, homelessness and marginalisation (Harrison and Carr-Hill 1992, Harrison *et al.* 1993, Harrison *et al.* 1997, Commander *et al.* 1999a, 1999b). She draws on Canning *et al.* (1999) and Commander *et al.* (1999b) in identifying alcohol abuse as a significant contributor to both physical and mental health issues. Tilki's (2006) findings are closely aligned to above referred to TILDA (2011) longitudinal study on ageing, as well as demonstrating a correlation with the experiences of all of the participants of this study who were negatively affected by alcohol abuse at various times and to various degrees throughout their lives. The rate of alcohol and substance abuse reported in the TILDA (2011) study was highest in men aged 65-74; 'individuals in the lowest wealth

quartile are more likely to report a diagnosis of alcohol and substance abuse compared to those in the highest wealth quartile (p. 85 Table 5. A25).

Barret *et al.* (2011) presents the TILDA (2011) study which showed more older men than older women abusing alcohol, with men aged 65-74 having the highest incidence (TILDA 2011 p. 85). Kaye and Crittenden (2015) go on to explore a number of mitigating factors contributing to this anomaly, such as psychosocial issues occurring alongside the alcohol generated issues. Kaye and Crittenden (2015) also argue 'older men who engage in substance abuse are more likely to live alone, be widowed and tend to be more isolated than those who are not engaging in substance abuse'. Participants of this study experience similar if not more challenging living experiences if you remove the 'widowed' element and replace it with physical and emotional separation from spouse, and add in the fact that the participants were the main protagonists in creating this separation scenario. The legacy of causation guilt and pointed blame associated with the breakdown and subsequent splintered separation of their marriage created and continues to create challenges for the participants of this study. Three of the four participants abused alcohol themselves to a point where both their mental and physical health declined and in all three cases suicide was never far from their thoughts.

Kaye and Crittenden's (2015) observation of the complexity of ascertaining whether it's the isolation that causes the substance abuse or the substance abuse that causes the isolation is important, but the findings of this study provided much deeper penetration which looked past the visible symptoms to explore whole life causation scenarios.

Bip, Green and Grey worked in the UK for different lengths of time throughout the late 50s, 60s, and 70s, with Bip staying there for over thirty years before returning to Dublin. The findings generated from various stories of alcohol (and the issues associated with alcohol abuse) told by the participants of this study are broadly similar to findings from the Tilki (2006) and TILDA (2011) studies. Bip, in particular, revealed stories of a pub culture that captured him and held him in a vice-like grip; particularly during those the times when he was falling down with aches and pains and his weariness and longing to lie down was stronger that the draw of whiskey; he stayed. The pub was where you got paid; where you were offered 'slate' (credit), and was a 'doorway' to employment. Johal *et al.* (2012) refers to the centrality of work in relation to 'shaping and sustaining' men's lives. They argue that the negative effects of men (in particular) becoming unemployed

are multiple and can create a likelihood of them developing mental health issues, and smoking and drinking more (p. 20). Tilki (2006), being consistent with the findings of this study argues that it was 'not socially acceptable' to go straight home from work, that there was an expectation to 'repair' back to the pub after your days' work and remain there for the evening; she cites MacAmhlaigh (1985 p. 7) in which he points to men who didn't comply with the expected norms of the working gang, 'were deemed poor mixers and risked not being offered further work'.

The participants of this study believed their credibility as men would be challenged if they did not embrace the social norms that this 'way of being' offered, but they also knew it was a type of carousel that had no stop button, and to get off (or even fall off) meant it was extremely difficult to get back on. Green felt work became secondary; it was drinking, being one of the lads, and the feeling that that gave him became the main focus in his life. Grey would buy drinks for others just to prolong the 'buzz' of being out and having fun. Bip and Grey spoke often about their ability to drink 'more than others' and Monkey shared stories of drinking whiskey before starting the day's work and even during lunch-break and the belief that it didn't affect him in the slightest; he could still out-perform others and was very proud of that fact. This practice of hard drinking and the perceived manliness attached is consistent with Pearce's (1992) study of fishermen in Ireland which highlighted the requirement for them to 'hold their liquor' and remain in control even having imbibed heavily (Tilki 2006.

Tilki (2006) describes Irish masculinity as being 'constructed around a combination of hard physical labour and heavy drinking'. Although this description seems out-dated as we move away from traditional modes of employment which required a physical aptitude and presence, it is still relevant to the participants of this study as they recalled lived experiences that gave them a purpose/role/identity. The description by Tilki (2006) broadly agrees with the findings from this study wherein Bip, Green and Grey spoke about how hard they worked and the many times they drank themselves into 'oblivion'. They had a reputation for hard work and even harder drinking, and while they had their health and work was plenty, they felt they occupied an important position amongst their peers. The importance an centrality of the pub cannot be overstated; Connolly in his gathering of 'working class essays' describes the pub as being 'our place'; a place without 'hierarchy' where you are judged on your 'character', which might in turn be influenced by one's ability to throw a dart or turn a domino; a place where workers, manual labourers,

unskilled and poorly paid are present; a place where 'those who inherited nothing better than the gene for male pattern-baldness' come to let off steam (Connolly 2017 pp. 44-46)

Teddy also spoke about the centrality of the pub in his life but from the perspective of his ex-wife and her extended family, in particular her father. Teddy resisted being drawn into the 'work to pub' culture and was made to feel that he was the problem and his absence was viewed unfavourably. Teddy never saw the point of working hard and drinking hard while you were poor and trying to build a life for your family and yourself. He is proud of the fact that he can 'hold his drink' as good as any man and has never been in a situation of being 'falling down drunk'. He maintains most of his friends were heavy drinkers because they were in the 'building game' and he might have been drawn into that lifestyle had he remained in the army. He believes that years working with 'down and outs' in a Bed & Breakfast in the inner city has made him more aware of the consequences of alcohol abuse.

Bip, Green and Grey are alcoholics and all three abstain from alcohol, and talk about their addiction freely, while Teddy drinks socially (maybe once or twice weekly). There is clear evidence that alcohol abuse has being a major factor in contributing to negative life changing experiences for all the participants, either directly or indirectly, or both.

6.4   Love/Loss/Disconnected

OLD

When I was young I wondered, how men zig-zagged and blundered

Into the bile and rage that enervate old age.

What nags now at my mind is how they keep so kind,

Given the blows they bear, and justified despair.

(Davis 2002 p. 49)

We know that social relationships have profound positive effects on our physical and mental health, longevity and happiness. Loneliness kills and the quality of our relationships matter.

(Vogl 2016 p. xvii)

All of the participants were losers in love; they were all married, with three of the four having children. All the marriages failed, and it is clear from the findings that the responsibility for these failures and the hurt and negative fall-out that followed, lay with the participants, as a result of their history and their way of being. Santini *et al.* (2016) in their study of older men and women in Ireland in respect of social relationships, loneliness and mental health, argue that spousal support is more central to the emotional well-being of men than women. Grey spoke about missing his mates and the social aspect of the pub while at the same time alluding to a deeper type of loneliness not having a wife or partner in life brings. Green also described his estranged wife as the only person that really knew him and understood him; with both Bip and Teddy referring to the undeserved hurt they inflicted on their wives, who even now treats them well.

All the participants live alone with three of them having a deeper than acquaintance connection with a woman. Teddy is the only participant that is in what he describes as a 'real relationship', while in Green's and Grey's cases they are clear that the relationship is platonic; they spoke how they enjoy the women's company and how the conversations are different, more relaxed, and easy. Bip prefers not to engage with women in any real sense, as he believes those days are gone; he describes himself as being volatile,unreliable and bad company for a woman. All the participants spoke about being lonely both historically and in the present. The findings of this study reveal a clear distinction between the requirements and expectations from the participants of the multitude of relational experiences across and throughout their lived experience. It is clear thatthroughout their life the participants' day to day delivery of expected norms and practiceswere more or less sustained and validated by their peers (school friends, work-mates andpub-pals). As the participants' journeyed to manhood and eventually marriage, they spokeabout feeling a pressure to deliver for the family which was both different and demanding.

