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The Impact of the 2008 Great Recession on the Well-Being, Young Adult Development, and Masculine Identity of Emerging Adult Irish Men

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Thesis submitted for the National University of Ireland, Galway in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology)



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Conference presentations

Detailed below are works, stemming from this thesis, that have been presented at conferences.

Conway, T., & MacNeela, P. (2016, November). *Investigating the effects of the Great Recession on the mental health of Irish third-level students*. Oral presentation at the 9th Annual Irish Economics, Psychology, and Policy Conference. Belfast, Ireland.

Conway, T., & MacNeela, P. (2017, March). *Are traditional notions of masculinity applicable in times of adverse economic opportunity, ubiquitous social media usage, and societal changes?* Oral presentation at the 1st Men and Masculinities Conference. Carlow, Ireland.

Conway, T., & MacNeela, P. (2017, May). *A qualitative exploration of the psychological impact of emigration on the identity, development, and well-being of young Irish males*. Poster presentation at the 5th Annual Migration Conference, Harokopia University, Athens, Greece.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University. I declare this thesis is entirely my own work.

Signed:

Thomas Conway

Abstract

This thesis presents three studies that aim to better understand how the 2008 Great Recession impacted the well-being, masculine identity, and young adult development of young Irish men. Exposure to limited opportunities and occupational uncertainty could lead to mental health problems and hopelessness among young Irish men, particularly those who subscribe to a hegemonic masculine ideology. However, this adverse experience may also cultivate greater creativity and resilience in young men in order to develop increased agency in making their way in contemporary society.

The first study used semi-structured interviews with 30 participants to investigate how hegemonic and contemporary masculine characteristics impact the masculine identity of Irish undergraduate emerging adult men. Thematic analysis revealed an awareness of a constantly evolving and increasingly nuanced notion of masculinity that both contradict and support hegemonic masculinity, the practice of maintaining the dominant societal position of men and subordinating women and marginalising minorities. Hegemonic tendencies were evident in practices surrounding alcohol use and the influence of some older male role models. Body objectification, traditionally a female domain, was evident among some young men but this was largely underpinned by hegemonic masculine competitiveness and dominance.

The second study employed semi-structured interviews, using thematic analysis, to investigate the impact of the Great Recession on the well-being, masculine identity, and young adult development of 22 young Irish male undergraduates. Emerging adult development during a recession, although stressful, generated resilience that facilitated a pragmatic, positive outlook. However, this study argues that emerging adult theory requires more consideration of socioeconomic

conditions. Identity development was affected both positively and negatively in terms of traditional gender roles. Young men who subscribe to hegemonic masculine norms may experience negative repercussions

The third study used semi-structured interviews to explore how the experience of emigration affected the well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity of young Irish men. Interpretative phenomenological analysis revealed that proactive involvement within the new environment, away from expatriate communities, was key for successful transition. There was a release from some hegemonic masculine norms but others, such as breadwinning identity and avoiding help, were evident. Openness to experience and managing initial loneliness was crucial for integration. All participants interpreted the experience as being extremely beneficial for their sense of self in terms of resilience, wellbeing, and confidence.

This thesis proposed that there were positive ramifications for young men during a long-term period of economic recession. The adverse environment motivated some young men to cultivate assets that would not have been developed otherwise. Negative impacts of the recession revolved around the influence of hegemonic masculinity on how some young men coped with difficulty. This research aimed to advance knowledge on how a recession impacts young Irish men and provide reasoning into why this specific population is particularly susceptible to negative mental health and suicide during periods economic adversity. Emasculation may occur for men who subscribe to traditional gender ideals but positive attributes may arise from being resilient during times of difficulty.

Chapter 1: Overview of Thesis

1.1 Aim of chapter

This chapter provides the background for this research thesis by outlining the impact of the Great Recession on the Irish population and on young Irish men in particular. It will explore the impact of economic adversity on both masculine identity and the emerging adult stage of development. The present status of the existing literature on the mental health implications of the Great Recession will also be summarised. Finally, the research aims and objectives of this thesis will be outlined.

1.2 The 2008 Great Recession and Ireland

The economic crisis in 2008 is recognised as the most devastating global economic collapse since the Great Depression in the 1930s (Grusky, Western, & Wimer, 2011). The impact of the Great Recession was felt worldwide as the international banking crisis provoked downturns in stock markets and increases in unemployment. Global unemployment rates reached 212 million in 2009, a 34 million increase on the 2007 figure of 178 million (International Labour Organization, 2010). The World Health Organization (2009) highlighted the potential for the 2008 crisis to affect global health, specifically among those who are socio-economically deprived. Although the Great Recession is officially over, its repercussions are still profound in the shape of high unemployment rates, in recasting expectations for work, and slow economic recovery (Grusky et al., 2011).

Ireland was one of the most heavily impacted countries by the Great Recession. A severe collapse in both housing prices and in construction sector activity and employment, a catastrophic banking crisis, and heavy economic adjustment,

initiated a 10% decline in the Irish average income between 2007 and 2012. Irish austerity measures resulted in taxation rises, reduced public expenditure, and cuts in public sector, health care spending, and welfare cuts with young people experiencing significant reductions. By 2010, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita had dropped by 13% while unemployment levels rose to nearly 14% compared to 2008 when rates of unemployment were just over 4%. Rates of male unemployment increased from 5% in 2007 to 18% in 2011 whilst female unemployment levels also increased from 4% in 2007 to over 10% in 2011 (see Figure 1.1; Callan, Nolan, Keane, Savage, & Walsh, 2014; Thomas, Burke, & Barry, 2014). According to research conducted by Pieta House (2015), the gender difference in unemployment was particularly affected by the collapse of the Irish construction sector since 93% of the population employed in this sector were male.

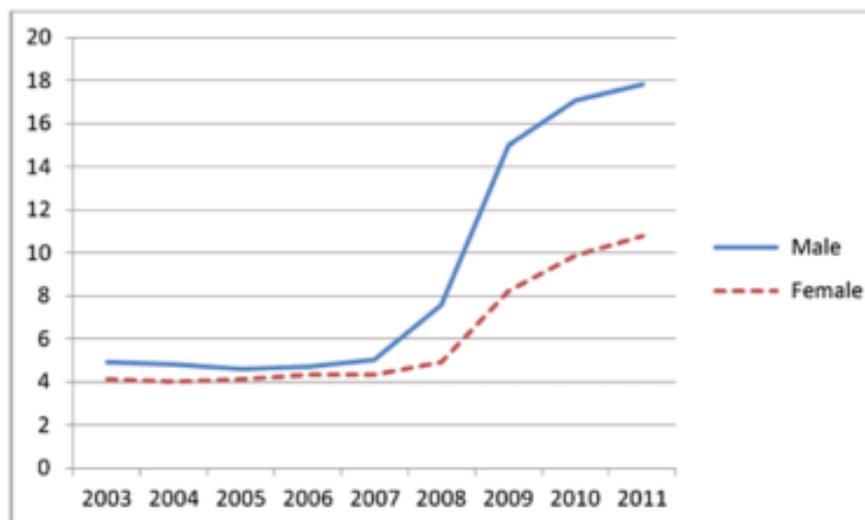


Figure 1.1 Male and female unemployment rates, 2003 to 2011. Source: Callan et al, 2014.

The scale and impact of recent economic problems on Irish society posed negative risks for young Irish men in particular as this group was identified as being susceptible to poor mental health and unlikely to access health services (Burke & McKeon, 2007, Richardson, Clark, & Fowler, 2013; Lynch, Long, & Moorhead, 2016). The National Office of Suicide Prevention (2013) revealed that, although Ireland had a relatively low level of suicide in the EU, it was fourth highest in terms of suicide among 20- to 24-year-old men across Europe. The period between late teens and early twenties is a distinctly vulnerable life period for young people where self-esteem, optimism, and coping strategies can be challenged by lifestyle change and transition into adulthood (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012).

It is important to outline the high prevalence of mental health disorders among children and adolescents as the occurrence of mental health disorders during these developmental periods can detrimentally impact adult development. A meta-analysis of the global prevalence of mental health disorders in children and adolescents found that 13.4% had experienced a mental health disorder and that a significant number of children and adolescents are affected worldwide (Polanczyk, Salum, Sugaya, Caye, & Rohde, 2015). From a European perspective, estimates suggest 10% of children and adolescents ranging from 5 to 15 years of age have a mental health disorder. Boys from a low-income family or have a lone parent were most susceptible to mental health problems (Meltzer, Gatward, Goodman, & Ford, 2003). From an Irish perspective, Lynch, Mills, Daly, and Fitzpatrick (2006) found that 15.6% of 12 to 15 year olds of the total study population in an Irish community sample were symptomatic of a current psychiatric disorder. The My World Survey (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) found that 11% of a participant sample of 6,085 Irish people aged from 12 to 19-years-old suffered from mild depression, 11% suffered from moderate

depression, and 8% suffered from severe depression. Crucially, the study also found that the prevalence of such mental health disorders increased as the participants developed into young adulthood. Those who have experienced mental disorder during adolescence, that are not in education, employment or training, are susceptible to mental disorder and suicidal ideation in their early 20s (Power et al., 2015).