The weight of family expectations was embraced by all the participants, but the delivery of these expectations affected them differently depending on the seriousness of the life challenges and the individual coping mechanisms which were ultimately determined by their history. Three of the four participants spoke about the support of their wives during difficult times although they (participants) were problematic to live with during those times. It was clearly the depth of understanding, real knowledge and subsequent support of their spouse, who was seen as a trusting confidant and who was privy to their inner struggles that got them through difficulties and importantly supported them in

maintaining their essential manly public demeanor. The importance of that support was crucial and acted almost like an identity pressure release valve, without which their world was in danger of imploding. This implies that men would be more vulnerable if experiencing poor relationship quality with a spouse or partner, whereas women may find and rely on support elsewhere to counteract the potentially negative effects of a poor spousal relationship. In old age, women tend to have a more varied social support network and often rely on their spouse, friends and family for social support. However, older men have a very different social network and rely less on friends as they get older, spending less time with their friends and seeing friendship as less important (Field and Minkler 1988).

It is clear from the findings of this study that although there is a much sought-after need and value put on re-igniting and maintaining strong (even loving) connections with family (siblings, children etc.), there is a longing for a deeper connection with a loving partner that understands them. This is similar to Kaye and Crittenden's (2015) study who describe the situation where older men who lose a spouse through death, in turn 'lose a close confidant and a critical companion' in their social support network. This absence of such an important and necessary human connection remains a critical detrimental aspect of the lived experience for three of the four participants, while Teddy's experience is different and seems to offer him a more positive future life trajectory, particularly from a personal fulfilment perspective.

Old age as we know it is associated with retirement and an easing towards end of life scenarios. Kaye and Crittenden (2015) argue in respect of the onset of ageing which when married to physical decline can create the possibility of a 'forced' retirement for those men primarily associated with 'manual labour' types of work. All of the participants of this study experienced premature retirement from employment, which created many challenges for them particularly those challenges concerned with locating themselves in this identity-less wasteland. Born into a culture that determined their worth by their ability to provide and be strong, this imposed, unfamiliar, confusing and unwanted way of being became 'a time of important redefinition' (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1996). With the absence of close trusting support and deteriorating physical/mental health, three of the participants of this study withdrew from mainstream society into a closed existence that served to keep them from being noticed and having to defend their lost manly charter. Teddy is different; his close connection to his children, ex-wife, and strong relationship

with a woman in his life, combined with the support of the local Community Development Project has enabled him to become a new version of himself: one that is employed, independent, and reasonably financially secure.

Three of the four participants spoke about being lonely at times but believes that's what happens when you're 'disconnected' and 'un-noticed'. The connection/relationship they have with someone that is outside their family milieu helps. This is not the case for Bip; he strongly believes that where he is now in his life is down to him, and it's too late to change anything. He spoke in a very determined way that seemed to give him some power over what was happening in his life; he was taking charge of where he found himself in life and making the rules in respect of how he should proceed. I believe this gave Bip some sense of control and independence. Throughout the whole of this study Bip never complained about either his historical negative adult life experiences, or his present daily experiences. Ratcliffe *et al.* (2019) in their study of older men and loneliness referred to the notion of 'pride' in who you are as being central to 'masculine identity', and being lonely was described as 'incompatible' to the men's understood hegemonic masculinity ideals, because of the 'assumed association of loneliness with ageing'.

As such the older male participants were openly disinclined to admit, or seek help, for loneliness, as it signified a subordinate masculine identity. Ratcliffe *et al.*'s (2019) findings resonates with the key finding of this study in respect of how the participants perceived themselves as unmanly, and how they subsequently quietly surrendered their hegemonic masculinity badge and gave up the struggle on what they felt they were born to do and be, which contributed to pushing them towards society's margins subsequently creating the conditions for disconnection and social isolation to exist.

6.5 Institutional and Family Related Abuse and Trauma

Over the course of the interviews there were trauma laced elicited stories associated with the varied negative childhood experiences of the participants which became more frequent and important. Bip's institutional sexual and physical abuse, Teddy's institutional abuse and predatory rape, Green's parental loveless childhood and Grey's hospital abandonment and subsequent family isolation were referred to regularly. These recollected and often dark conversations went back and forth through the participants' childhood and adulthood lived experiences, and at times became the rationales and

explanations for the elevation and personal exposures that contributed to understanding how the participants are perceived and very importantly to understanding how they perceive themselves.

Infurna *et al.* (2015), refer to the trauma caused by childhood emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse, and childhood misfortune which they argue can have detrimental and long-lasting effects on development across a lifespan. Caspi *et al.* (2002) point to the association of 'traumatic events' and childhood maltreatment' with greater distress in young adulthood as well as lower well-being. Childhood trauma is associated with premature declines in health in midlife and old age as well as chronic childhood stress being linked to unhealthy habits, such as smoking, alcohol dependency, and overeating (Infurna *et al.* 2015).

Trauma and its association with childhood to adulthood negative experiences as presented by Infurna *et al.* (2015) and Caspi *et al.* (2002) is reflected in the findings of this study in which the participants often spoke about a traumatised childhood and subsequent adult life journey that was seriously affected by their childhood lived experience. They referred to triggers and moments in their lives when they would be ambushed by a disturbing memory that could 'set them back' for days, even weeks. Bip appears to have endured the more severe and sustained abuse while incarcerated in the industrial school and unsurprisingly is still very angry when talking about that time in his young life. He speaks softly about the love he shares with his grandchildren and is happy when he is with them. He becomes animated when talking about his efforts to fix parts of his life that is broken when he is 'up for it', but there are times when he can't get the past out of the way, so he disconnects from the world until these feelings pass.

But Bip has softened in how he attempts to manage the 'pain inside'. Over the course of the interviews he seemed to shift to a more conciliatory demeanour; there was often times when he didn't care what damage he caused while trying to escape his demons, but he has moved to a place where he seeks to avoid hurting people while trying not to get hurt himself. Similar to Bip, Teddy also struggles with remnants of the past; he grits his teeth when looking back to difficult childhood times, which he suggests is never too far away. As long as he can remember there was never a time when the emotional cluster bomb of what that teacher did to him wasn't bouncing around his head threatening to explode. And

like Bip he also takes great solace from his grandchildren while at the same time being available to his children in any way he can.

Green believes the only way to create a way back to some kind of normal connection with his family is to 'keep his side of the street clean'. He argues that Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has taught him to be patient and to make sure there are no obstacles that might get in the way to any possible reconciliation with his wife and children, which he doesn't believe will happen any time soon (during the course of this thesis there were signs of some gentle reconnections with some of his children which delighted Green). Green regularly referred to the absence of love in the home where his father was 'cold and hard' and his mother's mental health negated against any kind of loving or nurturing environment. Green spoke about knowing he was not loved and eventually getting used to it, although a hatred for his father (who he blamed for what was at times an unhappy childhood) grew in him as he entered adulthood.

Green and Grey didn't experience the sexual and physical abuse that the other participants endured, but the emotional abuse and 'childhood misfortune' referred to by Infurna *et al. (2015)* was reflected in the stories of Green and Grey, with the later life symptoms of 'premature declines in health' in midlife and old age, as well as 'smoking' and 'alcohol dependency' being strongly evident in all the participants. Grey describes the distress he felt growing up and the rejection of him by his brothers and sisters. He maintains that this was because of the years he spent in hospital and never having any real connection with his siblings. It is easy to understand the trauma he endured when you add this sibling rejection to Grey's belief that neither his mother nor father had any love for him. Grey continued to question the reason for this absence of love, but just like the other participants seemed to adopt (unlike his attitude at the beginning of the interviews) a more passive approach to understanding why this was as the interviews progressed over time and depth.