The Irish undergraduate population was also susceptible to the recession's negative repercussions as financial hardship affected their quality of life. A Eurostudent survey (Higher Education Authority, 2013) revealed that the average student income fell by 26% from €997 in 2010 to €734 in 2013. 18% of third-level survey respondents in Ireland experienced financial hardship. The 2013 survey revealed that 51% of the female students and 44% of the male students experienced poor wellbeing, which the authors stated was consistent with previous Eurostudent surveys. Students from manual labour families were more likely to experience higher levels of financial difficulty than students from professional backgrounds. Monetary hardship was also recognised as the main barrier to studying abroad. The Headstrong 'My World Survey' (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) was a large-scale study aimed at evaluating the mental health profile of young Irish people. The young adult sample involved 8,221 Irish young people, of whom 8,195 were third-level students, ranging in age from 17 to 25-years-old. Third-level participants reported that college caused the most stress followed by finances and work. In terms of mental health, the survey revealed that 40% of the respondents were in the mild-to-severe range for levels of depression, 37% was in the mild-to-severe range for anxiety, and 30% of the sample was in the mild-to-severe range for stress. 43% of the sample revealed that they believed that their life was not worth living at some point whilst 51% of the sample

had experienced some form of suicidal ideation. 30% of the sample had contacted a mental health professional for support.

The Great Recession also had a profound influence on rates of Irish youth emigration. A National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) report in 2013 found that, since 2008, Irish youth unemployment had trebled with young people being twice as likely to be unemployed when compared with older workers. An Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) report in 2014 revealed that the 20 to 24-year-old age group experienced greater increases in unemployment (from 6% to 23% between 2007 and 2012) than any other age group. This report also found that male unemployment rose drastically from 5% in 2007 to 7% in 2012. In a parallel development, 43% of Irish emigrants in 2011 were in the 15 to 24-year-old age range (NYCI, 2013). According to the Central Statistics Office (2013), emigration from Ireland in 2013 reached 89,000, which was an increase of 2.2% on the 2012 figure of 87,100. Emigration peaked in 2013 although figures remained high in the following years with 81,900 emigrating in 2014 (CSO, 2015), 80,900 in 2015 (CSO, 2016), and 76,200 in 2016 (CSO, 2016). The NYCI (2013), in recognition of the increase in youth emigration, publicised the dearth of robust data on contemporary emigration from Ireland and called for this deficit to be addressed to inform accurate and effective policy planning.

The rapid period of Irish economic growth in the mid-nineties, entitled 'the Celtic Tiger', saw unemployment rates decreasing from 12% in 1996 to 4% in 2000, a level that was maintained until 2006. During this period, suicide levels remained steady with the unemployed population having much higher rates when compared with their employed counterparts (Corcoran & Arensman, 2010). A preliminary assessment of available data on mortality from 2000-2009 in 10 European Union countries has revealed that Ireland was one of the most severely afflicted by the Great

Recession with a 13% rise in suicide rates since the onset of the recession, second only to Greece, with both countries experiencing the biggest economic reversals (Stuckler, Basu, Suhrcke, Coutts, & McKee, 2011). The 2008 to 2012 recessionary period had significant negative impact on Irish male suicide and self-harm with male suicide increasing by 57% and self-harm increasing by 31% (Corcoran, Griffin, Arensman, Fitzgerald, & Perry, 2015). Suicide has had a significant effect on Irish society with, on average, 10 people per week ending their life. Men in particular seem to be affected with 8 out of 10 suicides being male. Of the 6,520 suicides between 2000 and 2012, 5,263 (81%) were men. The impact of the recession on suicide is credible as a Pieta House (2015) report revealed that 1,039 of the 2,137 male suicides from 2008 to 2012 were men in construction or production, sectors which collapsed as a direct result of the Great Recession. When 2012 drew to a close, the rate of male suicide had increased by 57% when compared to pre-recession trends with males aged between 25 and 44-years-old being the most impacted (Corcoran et al., 2015).

1.3 Economic adversity and young Irish adults

The Great Recession hindered financial independence among young Irish people as Irish youth unemployment increased from 6% to 23% from the Great Recession's onset until 2012 (ESRI, 2014). Independent living among young people was also affected by the recession. A review by Seiffgre-Krenke (2013) found that leaving the family home to live independently was crucial to successfully transition yet recent research has revealed that the numbers of young people cohabiting with family has largely increased in the USA, UK, and Canada (UK Office for National Statistics, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2017). Agentic striving enables some emerging adults to attain a successful transition into young adulthood by

forming a stable, coherent, and commitment-based identity whilst a lack of agency may hinder others (Schwartz et al., 2005). Agentic striving is central in aiding young people negotiate a recession as those with low agency are more likely to be unemployed during a recession (Vuolo, Staff, & Mortimer, 2012).

A difficult economic environment also provides various difficulties for young men in their late teens and early twenties, as this developmental stage is crucial to the emergence of a firm self-concept that is both independent and socially connected (Arnett, 2000). Indeed, the 'My World' survey revealed that financial difficulties can have a strong bearing on young adults' mental health and well-being (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). Recessions also pose a threat to young adult men that are transitioning to university, as this is already a potentially stressful period for them as a result of financial pressures (Conley, Kirsh, & Dickson, 2014; Peer, Hillman, & Van Hoet, 2015). Currently, there is a clear lack of research on the impact of an adverse recessionary environment on young male development.

1.4 The impact of economic adversity on masculine identity

Men may be particularly vulnerable during periods of economic recession as a result of their masculine identity being threatened by lack of opportunity (Connell, 2005). This is further compounded by the lack of willingness among men who subscribe to hegemonic masculine norms to seek emotional or physical help (Berger, Addis, Green, Mackowiak, & Goldberg, 2013; Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011; McCusker & Galupo, 2011), and strive to be perceived as physically tough (Robertson, 2003; Adams, Anderson, & McCormack, 2010).

Numerous studies suggest that men may be susceptible to greater risk for negative mental health during periods of adverse economic conditions as a result of

the masculine pressure they experience to be the primary breadwinner. Gerdtham and Johannesson (2005) assessed the relationship between business cycles and increased risk for mortality in 40,000 Swedish individuals and found that recessions may negatively affect male mortality. The authors suggested that this is possibly the result of increased sensitivity towards changes in the workforce if their identity revolves around being the primary breadwinner role. Similarly, Chang, Stuckler, Yip, and Gunnell, (2013), in their time trend analysis of the impact of the Great Recession on suicide in 54 countries, argue that men possess greater mental health risks during economic recessions. The authors suggest this is because of a masculine desire to be the primary breadwinner and also the resultant shame regarding unemployment and seeking emotional help.

Barth et al. (2011) conducted a time series analysis of 18 industrialised nations from 1983 up until 2007 and found that recessions seem to pose greater harm for males than females in terms of an increase in suicide rates. The authors proposed that a lack of economic success could negatively impact masculine identity and possibly increase helplessness and depression. Katikireddi, Niedzwiedz, and Popham (2012), when looking at rates of depression in Spain and the United Kingdom, suggested that recessions might pose greater mental health risks for men. Chang et al. (2013) state that since the primary earner in the household is more likely to be male, there is a greater chance of males being impacted by the recession than women. The authors posit that correlation between elevated male suicide rates during a recession may be a result of increased shame in light of being unemployed and be more reluctant to seek help.

Previous economic recessions reveal similar patterns in terms of males being the most susceptible to increasing rates of suicide in adversely affected countries. The

Asian economic crisis in 1997-1998 coincided with a rise in suicides in Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong. Male suicide during this period was seemingly mediated by unemployment as it was more prominent among working-age men between 15 and 64-year-olds (Chang, Gunnell, Sterne, Lu, & Cheng, 2009). Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all experienced rapid increases in male suicide rates from 1992 to 1994 when the former Soviet Union was experiencing a harsh economic reform (Gavrilova, Semyonova, Evdokushkina, & Gavrilov, 2000; Brainerd, 2001).

The economic impact of austerity on young men is further compounded by parallel changes in the social context of being masculine. Masculine identity is potentially also being impacted by increased focus on muscularity among males in the emerging adult bracket (Ciccolo, SantaBarbara, Dunsiger, Busch & Bartholomew, 2016). Body image and body objectification in young men may nurture anxiety (Murray, Rieger, Touyz, & De la Garza García, 2010), body dissatisfaction (Tiggeman, Martins, & Kirkbride, 2007), depression (Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004), and eating disorders (Thapliyal & Hay, 2014). Such changes in current masculine norms are important as they add to the contemporary perspective of masculinity that young men are using in order to react to economic changes.