Adams *et al. (2001)* argue that negative life events that include 'trauma' which can bring considerable 'pain and misfortune' can be turned around to create 'something good'. This emotional paradigm shift argument is advanced by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) in which they point to what could be described as a trauma survival indicator where 'benefit-finding' in the form of 'redemption sequences' replace bad experiences and events with good outcomes. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) suggest that personal growth can occur in

one or more of the following three different areas where 'good outcomes' are often realised: (1) changes in self, (2) changes in relationships with others, and (3) changes in philosophy of life and spiritual/existential beliefs. It is clearly reflected in the findings of this study that all the participants have all grown significantly using Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1995) three 'good outcome' areas as a measure. The findings point to transformative indicators where the participants have moved from a low demeanour to one that sees them participate in this emotionally challenging study; question their perceived failure as men; are confident enough to join decision making groups and processes, and are interested in supporting other men in their struggle.

Despite the seriousness of their childhood abuse related trauma and subsequent struggle to make their journey back, all the participants of this study believe (to various degrees, depending on how far along the 'road back' they are located) that something positive is still achievable in their lives and the lives of their wider family. Adams *et al.* (2001) points to the 'take home' message from the empirical literature; 'people who perceive benefits in adversity tend to show better recovery from and adjustment to negative events that brought them adversity in the first place'. Participants spoke about the positive shift in their lived experience when engaging in a process of giving something back to their family that might 'make up' for some of the hurt caused. These redemption scenarios and the benefits gained from the participants' engagement with the local Community Development Project were strongly evident in the findings and will be discussed in the following sections.

6.6   Redemption

Bip described his passage from childhood to where he is now as a 'challenging life journey, to say the least', and this description would be true for all four participants. They all struggled (and continue to struggle presently) through very dark days in their lives where their perceived accumulative failures as a man, father, husband, provider, brother, achiever, and whatever other personal failure deemed appropriately unmanly by individual participants determined their different and same live passages. Thompson and Langendoerfer (2015) cultural blueprint for 'being a man' where they refer to 'no sissy stuff, big wheel, sturdy oak, and give 'em hell masculinity injunctions' (discussed in more detail in the previous chapters) is consistent with the participants of this study's understanding of manly expectations. The perceived failures spoken about by each

participant are the manifested symptoms which hid the causations of a multitude of societal impactors and hegemonic ways of being, which served to trap them in a self-recrimination guilt laden loop. There was a need to address the 'things they did' which brought pain to the people closest to them, and the need for forgiveness that might free them from their torturous life sentence. Redemption would be the ideal scenario for the men in which they could be freed from the consequences of their 'wrongdoing'; but they never spoke about redemption just a need to put things right.

Bauer *et al.* (2008) in their 'Coping with Regret' longitudinal study points to the effect of 'intense regret on older adults and how it can 'compromise' their 'quality of life'. The experience of intense regret is associated with lower subjective well-being and more health problems particularly among older adults (Wrosch *et al.* 2005, 2007). The negative quality of life, lower well-being and health issues referred to is visible in this study; all four participants have health issues with three being regarded as very serious, which requires regular hospital and GP support. Bauer *et al.* (2008) also refer to research where older adults may employ 'self-protective' processes concerned with 'regret-specific goals' (Wrosch *et al.* 2005, Wrosch *et al.* 2007, Wrosch and Heckhausen 2002), which is broadly compatible with the findings of this study, where participants move beyond the self-protective position to a self-generated redemption scenario. In a redemption sequence, the storyteller depicts a transformation from a bad, affectively negative life scene to a subsequent good, affectively positive life scene. All participants set about seeking redemption in their own particular way and in their own time. The participants believed they had failed in life and they knew where and when this failure took place. The 'self-protected' processes (it was someone else's fault…. definitely not mine) that the participants employed wore thin over time, and they felt better as they eventually attempted to 'make things right'; the bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good, McAdams *et al. (*2001). This is certainly visible in respect of Bip, Teddy and Green who openly admit their wrongdoing and set about addressing this wrongdoing in individual and different ways. Bip spoke about his determination to support his son's children (his grandchildren) until the day he dies; Teddy is 'always' available for his children and lets nothing get in the way of his of care and support for them; Green keeps doing the right thing as he 'keeps his side of the street clean', and hopes this will act as a springboard to facilitate positive reconnection and forgiving scenarios; Grey believes that he did not hurt anybody, and regularly spoke about 'not starting any of this shit'; although at times he contradicts this position when describing

how historically he has vilified his brother and sister on several occasions for ignoring him; excluding him from family get-togethers and for treating him badly. Since recently attending his late sister's funeral, Grey now harbours hope for some kind of reconnection with 'what's left' of his family. He spoke about how nice they were to him and how 'maybe' he should make more of an effort with them. The following section refers to the importance of the local community development project in supporting the many challenges and struggles that the participants endured.

6.7   Engagement with the Local Community Development Project

My first contact with the project started with a knock on the door, and then when I wasn't bothering to answer, a shout in the window.

Grey (Participant)

Overview of the local community development project

The mission statement for this project includes a reference 'to act as a catalyst for positive change based on the identified needs of the community'. They carry out this work by listening to and sharing stories from the lived experience of humans; this way the missing pieces that make up and contribute to meaningful societal participation can be identified and addressed. It is also about the building of relationships and trust that creates the space to deliver community development. The work of the local community project that the participants engage with draws on the core principles related to community development, namely: starting where people are at in their lives, consciousness raising, relationship building and the achievement of human rights. While acknowledging these principles Ledwith (2020 pp. 81-85) insists that 'rather than dealing with symptoms that appear on the surface' we should employ a radical community development approach which is committed to 'transformative change', that 'questions everything' and goes deeper in challenging the 'contradictions of everyday life that we are persuaded to accept as normal'.

The project works with men who are excluded from society. There is a variety of reasons which contributes to the men's marginalisation, including, difficult life journeys, present realities, the absence of any social structure for 'real' engagement, and in many cases an over-reliance on alcohol as a coping mechanism. The various initiatives that the project employs in their work with the men including daily outreach and door knocking, a care

and repair service, initiating and supporting a social club, supporting the organising of trips away, provision of a welcoming drop-in, are all tools of engagement and trust building opportunities. Within these spaces and other relationships between both the workers and the men, and the men themselves are nurtured and developed creating new starting points for all concerned. While the men continue to struggle with the feeling of being disconnected and invisible to the wider community, the project has had an impact on building their confidence, consciousness and collectivity. The findings of this study point to a significant transformation in how the participants of this study have developed since engaging with this project; they think and act differently- not only in claiming their rights, but their emergence from the margins of this community and society as a whole. The project understands that some of the men of Swan's Rest continue to struggle and remain sad, disconnected, poor and unequal but there is a commitment to make every possible effort to continue to create the spaces for them to inch forward and engage so they can dream of, aspire to, and work towards the possibility for a new beginning or even an easing of some pain accrued from the fall-out of a life lived.

Consciousness- raising

'Conscientization' according to Freire (1970 p. 49) is the process of learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and is a pre-condition for taking action against the oppressive elements of reality. Through what he called *'the pedagogy of the oppressed'* people would 'perceive the reality of oppression, not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform'. Ledwith (2005 p. 54) suggests that community workers are critical educators and that 'every aspect of our work encourages the critical questioning of reality'. The process, she suggests is based on 'confidence, critical consciousness and collectivity; consciousness being the linchpin between the two' (Ledwith 2005 p. 2). Critical consciousness-raising is part of the emphasis within this project in order to break through what Milliband (1994) called 'hegemony of resignation which limits the perceptions of possibility. The view that there is no alternative is a powerful force in generating apathy and pessimism among those disempowered by hegemonic policies and ideology (Cooke and Shaw 1996 p. 2).

It is easy to understand why the participants of this study engage with this community project; Teddy and Grey refer to a feeling of 'belonging' and of being part of something that can exact 'change' in their lives. Green contributes to debates concerned with men's well-being and feels he has a 'voice' and that his voice is heard. While Bip has cast aside

his down-trodden demeanour to begin to address his health issues and also believes that working together there are real opportunities to challenge how older men are perceived. The work of this project has included trips both nationally and abroad, planned and saved for by the participants of this study. The project has created opportunities for different conversations to take place aimed at supporting individuals to consider more broadly their own lives and the lives of others.