1.5 Mental health implications of the Great Recession

The literature reveals the potential negative effects of being unemployed during the Great Recession. Economic crises have been shown to negatively affect the unemployed population in particular (Zivin, Paczkowski, & Galea, 2011). Research conducted in a community in Michigan during a previous recession revealed that unemployment caused by job loss was associated with negative health effects (Kessler, House, & Turner, 1987; Kessler, Turner, & House, 1987). There is a

substantial association between unemployment, suicide, and recessions (Hawton, Gunnell, & Platt, 2015).

Adverse economic climates can be detrimental to population mental health (Goldman-Mellor, Saxton, & Catalano, 2010). During the Great Recession, high-income countries were susceptible to increasing cause-specific mortality rates suggesting a potential association between the economic crash and harmful mental health effects (Suhrcke & Stuckler, 2012). Some countries that were severely economically affected experienced surges in negative mental health. The recent economic crisis led to significant increases in cases of major depression in Greece (Economou, Madianos, Peppou, Patelakis, & Stefanis, 2013). Spanish medical services experienced a substantial growth in primary care attendees with mental health problems, such as anxiety and major depression, and alcohol-related disorders from families dealing with unemployment and mortgage payment difficulties (Gili, Roca, Basu, McKee, & Stuckler, 2013). The rate of major depression in American adults experienced a significant and sustained increase during the Great Recession (Mehta, Kramer, Durazo-Arvizu, Cao, Tong, & Rao, 2015). The number of antidepressants being dispensed annually in England escalated by 165% between 1998 and 2012. According to a report by Quality Watch (2014), almost half of this increase over the fourteen-year period occurred in the four years between the 2008 financial crisis and 2012.

There have been increased rates of suicide in numerous countries that were negatively affected by the Great Recession. Reeves, McKee, and Stuckler (2014) estimated that the recession's economic impact on Europe and North America is linked with an increase of 10,000 additional suicides from 2008 to 2010. Branas et al. (2015) conducted a time-series analysis on Greece, a country deeply affected by the

recession, from 1983 to 2012. The results found that Greek austerity measures passed in 2011 precipitated, over a thirty-year time scale, the highest monthly rates of suicide in 2012. Other research on impact of the economic crisis in Greece suggests that there is a significant association between increased levels of suicidality, suicide, and economic hardship (Economou, Madianos, Theleritis, Peppou, & Stefanis, 2011; Kentikeleni et al., 2011). Italy also experienced a rise in both suicide rates and attempted suicides as a result of economic causes associated with the Italian recession (De Vogli, Marmot, & Stuckler, 2013). In England, the adverse economic climate appears to have been associated with a thousand excess suicides. (Barr, Taylor-Robinson, Scott-Samuel, McKee, & Stuckler, 2012).

It is important to note that some research suggests caution when attributing an increase in suicide rates to economic downfall. Catalano et al. (2011) conducted a review of literature and found that the belief that mortality increases during economic declines appears incorrect. Although, in terms of suicide and recession, the authors suggest that adverse economic periods increase the occurrence of suicidal behaviour. They also posit that a lack of transparency in this research area mark it as an important topic for future investigation.

The recession, in terms of gender, seems to have had a more negative effect on men. Suicide rates among men seems to have been impacted more than in females during the recession, particularly males aged between 15 to 24-years-old (Barr et al., 2012). Unemployment is a major factor since elevated rates of male suicide during the Great Recession seem to correlate with high levels of unemployment (Chang et al., 2013). Young men who experience unemployment during an economic recession may also be prone to poor health and mental illness as young women, compared to young men, tended to present better self-rated health, diagnosed and mental health during the

recession than in 2006 (Aguilar-Palacio, Carrera-Lasfuentes, & Rabanaque, 2015). In Spain, male unemployment rates during the recession were associated with an increase in suicide attempts (Córdoba-Doña, San Sebastián, Escolar-Pujolar, Martínez-Faure, & Gustafsson, 2014).

1.6 Research aims

The central research aim directing this thesis was to investigate how young Irish males in the emerging adult stage, between 18 and 25-years-old, adapted to the economic uncertainty during the Great Recession. The overarching aim was to provide a body of research that would facilitate a clearer understanding of the difficulties that emerging adult males experience during a recession in terms of their young adult development and masculine identity. The research incorporated individuals from different contexts to explore experiences across different contextual settings. Participant groups comprised of male and female third-level students and young Irish male emigrants. These students' grew up during the recession and were interviewed for this research when the recession was still widespread whilst the emigrants left Ireland, in the emerging adulthood phase, as a direct consequence of the recession. As a result, the data was authentic to the Great Recession experience. The thesis was entirely qualitative as this methodology provided a practical means of investigating an individuals' understanding of the social phenomena of a recession (Elliot, Fisher, & Rennie, 1999). This included exploring how masculine identity interacts with adversity and resilience, and the particular aspects of an individual's phenomenological experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The economic impact of austerity on young men is compounded by parallel changes in the social context of being masculine. In order to construct a

comprehensive exploration into the impact of an economic recession on the masculine identity and young adult development of young adult males, it was crucial to firstly investigate how hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms impact young Irish men. Resultantly, Study One was an investigation into the impact of hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms on emerging adult undergraduate Irish men. Both young male and female undergraduates detailed the influence of hegemonic masculine norms on young Irish men and how young men differ with previous Irish male generations in terms of masculine norms and identity. This study investigated:

- How do male and female students perceive current masculine characteristics in comparison with hegemonic conceptualisations of masculinity?
- Do hegemonic notions of masculinity have a positive or negative influence on contemporary forms of masculine identity?
- Is body objectification becoming gender convergent?
- Are recent cultural developments, such as social media, increased gym-use, and appearance, affecting young male identity?
- Are there any theoretical implications as a result of these experiences?

Study Two investigated the impact of an economic recession on the well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity of emerging adult undergraduate Irish men. The study evaluated young Irish men's experiences of both achieving emerging adulthood and attending university during a recession and how this impinged on their college experience. It investigated how the recession shaped the participant in terms of the developmental assets they used to cope with adversity. The study also explored how the students were affected by a general reduction in opportunity and the alteration of masculine gender roles due to the recession and also societal changes. This involved looking at:

- Did the economic collapse impact the transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood in terms of financial independence, agentic striving, and independent living?
- How do young men cope with prolonged economic adversity?
- Have hegemonic masculine roles been affected by restricted economic opportunity?

Study Three explored how the experience of long-term emigration as a result of the Great Recession affects the well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity of young Irish men. This study explored how the participants were making sense of integrating into a new culture and how this was affecting their sense of identity. The men also explored what being Irish meant to them and how they felt about Ireland in their current situation. Their experiences of overcoming initial difficulty and experiencing different masculine norms were also discussed.

- How is a young male emigrant's sense of adult identity affected by migrating to a foreign country?
- How do young male emigrants navigate the experience of emigration in order to become successfully integrated?
- Are hegemonic Irish masculine norms impacted by living and gaining employment in a foreign country?

Due to the cyclical nature of economic recessions, it was hoped that this research would provide a detailed understanding of the difficulties that young men will face in light of widespread reduced opportunity in terms of informing future policy for male mental health during periods of recession. Specifically, to explore the root cause of increased psychological distress among young men during these periods.

1.7 Outline of thesis

Chapter Two introduces the developmental psychology theories that provided a framework for exploring how the psychological aspects of young adult development are affected during a period of economic recession. A core aim in this thesis is to investigate if an economically adverse environment can cultivate positivity or resilience in addition to posing a developmental threat.

Chapter Three outlines the main gender theories that the research employed to facilitate an evaluation of how masculinity is perceived among young Irish males in relation to hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms and expectations. Theory that accounts for hegemonic perceptions of masculinity is described before turning to body objectification theories that are put forward to explicate an increase in body objectification among men. The increasing presence influence of the media on such issues is also investigated.

Chapter Four presents the rationale for this thesis by exploring how young male development and masculine identity is potentially affected by a long-term period of recession. It explored how the Great Recession potentially affects young male adult development and also the potential developmental assets that could be drawn upon to weather a chronically adverse period.

Chapter Five provides the research methodology that was used by the three studies presented in this thesis and the epistemological rationale behind this selection. It details the procedures involved in recruitment, data collection, and data analysis, and explains ethical considerations and research limitations.

Chapter Six introduces Study One, the first of three qualitative empirical studies that were undertaken in this thesis. Study One involved both young male and female undergraduates and explored both the experiences of, and attitudes toward,

hegemonic masculine ideologies and body objectification practices in young Irish male third-level students.

Chapter Seven presents Study Two, an empirical study that explored if economic adversity effected the young adult development and masculine identity of young male undergraduates. It was a qualitative study that was conducted with a subset of the Study One participant group.

Chapter Eight presents Study Three, the final study in this thesis. Study Three explored the experiences of young Irish male emigrants, who migrated as a direct result of the Great Recession, and how this experience shaped their sense of identity and impacted their masculine ideals. It also looked at how emigration had affected their mental health and future outlook compared to when they were in Ireland.

Chapter Nine is a general discussion about the findings from the three studies. The practical implications and theoretical contributions of each of the studies are discussed.

Chapter 2: Emerging Adulthood and Positive Youth Development - The Challenges of Becoming a Young Adult during a Recession

2.1 Aim of chapter

This chapter outlines the developmental theories that will provide a framework for exploring how the psychological aspects of young adult development are affected during a period of economic recession. Recessions generate harsh societal environments, as outlined in Chapter One, but a priority in this research is to explore how positivity or resilience might be cultivated by such adversity. This will be approached using two theoretical frameworks: emerging adulthood, and the positive youth development (PYD) approach of developmental assets theory. Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood framework will be used in order to investigate how an adverse economic climate could potentially impact the development of young adult characteristics in young Irish men. The PYD approach focuses on the positive qualities and outcomes that young people have the potential to develop (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). Benson's (2003) developmental assets theory is a PYD developmental framework that will be applied to identify assets that help young people to successfully negotiate a sustained period of economic recession. This chapter also explores how these theories can be brought together to understand how an adverse economic environment impacts this particular stage of psychological development, and to suggest how developmental assets can enable such hurdles to be navigated.

2.2 Emerging adulthood

2.2.1 Theoretical background of emerging adulthood

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000) devised the theory of emerging adulthood to provide a suitable framework to evaluate the developmental trajectory, from a contextual viewpoint, of an individual upon reaching the legal adult age of 18-years-old. Arnett states that emerging adulthood is a culturally constructed stage of life generated by inhabiting industrialised societies that is not universally applicable or immutable to time or circumstance. Arnett's (2000) concept is derived from numerous theoretical contributions that focused on the developmental period that encompassed the late teens up through the mid-twenties.

Prominent developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1956, 1963, 1968) posited a series of eight stages in his seminal theory detailing the stages of psychosocial development. During an individual's late adolescence, Erikson theorised a fifth developmental stage that entailed a hypothesised psychosocial crisis of ego identity versus role confusion. This involved a prolonged adolescence, which Erikson called a psychosocial moratorium, that was permitted to the youth living in industrialised societies and which corresponded with Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood. It sees a suspension of responsibility and commitment in order to enable the individual the opportunity to experience and explore numerous identities and roles before binding to one. The moratorium period provides an opportunity for the individual to improve ego capacities, including agentic abilities and strengths, and to master difficulties and barriers encountered in the social environment.

Erikson's research was further developed in Marcia (1980) in his identity status theory that concentrated on identity formation in late adolescence. This identity formation process was a complicated stage that, at minimum, required the gradual

development of commitment to a sexual orientation, ideological stance, and occupational route, in order for the adolescent to cultivate a feasible pathway toward adulthood. Marcia suggests that individuals within the late adolescent period are defined by different types of identity exploration and commitment to values: (i) Identity Achievement, (ii) Foreclosure, (iii) Identity Diffusion, and (iv) Moratorium. Young people in the Identity Achievement stage have been through the decision-making stage and are resultantly pursuing their chosen occupation and ideological aims. Those within the Foreclosure stage have committed to occupational and ideological goals but these goals have been dictated by parental choice rather than their own. Individuals inhabiting the Identity Diffusion stage are those that are occupationally and ideologically devoid of direction, regardless of whether there has been a decision-making period. The Moratorium stage is characterised by individuals who are undergoing difficulty with occupational and/or ideological issues and are, consequently, experiencing an identity crisis.

Empirical research has used both Erikson's and Marcia's theory in researching the emerging adulthood stage. Identity Achievement at 24-years-old was found to mediate ego development in middle adolescence and intimacy in the emerging adulthood stage (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). The development of epistemic cognition was also associated with the development of Identity Achievement in teenage adolescents (Krettenauer, 2005). The Moratorium stage has been associated with negative aspects such as anxiety, depression, and lowered psychological-wellbeing in emerging adult male undergraduates (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009). Foreclosure is associated with lower levels of health-compromising behaviours (i.e., illegal drug use, impaired driving) and decreased rates of internalizing symptoms (i.e., anxiety, depression) (Schwartz et al., 2011). Diffusion

was related to reduced self-esteem, ego strength, and life purpose in emerging adult university students (Schwartz et al., 2005).

Marcia's identity status theory has also been used empirically to retrospectively evaluate how identity status and identity transition was precipitated and achieved between late adolescence and mid-adulthood in a sample of 100 participants aged between 40 and 63 years (Kroger & Green, 1996). Interestingly, longitudinal research conducted by Fadjukoff, Kokko, and Pulkkinen (2010) assessed the impact of changes in economic conditions on identity formation between young and middle adulthood. The results revealed that the political identity of middle-aged adults developed during times of recession and occupational identity receded whereas, in times of economic prosperity, political identity was low and occupational identity was high. The authors suggest the potential psychological impact of macro-level economic conditions on an individual's conception of self requires more consideration in developmental research.

Drawing from Erikson's work, Daniel Levinson (1978) advocated a developmental period between the ages of 17 and 33-years-old that he believed was the learning stage of development. The primary task in this phase is to progress into the adult sphere and develop a robust life structure through a process of change, instability, love, and employment. Kenneth Keniston's (1971) theory of youth, the final influential theory on emerging adulthood, interpreted being young as a prolonged phase of role experimentation between adolescence and young adulthood. However, Arnett (2000) makes clear his argument against Keniston's use of the word 'youth' to encapsulate the late teens and early twenties by suggesting that the ambiguity of the term hindered the recognition of this period of life.

Arnett (2000) stated that the age spectrum of emerging adulthood ranges from the late teens up through the late twenties, with an emphasis on the 18 to 25-age bracket. Arnett's rationale for formulating this new theoretical stage is founded upon how this stage of life has changed considerably since the contributions of Erikson (1968), Levinson (1978), and Keniston (1971). Indeed, more recent research suggests that the emerging adulthood phase may persist up until 30 years of age (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011). Demographic changes in industrialised societies have resulted in occasions such as marriage and parenthood being delayed until at least the late twenties. Indeed, marriage is perceived as a landmark event that signifies the finalised attainment of adulthood (Arnett, 1998).

2.2.2 Defining emerging adulthood

Emerging adulthood is distinct from young adulthood due to a lack of role responsibility (i.e., often marked by menial employment, exploration of various relationships), diverse residential status, and delayed normative expectations (i.e., marriage, parenthood, mortgage). This stage is also identified by numerous opportunities in terms of life explorations (i.e., travel, various types of employment) with little long-term consequences. According to Arnett (2000), emerging adults avail of more possibility and opportunity than previous generations as a consequence of the increasing erosion of traditional social role pressures.

A core feature of emerging adulthood is that this developmental stage of life provides the largest potential for identity explorations in areas of love, occupation, and worldview (Arnett, 2000). Erikson (1956, 1968) posited that identity-versus-role confusion was more of a central crisis in adolescence but he also suggested that industrialised cultures enabled an extended adolescence. Arnett (2000) argues that

identity exploration primarily takes place in emerging adulthood (18 to 25-years-old) rather than adolescence (10 to 18-years-old).

Progress into the young adulthood stage, between the late twenties and early thirties, is attained by a reduction in diversity and instability due to enduring life choices such as beginning a career, entering marriage, and becoming a parent. Maintaining a career meaning that the young adult cannot engage in prolonged periods of travel, the responsibilities of marriage resulted in the individual being limited in participating in risk behaviour, whilst parenthood was constraining due to their parental responsibilities towards the child (Arnett, 2000). Financial independence, independent decision-making, and taking responsibility for one's self are the three major developmental elements for an individual to become self-sufficient and identify as an adult (Arnett, 1998, 2000, 2004). During the emerging adulthood stage, these three qualities are imperative for an individual to become self-sufficient. Once these key character qualities have been attained and financial independence is secured, emerging adults may undergo a subjective shift in their developmental identity as they move into young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Sharon (2016) identified markers of well-being and adulthood that emerging adults perceived as being central to achieving young adulthood. For positive well-being, emerging adults identified markers that they had more control over as being the most important, such as developing an equal standing in their relationships with parents, and being more considerate to others. In contrast to this, settling into a career was perceived as a marker they had less control over and, thus, did not predict well-being.

Emerging adults also experience inconsistent residential status as a result of achieving the highest rates of residential relocation of any of the developmental life stages. Arnett (2000) states that this transience is a result of an increase in both

opportunity and accessibility to change location, and also the option for travel and exploration in this age range. A number of reports have highlighted the growing increase in this trend but financial reasons are being identified as a major factor due to the repercussions of the Great Recession. A 2016 survey by the Office for National Statistics in the UK found that about 25% of young adults, between the ages of 20 and 34-years-old, were co-habiting with their parents, an increase on 21% in 1996. The Canadian census in 2016 also found that over one in three (34.7%) of young adults aged between 20 and 34-years-old were living with their parents, the highest rate since 2001. A report by the Pew Research Centre (2016) in the USA found that, for the first time in more than a century, adults between the ages of 18 and 34-years-old were more likely to be living in the family home than living independently.