Mutuality and dialogue in relationship building?

Dialogue and relationships are at the centre of any good community development work, but they both take time and require a process of mutuality and reciprocity. Freire tells us that faith in people is a prior requirement for dialogue, and love is at its foundation.

> When I do not love the World - when I do not love life - when I do not love people – I cannot start a dialogue.
>
> (Freire, 1977 p. 104)

The project puts its belief in the absolute capacity of people to name what is wrong in the world and act to change it. This is clearly emphasised in the work with the men, as they are encouraged to become involved in initiatives and programmes that reflect the conversations with workers of the project. And similar to the work of the community project this researcher was prepared to travel the extra relational mile to give of himself, and expose his own failings, mistakes, and bad decisions; this in turn created the condition that gave the participants a kind of permission to reveal clues of their own perceived failings that saw them struggling on the margins of society. If the type of love referred to by Freire (1977) is a mix of admiration, respect, understanding, caring and deep connection, then it was that love that was jointly shared as we journeyed together. And again, just like the work of the community project, as the relationship with the participants of this study grew so did the depth of discovery, knowledge and understanding which ultimately serves to inform both understanding and practice going forward. The work of the local community development project is guided by the core values and principles framework set out by the All Ireland Standards for Community Work (2016) (described earlier when discussing ethical considerations). These core values and principles including human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity informs the community development project as it prioritises the uniqueness of each individual it comes into contact with. The project works to achieve a dignified equality of opportunity

with no barriers, and leading to equality of outcome and condition. Human Rights will be discussed in the following section.

Human rights

Human rights are a vital component of community development, which should according to Ife (2010 p. 68), 'seek to affirm human rights… enable people to realise and exercise their human rights and to be protected from human rights abuse'. He argues that "if it is only in human community that we can fully define, discover and realize our humanity it is only in human community that we can achieve human rights" (Ife 2010 p. 128). He suggests that human rights, perhaps previously in the background of community work values and principles, could be put to the forefront to provide a useful explicit focus that such a synthesis could be mutually complimentary and beneficial (Ife 2010 p. 128).

The participants of this study display various degrees of confidence and self-belief and this is exemplified in the different levels of engagement in the many initiatives of the local community project; all the participants spoke about their involvement with the community project and how the 'better together' approach helped them in developing the confidence and skills to pursue their basics needs, particularly related to housing and quality of life. Participants spoke about the many conversations, information sharing, and meetings concerned with 'basic stuff' including living conditions, food poverty and having your voice heard, which gave them confidence and self-belief.

Teddy is deeply involved with regeneration, the residents' association, fund-raising, social club, etc., while Grey would have less engagement at the political level and carries out some voluntary work with the community project where he participates in the men's group and social club. Green's main community involvement is as voluntary gardener of Swan's Rest, but he also is part of the residents' group (although is inclined to sit at the back and away from the group), and has been away with the men's group on many occasions. Bip spends much of his time visiting his grandchildren around the country and trying to stay on top of his health issues, but still has time to support the residents' association and social club; he also is very much involved with the men's group and often volunteers for helping out in the communal kitchen.

From the stories the participants of this study tell of their engagement with the local community development project it is clear that they have been on a difficult journey to

where they are now in their lives; they have moved from a general apathetic dependent demeanour to one that has fostered a human rights awareness and are now at a place where they believe that their basic needs of adequate housing, food and some level of happiness is not gifted, instead it's their entitlement.

6.8   Class

Class can be defined as a large-scale grouping of people who share common economic resources, which strongly influence the type of lifestyle they are able to lead.

(Giddens 2006 p. 300)

The participants of this study were all working class with one being from a poor farming background. This study shows that their similar class position was a primary factor in creating the environment from which their various life trajectories took them to Swan's Rest. Drudy (1995 p. 295) argues that class position is a major determinant of life conditions and resources, including access to property and income, to education, to housing, to good health and power. The findings of this study point to generational reproduction of social inequality. All the participants have experienced (and to this day continue to endure) various forms of poverty throughout their life as a result of the class they were born into (see Figure 6 below).

The data shows that there were opportunities for the participants to achieve a standard that may have delivered better life outcomes, but mostly within their stratified class boundaries. Instead, negative outcomes for all the participants were the result of a combination of factors revealed in the data, including, class, socioeconomic placement within their class, abuse, and subsequent addiction, family breakdown and a limited quality of life. Sennett and Cobb (1993 p. 159) while referring to Sartre's notion of a 'class society' that sees the unfair distribution of 'scarce' resources by those with 'arbitrary power'; captures very well the life landscape of the participants. They continue by reflecting the participants' compliant lived reality as they refer to the 'psychological dimensions of class', which they claim serves the purpose of 'legitimating deprivation, unfair allocation of resources, and paltry rewards.

The social class of the participants was not a concept they ever thought anything of; their collective acceptance of their place in the world was generationally internalized and even embraced. The participants' working-class position was the platform, the over-arching concept and pre-determined starting point of their lives that ensured the seldom questioned social order while at the same time maintaining the normative status quo. The compliant nature of all the participants as they navigated their way around and through the rules, values, norms, and structures of their cultural parameters was clearly evidenced in the data. Using Bourdieu's idea of '*habitus*' which places individuals into particular social class groupings, and Gramsci's concept of cultural '*hegemony*' which convinces individuals and groups that the existing set of rules and norms is just the way the world is and operates (Habitus and Hegemony will be discussed in more detail in the following section). The Journey through the working-class lives of all the participants also threw up various negative realities including various forms of poverty. These poverty laden challenges when married to the child-to-man life experiences combined to push these men (participants) to society's margins.
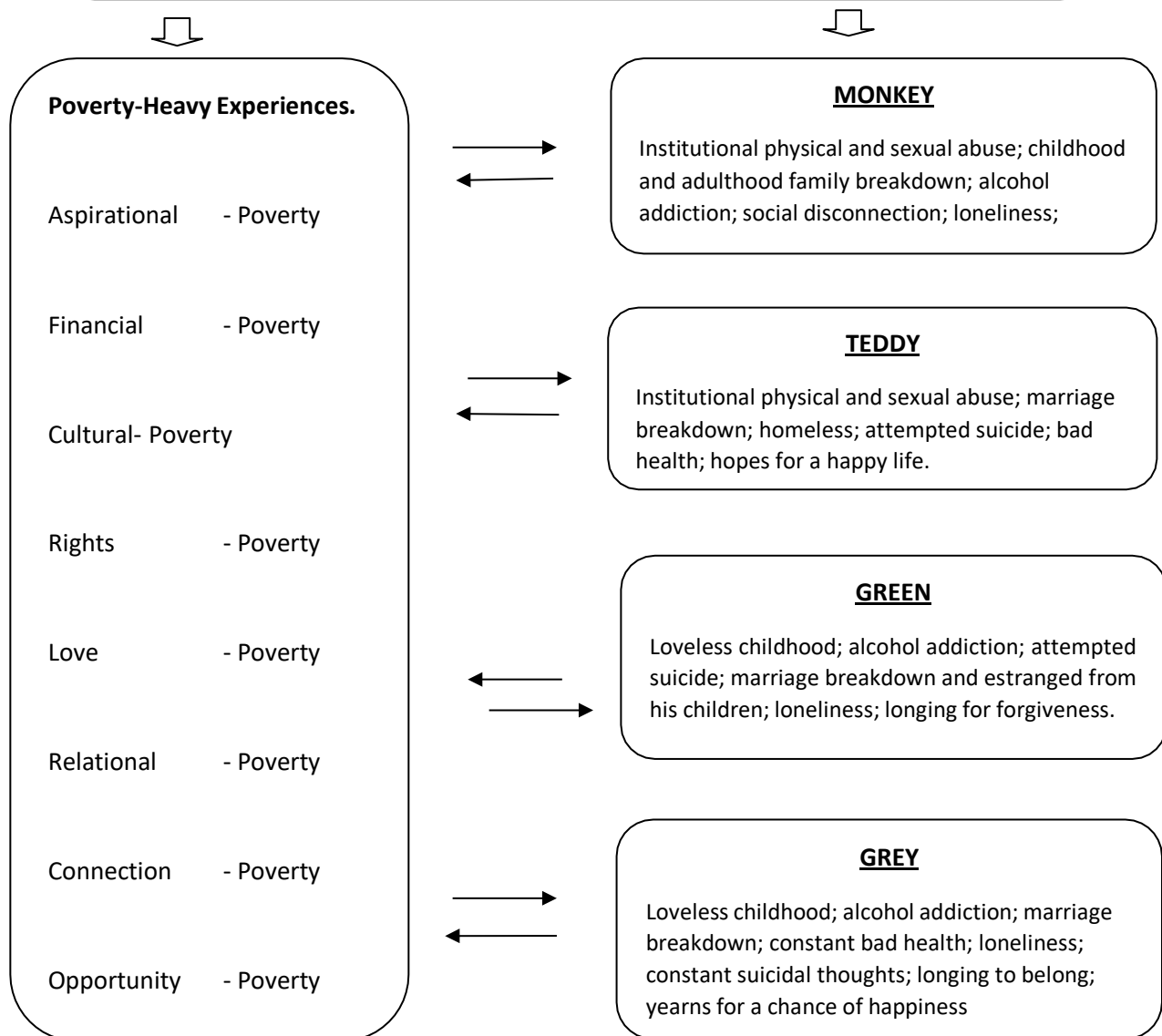
Poverty-Heavy Experiences.