2.2.3 Transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood

Emerging adulthood theory posits that there are a number of factors in determining if an emerging adult can successfully transition into early adulthood. Three salient factors are financial independence (Arnett, 2000), independent living (Kins & Beyers, 2010), and agentic functioning (Schwartz et al., 2005). The factors are discussed here alongside how they were impacted by the recession.

Financial independence is a major requirement in the emerging adulthood stage for an individual to successfully undergo the transition into young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Active employment is a crucial factor for an emerging adult to generate an adult identity. The financial independence that results from being employed enables an individual to initiate and maintain an independent lifestyle (Arnett, 1998). The difference between being employed and unemployed has been shown to affect young adult development. In a study by Luyckx, Schwartz, Goosens,

and Pollock (2008) that was looking at employment, sense of coherence, and the formation of identity, structural equation modelling revealed that employment in the emerging adulthood stage was positively associated with experiencing a greater sense of adulthood. However, emerging adult males who experience significant fluctuations in employment are more prone to long-term negative effects in their early thirties such as lower-income, lower occupational status, and job satisfaction (Krahn, Howard, & Galambos, 2015). Obtaining and maintaining a career was viewed as a marker of young adulthood that emerging adults had little control over and did not predict well-being (Sharon, 2016).

Emerging adults who live independently are more likely to achieve a mutually supportive relationship with their parents, attain financial independence, and achieve role transition. Both Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966) posited that living in the family home extends the period of psychosocial moratorium. A quantitative study by Kins and Beyers (2010) stated that living status is a crucial factor if a young person is to successfully transition from the emerging adulthood phase to the next stage of adult development. The location of residence for emerging adults, in comparison to other age groups, is a lifestyle factor that causes significant alterations to core aspects of identity, specifically in terms of relationship status and general outlook (Arnett, 2000, 2004). Seiffge-Krenke's (2013) review found that moving from the family home to independent living is a vital developmental task for both emerging adults and their parents.

Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage characterised by diversity in which a strong sense of identity is important in preparing an individual to enter into the roles and responsibilities of young adulthood. Agentic functioning is a key element of individualised identity development, and adaptation to Western societies in

emerging adulthood (Côté, 2000; Côté & Levine, 2002; Schwartz et al., 2005).

Developing agency is a psychological task that emerging adults must engage in to move from a secure identity, which in turn aids the guidance and sustainability of future life commitments (Schwartz et al., 2005). Some emerging adults will achieve more of a successful transition into the world of responsible adulthood as a result of forming stable, coherent, and commitment-based identities. Other emerging adults may lack agency and require help to transition into adult roles and responsibilities (Schwartz et al., 2005).

Vuolo et al., (2012), using a multilevel latent class analysis of longitudinal data, looked at the psychological and behavioural trajectories from 18 to 31-years-old of 1,010 young people in their transition from education to occupation. They found that agentic striving is an important characteristic in helping young people navigate a negative economic climate, as young people with low agency are more likely to be unemployed for a period of months during a recession. Individuals in the emerging adulthood age bracket who identify as young adults tend to possess more criteria that signifies adulthood, have an enhanced sense of overall identity, hold ideals in terms of a romantic partner, be less depressed, and not engage in as much risk behaviour (Nelson & Barry, 2015).

2.2.4 Emerging adulthood and the Great Recession

An economic recession has the potential to drastically influence the period of emerging adulthood. The onset of the Great Recession in Ireland and the resultant increase in unemployment for young people caused the attainment of financial independence to be increasingly difficult. Less young adults in the United States were in employment in 2010 when compared to any period since the 1940s (Pew Research

Center, 2012). An ESRI report (2014) revealed that Irish youth unemployment rates increased from 6% to 23% from the beginning of the recession to 2012. The rates of young Irish people out of work increased with 20 to 24-year-olds experiencing the largest increases in unemployment of any age demographic, from 6% to 23% between 2007 and 2012 (NYCI, 2013; ESRI, 2014). Financial difficulties have also had a strong bearing on young Irish adults' mental health and well-being. The Headstrong 'My World Survey' (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) in Ireland found that 45% of young adults experienced stress as a result of their financial situation.

Research suggests that living in the family home during emerging adulthood is associated with negative outcomes. Experiencing poverty during the emerging adulthood stage may result in low-income youth being more inclined to stay in the family home, which may possibly generate additional challenges for poor families. Emerging adults from poor backgrounds that do leave home tend to: (i) leave at a younger age than non-poor emerging adults, (ii) experience repeated home-leaving, and (iii) be more likely to leave home for marriage / cohabitation or independent living rather than for school (Marco & Berzin, 2008; Berzin & De Marco, 2010). Emerging adults not in employment or education who live with their parents have the most difficulty in transitioning to adult status. Emerging adults who move back into the family home retain the previously developed adult criteria although they are more likely to engage in risky behaviour (Kins & Beyers, 2010). Since the Great Recession, the rates of young people living with their parents have largely increased in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada (UK Office for National Statistics, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2017). Kins, Beyers, Soenens, and Vansteenkiste (2009) showed that living with parents during this developmental stage

might inhibit young adults' achievement of independence, consequently negatively impacting their well-being.

2.2.5 Implications of a global economic recession for emerging adult Irish men

The emerging adult's experience of transitioning to third-level education can be a stressful and disruptive period. In terms of independent living, Conley et al., (2014) examined the longitudinal course of 2,095 young persons' emerging adulthood transition to college. They found that young people might undergo a reduction in psychological well-being and cognitive-affective strengths as a result, with young men being particularly susceptible to decreased social well-being. Financial independence is also an important factor. Peer et al. (2015), using a general qualitative inductive approach, explored the effects of stress on emerging adult university students' lifestyles. The study revealed that this period could result in students experiencing multiple stressors such as academic and financial issues, and family and personal relationships. Agentic striving may also be hindered by the transition to university. Azmitia, Syed, and Radmacher (2013) performed a cluster analysis to investigate how identity and emotional support is affected when an emerging adult transitions to university. Results showed that mental health in college is improved for students who possess higher identity synthesis and emotional support from family, and particularly from friends. Leaving the family home may generate depressive symptoms in emerging adults as they have yet to discover their identity (Nelson & Barry, 2015). For undergraduates who remain in the family home, they may experience less independence and less empathy. Students who live at home are more prone to believe that their parents are unaware of their third-level

responsibilities and requirements, and interact with them as if they were still in secondary level education (Flanagan, Schulenberg, & Fuligni, 1993).

Adverse economic circumstances also pose various difficulties to emerging adult males at a point in their life-course that is critical to the emergence of a stable self-concept that is independent yet socially connected. Given the importance of gender roles in one's self-concept, negotiating the self-image of masculinity is a key issue for young adult males to work through in the identity exploration characteristic of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Arnett's theory directs attention to the young adulthood period as a critical phase in self-development but there also needs to be links made to theories in the contextual area of study. For this thesis, this entailed considering the meaning of masculine identity, which is explored in Chapter 3.

2.3 PYD and positive ways of viewing challenge

It is important to identify positive developmental approaches that potentially affect the emerging adulthood phase during an economic recession, as there is a scant body of research looking at this specific context. There are a number of prominent researchers in the areas of positive psychology, positive purpose, and mental health, whose work primarily focuses on human strengths and positive youth development. Damon has been instrumental in the development of the PYD approach with his central focus being the assessment of noble purpose in youth and young adults. His argument is that a primary indicator of PYD and youth thriving is through a young person's engagement with efforts that benefit the welfare of the community (Damon, 2004). Martin Seligman, an American psychologist, is a leading researcher in the field of positive psychology, which emerged as a counterbalance to the deficit-driven perspective by prioritising individual strengths (Seligman, 2003a). Damon and

Seligman both incorporate a perspective that promotes the salience of personal strengths as indicators of PYD. This is reflected through well-being, mental health, and purpose in life being associated with reduced negative outcomes and increased levels of positive developments such as community engagement and healthy relationships (Lerner et al., 2009).

2.3.1 Positive psychology

Positive psychology comprises of a body of work that focuses on individual strengths. The primary aim of this domain is to cultivate human happiness (Seligman, 2003a). Positive psychology research investigates three principal avenues that facilitate positive traits and, consequently, empower positive experience: (i) positive experiences (e.g. happiness, wellbeing); (ii) strengths and virtues (e.g. character, interests) (Seligman, 2003b); and (iii) positive institutions (e.g. schools, families) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology perceives the individual as an active decision-maker that has the capability to choose, have preferences, and possess the ability to improve one's wellbeing. Seligman perceives human strengths as a buffer to mental illness and an enhancer of well-being (Seligman, 2002; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).

Positive psychology research focuses on a multitude of psychological approaches, many which are relevant to the focus in this thesis on the experience of societal adversity and identity. Such approaches include:

- (i) Self-determination – A general psychological concept, situated within human agency theory, which is crucial to the positive psychology domain (Wehmeyer, Little, & Sargeant, 2011). Human agency is defined as “the sense of personal empowerment, which involves both knowing and having

what it takes to achieve one's goals" (Little, Hawley, Henrich, & Marsland, 2002, p. 390). An interesting avenue of investigation is how self-determination beliefs fare in spite of economic adversity.

- (ii) Resilience in Development – Positive psychology focuses on how human systems (i.e., family, community, education, religion, culture), and the interactions within them, cultivate resilience (i.e., “patterns of positive adaption during or following significant adversity or risk”, Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2011, p.118). A related research aim in this thesis is to explore if resilience developed by human systems is affected by lack of opportunity.
- (iii) Benefit-Finding and Growth – Some individuals, having experienced an adverse life event, achieve positive outcomes that are often referred to as Benefit-Finding and Growth (Lechner, Tennen, & Affleck, 2011). These experiences may cause alterations in an individual's perception of the self, the self in relation to other people, and medication of his / her life philosophy (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). This would lead the research to explore how young individual's perception of the self was affected by the recession.
- (iv) Coping through Emotional Approach – Emotional Approach Coping is a concept involving the deliberate use of emotional processing and emotional expression in order to navigate difficult circumstances (Stanton, Sullivan, & Austenfeld, 2011). This would be investigated by exploring how young people harness their emotions to cope with the dearth of opportunity.

2.3.2 The emergence of Positive Youth Development

The PYD approach highlights the capacity for resilience that young people possess in the face of adversity. PYD moves away from the negative, deficit perspective of youth that has traditionally dominated the psychological approach throughout the twentieth century. Instead, this approach adopts a strength-based approach that focuses on the positive qualities and outcomes that young people can develop (Lerner et al., 2009). The PYD approach comprises of concepts such as:

- **Developmental assets:** Competencies, and values, grouped by four categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity representing the talents, energies, strengths, and constructive interests each young person possesses (Benson, 2003).
- **Thriving:** A non-problem behaviour approach. There are seven indicators of thriving: School success, leadership, helping other people, maintaining physical health, delay of gratification, valuing diversity, and overcoming adversity (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth (2000).
- **Well-being:** Five positive psychological characteristics of happiness, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and engagement, which have the potential to cultivate well-being, good physical health, and other positive effects (Kern, Benson, Steinberg, & Steinberg, 2016).

Lerner et al. (2004) state that the PYD perspective is the most useful theoretical approach when attempting to understand adolescent development.

Research shows that positive and negative mental health in adolescence pose a significant impact on the adolescent's development. With regards to short-term development, positive mental health is crucial for an adolescent's well-being, interpersonal relationships, and the capacity to contribute to society (Kappahn,

Morreale, Rickert, & Walker, 2006). In terms of negative mental health in adolescence, the My World survey (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) found an association between negative mental health and a variety of health and developmental issues for young people such as substance use, educational achievement, and impaired sexual health. Negative developmental outcomes in adolescence, such as participation in risk behaviours (i.e., drinking, smoking, and / or sexual activity) increase the probability of the occurrence of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Hallfors et al., 2004). There are two principal approaches that focus on reducing the harmful effect of adolescent negative behaviour on young people: the prevention approach and the positive youth development approach.

The prevention approach emerged during the 1980s with its main priority being the ability to provide support to families, schools, and communities before the development of negative behaviours in children. The continuation of problems among the youth population provoked concern in society and prevention interventions were designed for a variety of specific problems (i.e., abusing drugs, youth pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, leaving school, conducting violent behaviour). These interventions were supplemented by a multitude of policies aimed at diminishing problem behaviours among the youth population (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002). The prevention approach's focus on single behaviours was criticised for disregarding the elevated rates of co-occurrence and co-variation of risks (Barone et al., 1995; Fergusson, Horwood, & Lynskey, 1994). The prevention approach also ignored empirical research on common predictors of problematic behaviours, such as attitudes, beliefs, and values as well as the protective and risk factors in a young person's social environment (i.e., family, peers, school, community) (Jessor et al., 2003). A central aspect of the prevention approach is the

deficit perspective. This viewpoint maintains that there is something intrinsically wrong or insufficient in a young person's abilities to develop (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008), and that adolescents possess problems that require control until they have achieved adulthood (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998).

The PYD perspective originally appeared in the work of comparative psychologists and biologists investigating how the combination of ecological and contextual settings affected the malleability of the developmental process (Lerner et al., 2009). The emergence of PYD in theoretical proposals (Overton, 1973; Lerner, 1978) occurred during the 1970s, positing that the application of an integrative, relational perspective towards biological and contextual influences can potentially resolve the nature-nurture debate. The 1980s saw a burgeoning in the field of research of adolescent development with a growing emphasis on the plasticity of adolescent development. Developmental researchers began to place more importance on the adolescent stage due to its impact on the individual's development. The PYD perspective was further honed by developmental systems theory analysts interested in exploring the impact of adolescence on the life span (Lerner et al., 2009). A lack of a fixed, accepted definition for PYD has been a continual hurdle when reviewing the PYD research corpus

2.3.3 Theoretical foundations of PYD

The PYD approach is based in human developmental systems theories of human development (Lerner et al., 2009). The core features of PYD theory include:

- (i) Plasticity: The potential for systematic change of a development and it is a core element of developmental systems theories. This potential is a result of a developing individual's dynamic interactive relationship

with one's biological, psychological, and / or ecological organisation (Lerner et al., 2005) and is crucial to human development (Lerner et al., 2009). There are limitations to plasticity since every development modification is not possible in person-context interactions (e.g., an individual's inability to alter his/her sympathetic nervous system to lower reaction to stress generated by occupational conditions) but an individual is able to alter his / her coping strategies (e.g., occupational support networks, communication style, employment conditions).

- (ii) Integration of levels of organisation: Positive, healthy developmental trajectories over the course of an individual's life are a consequence of mutually beneficial interactions between a developing individual and his / her contextual features that support and nurture healthy development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006).
- (iii) Developmental regulation: The fundamental development processes are the dynamic interrelations between the person and his / her numerous contextual levels (Overton, 2006). Brandtstädter (2006) defines positive development as the positive alignment of the numerous levels of organisation with the person, generating adaptive regulations, a mutually positive relationship.
- (iv) Optimism, the application of developmental science, and the promotion of Positive Human Development: Plasticity provides reason for an optimistic and proactive search for features of an individual and of his / her ecology that can be organised to nurture positive human development across the lifespan (Lerner et al., 2003).

2.3.4 The Five Cs model of PYD

In order to separate from the traditional deficit-based approach on development, the PYD perspective developed the Five Cs of positive youth development. This approach argues that positive development consists of five positive outcomes for young people. This approach emphasises the developmental systems theories focus on developmental plasticity (Lerner, 2004). The Five Cs consist of competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring:

- Competence is the ability that an individual possesses to enhance both understanding and actions within one's environment. Competence is that which enables an individual to achieve his or her intentions as long as the external environment is positive, and if not, to adapt to the environment in order to achieve to the best of the individual's ability. Competence ranges over a four specific areas: social, cognitive, academic, and vocational.
- Confidence is an individual's positive sense of self-worth that is required to act efficiently.
- Character is an individual's integrity and intent to do what is morally right, and also the respect one possesses for societal rules.
- Connection refers to the positive bonds or social relationships one possesses as a result of bidirectional exchanges with peers, adults, family, school, and community.
- Caring is individual's ability to apply these attributes to cultivate sympathy and empathy for others (Lerner et al., 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

All Five Cs lead to the generation of the sixth C of Contribution, where an individual uses the other five attributes not only for self-motivated goals but also to provide them to others (Lerner et al., 2005; Pittmann, Irby, & Ferber, 2001).

The Five Cs Model has been subject to much empirical analysis through numerous studies (Lerner et al., 2005; Jeličić, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007; Bowers et al., 2010; Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015). The 4-H Study, a longitudinal research project ranging from fifth grade to twelfth grade in the USA, provided a good internal consistency for the Five Cs and was a primary empirical support for the Five Cs Model (Lerner et al., 2005). Jeličić et al. (2007) also found that the Five Cs Model demonstrated construct and predictive validity. Bowers et al. (2010) found that the Five Cs Model could be measured in the same manner over different measurement occasions, a requirement for development to be studied properly. Conway et al. (2015) found that the measurement properties of the Five Cs model were a suitable approach when evaluating adolescents' positive attributes in different backgrounds.

2.3.5 Emerging adulthood and PYD: Application of theory

Recent research conducted by Scales et al. (2016) outlined that the changes that a young person experiences in transitioning to the new roles that characterise emerging adulthood (i.e., financial independence, independent living, agentic striving) are subject to social and psychological processes that are very similar to the first two decades of life. Indeed, Scales et al. (2016) state that PYD frameworks, such as the Developmental Assets Framework, the Social Development Model, and the 5Cs, have the potential to both scientifically and practically relevant for understanding and strengthening positive youth development.