Aspirational   - Poverty

Financial   - Poverty

Cultural- Poverty

Rights   - Poverty

Love   - Poverty

Relational   - Poverty

Connection   - Poverty

Opportunity   - Poverty

MONKEY

Institutional physical and sexual abuse; childhood and adulthood family breakdown; alcohol addiction; social disconnection; loneliness;

TEDDY

Institutional physical and sexual abuse; marriage breakdown; homeless; attempted suicide; bad health; hopes for a happy life.

GREEN

Loveless childhood; alcohol addiction; attempted suicide; marriage breakdown and estranged from his children; loneliness; longing for forgiveness.

GREY

Loveless childhood; alcohol addiction; marriage breakdown; constant bad health; loneliness; constant suicidal thoughts; longing to belong; yearns for a chance of happiness

Figure 6   Poverty Heavy Experiences

The previous illustration, Figure 6, symbolises the participants' experience of life through a socially determined class-structure lens, with the multiplicity of major life impactors shown to create a holistic understanding of a life lived. It is quite striking how similar the outcomes for the individual participants are, and even now at this stage of their lives their struggles are quite similar and different. Engaging with the local community project has created contrasting levels of participation and ambitions for change; there is a visible momentum being generated by each individual where, if they are not actively searching for renewed life opportunities that might deliver, love, redemption and belonging, they are at least hoping to find their way back to some kind of acceptable social reality.

6.9   The Intersectionality of Poverty, Habitus, Cultural Hegemony and Social Class

Where can I be King?
In that world that spins me around?
In the country of my birth?
In the school that slowed me down?
In the job that stole my hours?
In the way that wasn't true?
In the family that I love?
In the love that saved my life?
In the body known as me?
*(*Author*)*

The effects of poverty endured by the participants of this study came in many guises. Apart from the expected visible effects and outcomes of the more obvious forms of poverty including, financial, educational, relational, etc., which contributed to the participants of this study living on the margins of society and languishing on the lower rungs of the social housing ladder; it was the subsequent unseen, and un-noticed fall-out from a life-time of struggle from child to man, being old, poor, living alone, and disconnected that compounded their exile to the margins of life. The emotions attached to being alone, not talking to anyone, leaving the flat and dreading coming back to emptiness also weighed heavy. The invisible mass and multiplicity of accumulative societal poverty segments that contributed to the participants' understandings of their world fooled them. There was never a time that they questioned their seemingly coordinated activities as humans, their sociological interactions with each other, their shared culture and rules that bind them to each other. This was their life; this is how things are; it is up to them to fix it. They felt compelled to 'get on with it' or be viewed as having

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failed. The findings of this study point to a pre-determined pathway to limited life chances, illusions of agency, and embedded and expected social norms based on the limited socioeconomic cultural inheritance of the participants. Belief systems that emanate from these cultural determinants pushed the participants to make choices in a vacuum of un-noticed ideologies that were never constructed to serve them.

Various studies have shown the connection between poverty and negative life experiences and opportunities, particularly as it is seen as a natural way of being. It is also clear that this connection to poverty is a major life determinant and also extends to a multiplicity of poverties referred to earlier in this chapter. Poverty created different and sometimes the same negative life outcomes for the participants of this study particularly in relation to mental health.

Poverty and mental health

Holz *et al.* (2015) longitudinal study (from 3 months old to 25 years old) of childhood poverty and its effects on 'conduct disorder' and 'brain structure and function' found a clear correlation with other studies that 'highlighted the association between poverty and conduct disorder'. They cite Costello *et al.* (2003) and Evans *et al*. (2013) who argue that evidence indicates that the 'main' determinant of mental health issues such as conduct disorder is poverty. Conduct disorder has many forms including: 'rule violation and anti-social behaviour' which can be characterised by aggressive, deceptive, and destructive behaviour patterns, particularly towards peers and adults (American Psychiatric Association 1994). Costello *et al.* (2003) argues that 'poverty is linked to the development of conduct disorder; implying, social causation pathways, that is, exposure to adversity and stress'.

The messages elicited from this study and others is that poverty is a major impactor on the mechanisms and structures of society which in effect contributes to the stratification and life-pathway that compounds and sustains the inherited struggle of those who have less. Van Kempen (1997) in her article on 'poverty pockets and life chances and the role of 'place' in shaping social inequality seems to agree, and points to the 'encompassing character' caused by the 'interrelatedness' of 'four mechanisms' concerned with employment, socialisation, stigmatisation, and limited access to social rights. She refers to the lack of economic, social and cultural capital and access to 'provisions' which is a 'living and growing up in a poverty pocket'. Swan's Rest is a poverty pocket surrounded

by other poverty pockets in its immediate vicinity. The combination of poverty induced consequences and subsequent connected or not, negative life experiences contrived to push the participants of this study to society's margins.

Poverty pockets affect life chances in such a way that leads to restricted choices and allows feelings of social exclusion to reign (Van Kempen 1997). Ward *et al.* (2019 p. 24) points to the statistics generated through TILDA (The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing) that seem to agree with the connection with poverty and life chances, when reporting that older people with third level education were 'the least likely to be in the most socially isolated group. When used in relation to the participants of this study and the various contributing factors that determined their journey to Swan's Rest, where they all live alone, Ward *et al*. (2019) point to the 'stark' difference of 22% chance of those living alone being isolated, compared to 4% of those who lived with someone. Third level education as a significant indicator when determining barriers of choice and life chances for those in society who have less. According to Murray and Smyth (2020 p. 55) the argument that 'higher education is equally accessible to all, based solely on choice and academic merit, is debatable' In exploring the literature contained in the 'Growing Up in Ireland' (the National Longitudinal Study of Children), Murray and Smyth (2020 p. 56) state that children with 'parents from the professional and managerial backgrounds are significantly more likely to attend university while those with parents from the manual and skilled classes are more likely to attend institutes of technology'. Murray and Smyth (2020 p. 57) cite Reay and Ball, (1998 p. 432) who point to the relevance of differences in social class which contributed to the lack of participation in third level education citing tuition fees and 'other costs associated with third level education', lack of awareness of the availability of grants to those in the 'lower socio-economic classes, and no real pressure from 'working-class' parents 'towards a particular educational trajectory'. The starting points for the participants of this narrative study determined the trajectory of their journey in life; the cultural, economic, and social resources that they were born into are the ingredients that shaped their identity. The following section will explore this concept further.

Habitus

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, and Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony, offers a theoretical perspective when seeking to better understand the lived experiences of the participants. It gave insight and helped to explain the participants'

behaviour and complicity in respect of how they went about their daily lives and why they were impervious to any thoughts that might allow them to challenge their place in society. Bourdieu (1984 p. 172) argues that people's lifestyles are the 'systematic products of habitus'; for example, members of the same social class by definition share structurally similar positions within society that engender structurally similar experiences of social relations, processes and structures (Grenfell 2014 pp. 49-64). Bourdieu (1984) suggests that different classes are denoted by their different ways of being, different taste; different ways of acting in the world; their lifestyles signified by the clothes they wear, food they eat, hairstyles, accent, music they listen to, etc. This was clearly shown in how the individual participants habitus of ambition, view of the world, acceptance of certain values and social outcomes impacted their individual lived experiences of poverty, mental health, addiction, employment etc., and although uniquely individual in acting out their lives, their negative life outcomes reflected their collective habitus. The lower-class stratification that the participants of this study experienced, which exhibited little economic, social, or cultural capital, could be attributed to and explained by their habitus, which has been internalised and played out in a manifestation of agreed beliefs, values and norms that are culturally specific to their class.

Cultural Hegemony: Life is hard sometimes...just get on with it

The belief and acceptance of the participants that their lives are just the way the world is and something they need to accept as being the natural order of things was never questioned. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony; 'Common Sense', the traditional popular conception of the world (Gramsci 1971 p. 199), was based on the notion that we all share 'common sense' values and as a way of creating a subordinate and complicit society strategies could be devised that made sense in the cultural/traditional worlds of people. The concept of cultural hegemony is reflected in how the participants blamed themselves on their failures and never looked beyond themselves or others to apportion blame or even look for answers. The concept is also helpful in creating the understanding as to how those with power and influence (and their friends) have maintained the status-quo by drawing on substantial resources in order to shape public opinion and secure legitimisation by those who have less. The 'common sense' that Gramsci (1971) referred to is translated into cultural norms which help people make sense of the world, which in turn serves to perpetuate what is believed to be the natural order of things. Because the participants were unlucky to be born into their class and have inherited the norms and values associated with their place in the world they comply with the culture that is given

to them and the cultural hegemon that has them in its grip, making them blind to see outside of their world while disproportionally benefitting a dominant group withinsociety.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an analysis of the lived experience of older men who currently reside in a public sheltered housing complex in Dublin and their engagement with the local community development project. The combination of their structurally similar positions within society, and the acceptance of one's lot, adopted by the participants, when acted out in a form of corrupted agency produces an acceptance of societal stratification which goes un-noticed; instead, it fools the participants into thinking that they are participating in the natural order of social milieu that will ultimately deliver life's prizes. Their total immersion into the culturally embedded patriarchal socialised world determined not only their life journey starting point but also dominated their pathway choices which led them to where they are now. They accepted their place in the world without question; their world was where they belonged, where they embraced their advantage as men and where they grappled with a world that was moving away from industry and replacing muscle with mind. The varied but not too different socioeconomic positions, of class, individual struggles with life changing catastrophes, abuse, addiction, isolation, guilt, and personal human hurt created a variety of life trajectories for the participants. These individual life trajectories (at the time of writing) place them in sometimes the same, as well as different social spaces, with different hopes and expectations for the future. The final chapter will summarise the thesis with references to the key points of the findings and recommendations for future research and learning.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This is the final chapter and provides a summary of the thesis which will include a recapitulation of the purpose, findings, and main points of the study. There is also a reference to the connection of the participants with the local CDP and their participation in this study. Particular attention is given to the dual role of the narrative inquiry process in respect of both eliciting valuable data as well as its value as a community development tool.

Under the heading 'broader collaboration for change' gender specific strategies are discussed as well as the sharing elements of this study as a way of informing the discourse when working with marginalised men. Practical solutions for change are suggested in respect of developing initiatives in sheltered housing as well as naming old men living on life's margins as a specific 'target group' in Government interventions. There is also a reference made to convincing all involved in inter-agency collaboration and funding to support interventions and work based on the learning generated from this study. Finally, there is a reference to developing a strategy when engaging with the individual, to moving to a collective perspective when working for change.

7.2 Recapitulation of purpose and findings of the study

Chapter one explains the rationale for employing narrative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of older men living in public sheltered housing units, in respect of life, loss, connection and community development. An outline of the aims and objectives are also described in this chapter as we attempted to elicit new knowledge and understanding from the stories told that would also inform our practice as professionals. In chapter two the relevant literature that both informed this researcher and also the interrogation of the findings is presented. Chapter three described why narrative inquiry was the best-fit-for-purpose methodology that would produce important data for this study. It also referred to the research design which is determined not only by the researcher's ontological perspective but also a rigorous ethical consideration. The participants stories are explored in chapter four in which the primary emerging themes are surfaced. Connolly (2007 p. 453) describes this stage as 'messy' in which we endeavour to reflect both the narrator

and researcher's voice in the data. Subsequently the data is organised, disseminated, and presented as the main findings in Chapter five, followed by a comprehensive discussion and analysis of the main findings in chapter six, while the following chapter refers to the key findings of the study.

7.3   Key Findings

Contextualising the Findings

The central research question for the purpose of this study is:

> *'How do older men living in sheltered housing talk about their lives and their engagement with the local community development project?'*
> *'Older men's stories of life, loss, connection, and community development'.*

As community development workers we are in the business of creating the conditions for transformative change. We do this by listening to stories of a life lived; by introducing initiatives such as capacity building interventions, awareness workshops, volunteering opportunities, participatory research involvement etc. New transformative spaces were identified by the findings of this study in which the narratives of the lived experiences of the participants and their engagement with their local community development project are explored. Moving beyond the surface layers in order to reach deeper depths of discovery was only made possible by the honest engagement and endeavour of both participants and researcher jointly unpacking the elicited narratives. It was this collaboration based on an unbreakable trust and a relational familiarity that has contributed towards the rich findings of this study. The involvement in the back-and-forth clarity seeking that occurred throughout the interview process, and ongoing conversations that took place through to the final writing up of the findings generated a sense of ownership of the outcomes for the participants. The revelations and discovery that surfaced, both surprised and challenged the participants of this study, but also unexpectedly allowed for a joining up of some life dots for the participants that created further insights and deeper conversations.

The findings of this study point to a forlorn, negative projection into the future of disconnection, loneliness, addiction-escapism, and apathy for the participants. Engagement with their local community development project is more than just about being occupied or filling in time; it is a progressive, participative experience which seeks

to engage at a level that enables connection and subsequently supports an array of ideas and initiatives that places the men the project works with in situations and circumstances that involve decision making scenarios that can affect their lives. The findings of this study evidence that the CDP is a transformative lifeline available to the participants. The findings emphasise the importance of the participants engagement with the community development project which they described helped create a mind-set that brought them from the personal to the political in exploring avenues for change. Their participation in a variety of interventions and planning processes has instilled in them a strong belief that local collective transformative initiatives can have a contagion impact (when others witnessed their busyness and asked questions) and lead to broader social change. The participants also felt empowered in these spaces as their voice was not only heard but listened to and acted upon.

The findings also point to the participants suffering adverse outcomes from a life lived. The accumulative major themes that emerged including notions of masculinity (which harboured ways and expectations of 'being' in the world); Institutional abuse, alcohol abuse, love / loss / disconnection, and a yearning for redemption, over time coagulated and congealed to form an unsavoury sense of identity for the participants. Using the concepts of poverty, habitus, cultural hegemony, and the relevance of class as a kind of separating agent to break down the major themes and create clarity in the search to understand cause and consequences of a life lived, was instrumental in making sense of the data. Very importantly, the ability to give 'voice' to the participants was generated by the special relationship between the participants and the researcher which was the major contributing factor in eliciting the wealth of stories which delivered the rich bounty of data for this study.