The application of a PYD approach to the emerging adulthood stage is at an exploratory stage. Research suggests that the developmental assets (Benson, 2003) framework is applicable to individuals in the emerging adulthood stage. Pashak, Hagen, Allen, and Selley, (2014) successfully applied the framework in a quantitative

- | | |
|--|---|
| (v) Healthy family and social relationships | Ability to create healthy social connections with other people in friendships and community relationships, to share intimacy, and to be a loving member of a family unit. |
| (vi) Educational attainment | Involvement with educational pursuits and completion of secondary school or third-level courses or certification requirements. |
| (vii) Constructive educational and occupational engagement | Engagement in productive behaviours, education, occupation, or beginning a family, or a combination of these. |
| (viii) Civic engagement | The desire to improve the social, political, or physical welfare of their community or society. |

Based on their developmental framework for successful young adult development, Scales et al. (2016) identified three areas of research and applied understanding that are required to aid the promotion of PYD in young adulthood. The authors argue that the first area is already firmly represented by the prevalent numerous empirical frameworks of PYD that identify what adolescents require for both current well-being and also to be on the route to achieving successful young adulthood. It is the following two domains, according to Scales et al. (2016), that require more development. The second domain is the need to reach consensus on the central factors of positive functioning that define the successful development of young adults. Scales et al. (2016) have broached this area by offering an elaboration of successful young adulthood and identifying eight constructs, described above, but the authors promote the need for the input of other researchers in this area to build upon their elaboration in order to add to the emerging consensus. The final area

involves the extension of PYD approaches to young adulthood in order to identify the developmental relationships, opportunities, and internal assets that young adults, in the age range of 18 to 25, require and to ascertain how these differ from the assets required in earlier stages of development. Identifying these will aid young adults in experiencing the central aspects of positive development in the young adulthood stage, and to further positively transition to following developmental stages.

2.4 Developmental assets model of PYD

Another important model of PYD is the Benson's (2003) concept of developmental assets. Developmental assets theory is a perspective devised specifically for adolescents (Benson et al., 2006). A young person's developmental assets are his/her set of individual assets, comprised of competencies and values, grouped by four categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Benson et al., 2011) representing the talents, energies, strengths, and constructive interests each young person possesses. Benson (2003) states that a young person should thrive when individual strengths are aligned with a community's external assets: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. By practically applying and encouraging a young person's developmental assets, a community can generate well-being and positive development in young people (Benson, et al. 2006; Benson & Scales, 2009).

The developmental assets framework has identified 40 developmental assets, separated into internal and external divisions (see Table 2.2), that are required for each young person to develop in an optimal manner. Internal assets are the qualities that are central to the young person such as a positive sense of identity, educational engagement, social competence, and honesty. External assets are the qualities that are

provided by community, school, and family. These assets are present in the environment that a young person occupies and also in the people that the individual interacts with (Benson, 2003).

Table 2.1

The Developmental Asset Framework

40 Developmental Assets

External Assets

Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family support – Family life provides high levels of love and support. 2. Positive family communication – Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent(s) advice and counsel. 3. Other adult relationships – Young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults. 4. Caring neighbourhood – Young person experiences caring neighbours. 5. Caring school climate – School provides a caring, encouraging environment. 6. Parent involvement in schooling – Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
Empowerment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Community values youth – Young person perceives that community adults value youth. 8. Youth as resources – Young people are given useful roles in the community. 9. Service to others – Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. 10. Safety – Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighbourhood.
Boundaries and Expectations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Family boundaries – Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts. 12. School boundaries – School provides clear rules and consequences. 13. Neighbourhood boundaries – Neighbours take responsibility for monitoring young people's behaviour.

<p>Constructive Use of Time</p>	<p>14. Adult role models – Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behaviour.</p> <p>15. Positive peer influence – Young person’s best friends model positive, responsible behaviour.</p> <p>16. High expectations – Both parents and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</p> <p>17. Creative activities – Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theatre, or other arts.</p> <p>18. Youth programs – Young person spends three hours or more per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school, and/or in the community.</p> <p>19. Religious community – Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.</p> <p>20. Time at home – Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.</p>
<hr/> <p>Internal Assets</p> <hr/>	
<p>Commitment to Learning</p>	<p>21. Achievement motivation – Young person is motivated to do well in school.</p> <p>22. School engagement – Young person is actively engaged in learning.</p> <p>23. Homework – Young person reports doing at least one or more hours of homework every school day.</p> <p>24. Bonding to school – Young person cares about her or his school.</p> <p>25. Reading for pleasure – Young person reads for pleasure 3 or more hours per week.</p>
<p>Positive Values</p>	<p>26. Caring – Young person places high value on helping other people.</p> <p>27. Equality and social justice – Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.</p>

28. Integrity – Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
 29. Honesty – Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”
 30. Responsibility – Young person accepts and takes responsibility.
 31. Restraint – Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
- Social Competencies
32. Planning and decision making – Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
 33. Interpersonal competence – Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
 34. Cultural competence – Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial ethnic backgrounds.
 35. Resistance skills – Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
 36. Peaceful conflict resolution – Young person seeks to resolve conflict non-violently.
- Positive Identity
37. Personal power – Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”
 38. Self-esteem – Young person reports having high self-esteem.
 39. Sense of purpose – Young person reports “my life has a purpose.”
 40. Positive view of personal future – Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.
-

Both the external assets and internal assets are comprised of four separate categories. The external assets category comprises: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time. The Support category contains assets that involved the presence of love and acceptance. The Empowerment category is composed of assets that nurture the ability to feel safe and valued. Assets concerned with the presence of suitable rules, guidelines, and expectations that have been composed by institutions (family, school, work) are located in the Boundaries and Expectations category. The Constructive Use of Time category comprises the presence and accessibility of activities that possibly encourage positive growth. The internal assets category is composed of: Commitment to Learning, Positive values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity. Another feature of the theoretical model is its assessment of a vast range of outcome factors that are situated in either the Thriving Behaviour category or Risk Behaviour category. Developmental assets theory argues that individuals who have a larger number of developmental assets have increased chance of achieving success, or thriving behaviour, in future times (Benson & Scales, 2009).

2.4.1 Applying the developmental assets framework during a recession

Ireland provided an apt setting for investigating how a young person's developmental assets react in the context of the Great Recession, economic instability, and increased rates of youth unemployment. This research, taking into account the adverse economic climate and age of participants, will be focusing on specific assets that were deemed by the researcher to be the most pertinent for the young men due to the contextual influences of being an undergraduate student during an economic

recession. The chosen assets were identified through their similarity to Scales et al.'s (2016) constructs of successful young adult development:

- Positive peer influence – An individual's close social group promote positive, responsible behaviour. This corresponds with Scales et al.'s (2016) construct of 'Healthy family and social relationships' which identifies the ability to create healthy social connections with other people in friendships.
- Academic motivation – Motivation to achieve good results in an educational setting. This asset maps in with Scales et al.'s (2016) 'Educational attainment' construct which prioritises educational pursuit and completion of third-level courses.
- Caring – Importance of being helpful to other people. Corresponds with the Scales et al.'s (2016) 'Ethical behaviour' where the individual exhibits behaviour that emphasises care for others.
- Responsibility – Having the ability to accept and take responsibility for one's self. This is reflected in Scales et al.'s (2016) construct of 'Constructive educational and occupational engagement' which entails the individual engaging in productive behaviours, education, occupation, or beginning a family.
- Interpersonal competence – The possession of empathy, sensitivity, and capability for friendship. This is demonstrated in the constructs 'Healthy family and social relationships' and 'ethical behaviour' in Scales et al.'s (2016) constructs.
- Personal power – Control that an individual feels for oneself. Scales et al.'s (2016) construct 'Psychological and emotional well-being' identifies the

importance of possessing healthy levels of self-efficacy to navigate any problems.

- Self-esteem – Having a high regard for one’s self. The ‘Psychological and emotional well-being’ construct (Scales et al., 2016) suggests that the importance of being happy and self-accepting.
- Sense of purpose – Belief that life has a purpose. Scales et al.’s (2016) construct of ‘Psychological and emotional wellbeing’ also identifies the importance of developing a sense of purpose.
- Positive view of personal future – Having optimism about one’s personal future. In the construct ‘Psychological and emotional well-being’, Scales et al. (2016) emphasise the need for a positive outlook.