So what?

It is clear from the findings that older men residing in Swan's Rest sheltered housing complex carry an extraordinarily heavy life load. Their complicity with the cultural hegemonic map for being in the world continues to weigh them down. The curtain has come down on the multitude of perceived expected performances concerned with being a man and has left them wanting. Their struggle is very real. Detailed descriptions by the participants of a life of struggle exposes the researcher and reader of this thesis to the deeply entrenched, seldom (if ever) spoken about causations, and creates anunderstanding of the subsequent level of societal disconnection and the painful emotional

and physical impact of later life struggles. The findings that emerged from the collective narratives of the participants of this study will better inform us as practitioners and educators in developing pathways back from marginalised landscapes that only serve to impose a worthless demeanour that crushes the heart and mind. This study has created a depth of knowledge that will hopefully generate more than a curiosity in how we work with such challenges. In our work we collectively aim to see past the symptoms to address the causations of struggle and oppression, and in this way, we negate against perpetuating the dependent, voiceless existence exhibited by the participants of this study. These causations based in many cases on wrongful judgemental attitudes are conducive to denying them the opportunities for transformative change that could lead to both a redefinition of identity and a purposeful role in society. The participants referred to feeling they were invisible in a societal context, suggesting at best an inconvenient, insignificant, and passive existence as opposed to the feeling of being a worthless drain on society that was a result of their failure as men.

The participants of this study have been engaging with the local community development project (CDP) for many years (in some cases more than a decade) and they regularly talk about being in a better place now in their life because of this engagement. They are attempting to take a road in from the margins that is not known to them, and one that was not available to them before their engagement with their CDP, and now also with this research study. The work of the CDP has allowed the participants of this study an opportunity of a new starting point; one which provides them with the tools to try and re-engage at many different levels. They have travelled nationally and internationally with the CDP; from Letterfrack in Connemara to Auschwitz; Spike Island to the European Parliament in Brussels, and more. They are brave pathfinders that have shared deep life experiences concerned with stories of masculinity, redemption, family, addiction, abuse, disconnect and love and loss, all captured in their class. Their stories of engagement with the CDP gives hope for others that might be lost.

Dual function of the narrative inquiry construct

Narrative is a fundamentally human way to give new life to and create an understanding and meaning from elicited stories of a life lived. Using narrative as the research methodology was the key factor to generating important findings; the narrator and listener co-journeying essence of the methodology enabled deep telling and discovery based on a reciprocal trusting experience. The importance of the listener being of the same sex,

similar age, and social class, but with high education attainment in the social sciences field created the condition for a rich bounty of valuable data.

The one-to-one participant led conversational process (that is the bedrock of narrative research) could also be used in the day-to-day community development work with everyone. The interviews/conversations/discussions and back and forth validation process led to deep informed and important elicitation of stories of a life lived and almost forgotten, or maybe consciously or subconsciously hidden. It was this trusting relational experience that gave strength to the participants to imagine new life potentialities where before theirs was at best a troubled existence. The process from elicitation of stories of a life lived to the creation of narratives that bring clarity, explanation and even more questions can be used as a developmental tool that helps entwine the threads of life's tapestry in a professional and safe manner while building the capacity of those engaging to participate in a broader sense. The co-journeying conversational telling experience at times shone a light into dark, almost forgotten periods in the participants' lives. We need to explore ways of up-skilling ourselves in one-to-one working with those that shy away from collective opportunities, as well as sourcing the funding for this time-consuming community work. This work entails a focus on working for change that lifts andempowers people to come together and participate in the collective. The political, social and economic platforms and strategies that is our workscape demand answers for the individual as well as the collective. Questions of class, poverty, discrimination, identity, and struggle are common to all, as are the principles of community development. The deep self-discovery experience of this one-to-one work not only afforded the participants of this study the possibility for self-forgiveness, but also created the possibility for an understanding of the struggle of others. This looking outside themselves is the first steps in moving towards a collective analysis and subsequently a collective response.

One-to-one work over the last number of years has seen some of the harder to reach men move to participate from that individual work initially into small group gatherings and then larger groups where they found new voice. Participants have become more visible in their community, as they engage with the local project and with each other at a level not seen previously. They have established a certain credibility within the complex as they lead from the front in engaging with various initiatives from regeneration to planningtrips out of their lived environment. Over the years, all of the participants of this study have been part of the planning and delivery of visits to destinations such as Auschwitz,

The European Parliament, Aran Islands, Letterfrack, etc. They continue to be involved in Residents Groups, Men's Sheds, Social Club, various gatherings and community initiatives. This work started with individual conversations with individual men who avoided the collective spaces. These men can now be seen by others who watch and wait, as having stepped in from the edge. There is a sense of momentum of purpose being created that will undoubtedly convince others that change is possible. For some of these men finding their way back from life's margins may not be the impossibility it once was.

7.4   Recommendations for further research and Professional Practice

Broader collaboration for change

The findings from this study urges us to explore gender specific strategies for working with older marginalised men that afford us opportunities to share important lived experiences that will allow for greater learning and subsequently inform both our practice and the discourse regarding working with men on the margins going forward. I would suggest that segments and stories from this study should be shared with relevant communication/publication platforms, groups, projects, and institutions that have an interest in working with older hard to reach men. As researchers, practitioners and educators interested in social change we need to move beyond a quick-fix symptom focus to developing more long-term educational and informed consciousness raising opportunities. The findings point to the sensitivity required to address the narratives revealed in this study. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' formula that captures how we work with these hard-to-reach, vulnerable men. When combined with the experience from community development practitioners in this field, these findings would contribute to our learning and subsequent practice. In this regard I would encourage third level educational institutions to explore the potential that community workers/researchers in this particular field could bring to the curriculum table. By this I mean practical workshops could be developed by third level institutions and practitioners in the field that brings new in-sights and learning in respect of working one-to-one, from research type discovery to implementation of interventions and mechanisms of support that will hopefully move those hard-to-reach individuals to a collective endeavour.

Practical immediate actions for change

With more than one hundred Public Sheltered Housing Complexes in Dublin City alone (similar to 'Swan's Rest'), accommodating more than 3,200 units therein (Dublin City

Council 2018)), an immediate response to addressing the social isolation, poverty and social inequality identified in this study could be the development of a local joint initiative supported by Dublin City Council (landlord), the Local Community Development Project, and driven by residents of the individual Sheltered Housing Complexes. Setting up this initiative would involve sourcing funding for a dedicated community worker (possible funders; Local Partnership/Leader Company, City/County Council, Other), who would have a daily presence in the sheltered housing complex and who would work towards building the trust and subsequent capacity of the residents to engage in decision making processes that affect their lives (using one-to-one conversational strategies as described previously that would give them hope, help them in building their confidence and belief, in order to re-imagine their world).

With this collective support they would work towards developing a local forum where they would regularly meet representatives of their landlord and other agencies and work together in partnership to address their needs. The initiative would be a win-win scenario for all, as residents are supported in making their way back from society's margins to participate meaningfully with decision makers, who would now be collaborating with residents that are actively moving away from just a bearable existence (which is reflected in a forlorn, self-neglected demeanour) to one where hope for the future is apparent, which is reflected in pride of self and place. This unique partnership could be replicated in other parts of the city and subsequently throughout the state. It may even lead to a province/national forum where ideas and learning can be shared, explored, and developed. Performance indicators and benchmarking are increasingly being used in decision making processes in respect of funding and supporting programmes and initiatives. There is a strong case to be made to fund community work based on the data in this study. This research identifies a reduction in isolation, loneliness, and alcohol intake described by the men in this study as a result of their engagement with the community development project. The participants also referred to an uptake in physical activities, awareness around mental health and an engagement in processes that stimulate and encourage their on-going well-being. Working for change where we put people first would involve an inter-agency collaboration with Dublin City Council (DCC), Health Service Executive (HSE) and the local community development project working towards positive outcomes for older people based on informed research that can be both practical and economically viable.

Resourcing the argument for change

The Department of Rural and Community Development provides funding through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) that aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion, particularly within disadvantaged communities. This national government initiative is a primary activator in creating social change, but older men are not named as a specific target group in the SICAP programme plan (Pobal 2018). The findings of this study outline key messages and highlights an urgent need to change the narrative that negates against prioritising the needs of older men living on life's margins. Making a case for this work can be achieved through engagement with the Local Community Development Committee's (of which there are 33 nationally) who manage SICAP at a local level and are obligated to address an 'emerging need target group' based on specific identified needs (Pobal 2018).

7.5   Final Reflective Word; 'the power of one'

As community workers we employ various principles to guide us in our work; we use strategies to bring people together, to collectively analyse the issues they face and act collectively for change, but pressure and the weight of the social ills that plague the communities we work with may push us past the individual, leaving behind those who really struggle with the issues we are aiming to address. This study has brought my attention back to the individual biographies that are at the heart of the research. As workers we need to pay more attention to the individual. Dedicated resourced community work with the individual that is concentrated on building their capacity to take their place in the world will have a contagion, peer influenced positive effect on the collective; if I/he can do it so can you/I? Collective informed action is our end game as community practitioners and we must strive towards this goal, but we need to bring everyone possible with us including those who need the one-to-one support to enable them to participate at a collective level. If we are to be successful in confronting oppressive societal challenges and be transformative in our work, community development with hard-to-reach communities needs to firstly undergo a process of personal development. Participants from such communities need to collaborate with community workers in building a trusting relational understanding that can progress them from 'individual' to collective analysis, actions, and outcomes.

Appendices

Appendix 1: First Employer permission letter

Mr Thomas Coombes

Manager

Bluebell Community Development Project

Bluebell Ave.

Dublin 12

20-01-2015

Dear Tommy,

I acknowledge yours of 22/12/2014 and as always wish you well on this very positive and worthwhile academic venture. I have tracked your progress on this PHD programme and have always striven to be as supportive as possible.

The details of your research I have noted and I feel that the results will enhance both your own and the wider organisations ability to respond to the needs of this very central target group.

Again congratulations to you on coming this far with your academic work and the best of luck with it going forward.

Yours sincerely

John Burns

Community Development Coordinator

Canals Community Partnership

Ph. ███████

Appendix 2: Second Employer permission letter

BLUEBELL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (CDP)

Bluebell Youth & Community Centre, Bluebell Road, Bluebell, Dublin 12

Ph.01-4601366 Fax 01-4601367

E-mail. admin@bluebellcdp.com

14/11/2014

Dear Thomas

The board of Bluebell CDP is fully supportive of your Doctorate in Social Science in Maynooth University. Your thesis that explores the lived experiences of older men in the sheltered housing units in Bluebell is seen by this board as a major contribution to the work of this project.

We have been informed by your good self on an ongoing basis the process and nature of the interviews with the men and we are very happy with your professionalism and understanding of the challenges that this process presents.

We would like to take this opportunity to offer you any assistance that you may require, and wish you good luck in your endeavour.

Yours sincerely

Liz Fagan

Chairperson

Bluebell CDP

Appendix 3: Counselling provision support agreement letter

INCHICORE BLUEBELL COMMUNITY ADDICTIION TEAM

7/1/2015

Dear Thomas

Further to your letter and our recent discussion re: The Inchicore and Bluebell Community Addiction Team providing counselling/key working support to participants of your PhD study. I wish to confirm that we are in a position to provide this should the need arise. I have advised Michael Walsh and Laura o'D (IBCAT staff) who are based in Bluebell of the details and are our agreement to provide the necessary supports. I hope this finds you well Tommy, if we can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me or any of the staff in either Bluebell or Inchicore.

Kind Regards

Greg Christodoulu
IIBACT Co-ordinator

Appendix 4: Participant Research Consent Form

Participant Research Consent Form

Research Title

How do older men living in sheltered housing units talk about their lives and their engagement with the local community development project?

Programme: Doctor of Social Science

Researcher: Thomas Coombes

Contact details: thomas.coombes.2009@nuim.ie, thomascoombes@eircom.net

Phone: 0858893942

Research Supervisor: Hilary Tierney

Contact details: 0879194812

Thank you for considering participation in this study which will take place between February 2015 and October 2015. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of the basis of your involvement and my obligations in the research study. At the end of the form you will be asked to formally agree to participate in the study.

A separate conversation can be arranged if you require any further information regarding the study prior to signing this form, or at any time during or following the interviews.

1. Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this project are to:

1. Complete a thesis in order to fulfil a major course requirement for the Doctor of Social Science programme in Maynooth University.

Elicit the stories regarding the lived experience of older men residing in sheltered housing units in Bluebell, and explore to what extent has their engagement with the local community development project had on this experience?

2. Inform the discourse and subsequently our professional practice.

Do you understand the purpose of the study?

Yes _____ *No* _____

2. Recording Conversations

In the first instance, if you grant permission for recording/videotaping, no sound files/recordings will be used for any purpose other than to do this study, and will not be played for any reason other than to do this study. At the end of the study, all sound files will be destroyed unless you give express permission for them to be archived as part of an oral record. Such permission will be sought after the completion of the project.

Do you give your permission for our conversations to be audio/video recorded?

Yes _____ *No* _____

Do you understand that sound files will be destroyed unless you give separate and explicit permission for them to be kept as part of an oral record?

Yes _____ *No* _____

3. Anonymity

Locating the research to sheltered housing units in Dublin creates a greater possibility of participants in the study being recognised. Although you will be given pseudonyms, there is a chance that you could be recognised from the research thesis and any subsequent publications.

Do you understand that it will not be possible to guarantee total anonymity?

Yes _____ *No* _____

4. Confidentiality

Given the limitations outlined above, your confidentiality will be safeguarded in the following ways. Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection, or in the written thesis; instead, you and any other person involved will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports.

Do you give permission to be quoted directly in the final thesis?

*Yes   No   *

Do you give permission to be quoted directly in publications and other media?

*Yes   No   *

Are you willing to have un-attributed quotations from our interviews appear in the completed doctoral thesis as a part of the Doctor of Social Science Programme, Dept. of Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University?

*Yes   No   *

Are you willing to have un-attributed quotations from our interviews used by me in publications and other media?

*Yes   No   *

All information from our conversations will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. Recordings/transcripts/notes are available to you during the research and can be accessed at any time, by arrangement

Are you satisfied that information from our conversations will be kept safely and that you can access it at any time?

*Yes   No   *

5. Withdrawing from the research study

Your participation in this research is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point of the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice.

Do you understand that you may withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason and without prejudice?

*Yes   No   *

6. Agreement to Participate

Having considered the questions on this consent form and asked for and received any clarification or further information, do you agree to participate in this study on the basis outlined above?

Yes _____   *No* _____   Name (Block) _____

Signature_____Date_____

I agree to conduct the research on the basis outlined above:

Researcher_____Date _____

Please contact me by phone or email during the normal working week to ask any questions or discuss any aspect of the project.

Appendix 5: Confidentiality Statement

It is my intention to make this interview process as pleasant an experience as possible so that you can relax and answer the questions as honestly as possible.

At all times your confidentiality will be protected except if it affects you or someone else's wellbeing. If during the interview process you were to divulge intent to commit a crime or if I am ordered by the court or by any lawful authority to disclose information disclosed during the interview sessions. You will be informed immediately of any disclosure I am compelled to make.

However, the questions I will be asking you will not raise any of these issues, but be aware when answering of any possible implications.

Be assured that in all circumstances Maynooth University will take all appropriate lawful steps possible to guarantee confidentiality.

Thomas Coombes

Student (year 3.)

Doctor of Social Science programme

Maynooth University.

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