There is a yet untapped potential to apply developmental assets theory to exploring how young people withstand long-term periods of economic adversity. By applying this theory, it allows the research to identify if certain developmental assets are used by emerging adults to help them proceed through the difficulties that arise from economic adversity, and if so, how are they used. Developmental assets theory, along with emerging adulthood theory, provides a framework to enable an investigation of how certain requirements for young adulthood are possibly more difficult to achieve during a recession.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter identified emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and developmental assets theory (Benson, 2003) as developmental theoretical frameworks that will frame the findings of this thesis. Emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), the developmental phase between adolescence and young adulthood, will be used to explore how the Great

Recession affected the transition into young adulthood. Developmental assets (Benson, 2003), traditionally a theory applied with adolescents, will be utilised in a relatively novel fashion by this thesis to investigate what assets emerging adults harness to manage a long-term period of economic adversity. This chapter also reviewed recent studies that combined both theories and explored how this juxtaposition could be utilised.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Issues in the Study of Emerging Adult Men and Contemporary Masculine Identity

3.1 Aim of chapter

This chapter will review both Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity and Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) theory of body objectification. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, a prominent gender theory, will be employed in this thesis to investigate how hegemonic masculine expectations may affect the meaning attributed to masculinity in the identity development of young Irish men. Body objectification theory (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997), originally a female-focused concept, is being increasingly utilised to investigate objectification among young men. Using this relatively novel gender perspective, body objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) will be used to explore if objectification impacts how young men currently interpret masculine norms. A specific aim of this thesis is to explore if there is a link between male body objectification and a hegemonic masculine identity as a review of the literature suggested that this potential link has not been explored. This review will also investigate the growing influence of media on young men and their physical image, exploring how this may be affecting current notions of masculinity.

3.2 Hegemonic masculinity

A principal concept in this thesis is Connell's (2005) idea of hegemonic masculinity (see Figure 3.1). Its focus is not on specific character types but rather the "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to

guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Practicing hegemonic masculinity is a significant process in order to achieve and maintain a dominant social standing. The concept refers to the idealised gender characteristics and societal roles that men maintain to ensure control, through dominant social roles in areas such as alcohol consumption (Peralta, 2007), breadwinning (Connell, 2005), toughness (Adams et al., 2010), help-seeking (Courtenay, 2000), and sexuality (de Visser, Smith, & McDonnell, 2009). The three primary facets of the concept are:

- **Subordination:** This involves the gender-related dominance and subordination of men over women, and also hegemony over subordinate masculinities (i.e., dominance of the heterosexual male and subordination of the homosexual male). Essentially, hegemonic masculinity and subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities revolve around suppressing elements that the dominant group perceive as deviant, such as homosexual men. According to Connell (2005), gay masculinity is the most visible but not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and boys are expelled from hegemonic groupings because of their interests in traditionally non-masculine things or disinterest in stereotypically masculine areas.
- **Complicity:** Connell (2005) states that the amount of men rigorously adhering to the hegemonic masculinity spectrum may actually be quite small but that the majority of men may experience a complicit relationship with the hegemonic concept. That is, many men may practice hegemonic masculine behaviours to a limited extent that nonetheless supports the patriarchal structure of society (i.e., the individual is not at risk of being recognised as a prominent advocate of patriarchy), and in so doing are complicit in gaining

advantage by subordinating women. Connell (2005) provides the example of the family man who respects his wife, is not violent towards women, fulfils his housework duties around the family home, earns the family income, but is convinced that feminism is a form of female extremism.

- **Marginalisation:** According to Connell (2005), hegemony, subordination, and complicity are relations internalised within gender order. Marginalisation occurs from the interaction between gender and other societal structures such as class and ethnicity. This involves the relationship between the dominant group and subordinated or ethnic masculinities and is an important layering with respect to authorising which groups has the most dominant masculinity. Connell (2005) provides the example of white hegemonic masculinity in the U.S. sustaining institutional oppression and physical fear that has shaped the development of masculinities in the black population.

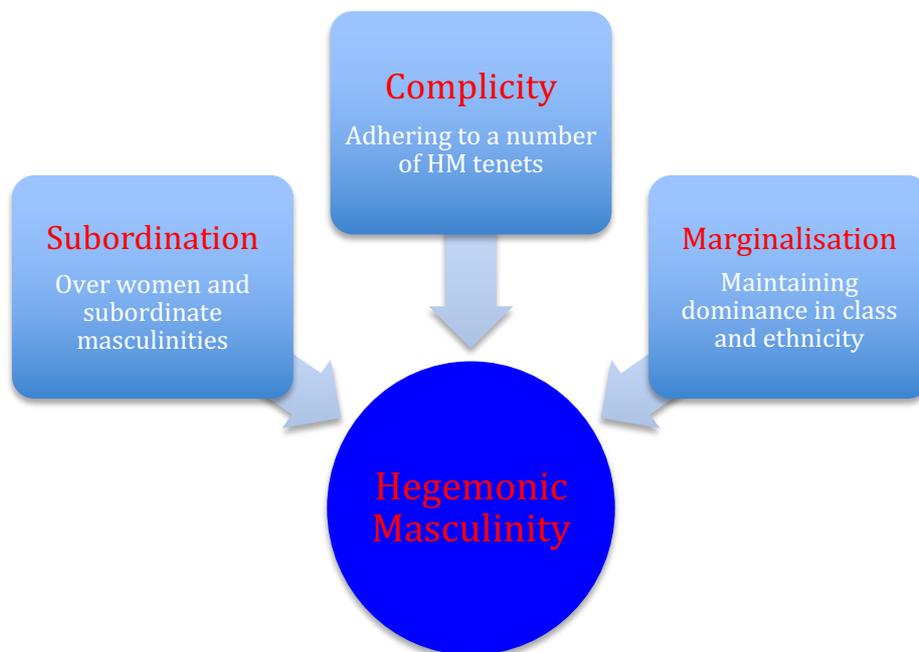


Figure 3.1. The structure of hegemonic masculinity.

Connell (2005) proposes two processes of relationship within hegemonic masculinity that are dyadic in nature: one category or group encapsulates hegemony, domination / subordination, and complicity whilst the other category or group experience marginalisation / authorisation. This relational framework provides, according to Connell, a structure that enables the analysis of specific masculinities.

3.2.1 Characteristics of hegemonic masculinity

Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity has been used in a wide body of research investigating the impact of masculine norms on a variety of different areas, a large body of which are listed below. This dominant form of masculinity is widely exhibited in a variety of social categories (i.e., physical and emotional toughness) and behaviours (i.e., risk taking, predatory sexual activity, and being a breadwinner) (Connell, 1987, 2005). This image of masculine identity is evident in society and a focal point for socialisation in wide range of behaviours such as alcohol consumption, toughness, help-seeking, sexuality, and media.

Men that consciously reject hegemonic masculinity consequently cultivate an identity using the hegemonic standard as a reference point (de Visser & Smith, 2006). In doing so, such individuals have to negotiate peer reaction to not being a hegemonic subscriber since any behaviours that are expressed which are outside of the hegemonic masculine domain are seen as non-masculine or feminine (de Visser & O'Donnell, 2013). However, competence in traditional hegemonic domains (i.e. sporting ability) can generate masculine 'capital' (de Visser & Smith, 2006; de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). This capital can be used to allow for non-masculine behaviour in other traditionally hegemonic areas (e.g. not participating in group alcohol use) (de Visser, Smith, & McDonnell, 2009).

3.2.1.1 Breadwinning

Connell (2005) states that being a provider is a role that is traditionally associated with masculinity and this association would be hindered in an economic environment where there is a challenge to the role of man as the breadwinner. The inability of men to provide financially may directly disrupt the configuration of hegemonic masculinity, which Connell refers to as a crisis tendency. Connell's argument suggests that men who identify with hegemonic masculinity ideals may be negatively affected by the economic threats to their breadwinner identity. A qualitative report conducted by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (2011) reviewed the impact of the Great Recession and unemployment on men's health in Ireland. A common response to becoming unemployed was a drastic reduction in self-confidence. Losing the status of breadwinner initiated a questioning of self-value with the eradication of a sense of purpose nurturing stress, anxiety, and powerlessness.

Numerous studies argue that men are at greater risk of negative mental health in a negative economic environment because of the masculine pressures they experience to be identified as the main breadwinner. Gerdtham and Johannesson (2005) suggested that the negative impact of recessions on male mortality is potentially a consequence of heightened sensitivity among men towards changes in employment if they identify with being the main breadwinner. Barth et al. (2011), whose research found that recessions pose greater risk for males in terms of suicide rates, also proposed that economic failure might degrade or undermine masculine identity. Chang et al. (2013) argued that a primary reason behind men experiencing an increased susceptibility to negative mental health during economic downturns is a result of their desire to be identified as the primary breadwinner. Björklund, Söderlund, Nyström, and Häggström (2015) conducted a qualitative study

investigating the impact of unemployment on young Finnish men between 18-25. The authors posited that a reason behind some participants' feelings of shame and guilt is their adherence to the belief that men should be the breadwinner and that they were not living up to this. Backhans and Hemmingsson (2012) found that unemployment impacted men more than women in a Swedish cohort in terms of the impact of unemployment. The authors suggested that the men identifying with their job role and increased breadwinning responsibilities was a primary reason this gender difference. Interestingly, none of these studies applied Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity to further explore their suggestions that masculine identity is impacted by loss of the breadwinner identity providing this thesis with a novel approach.

3.2.1.2 Alcohol consumption

Alcohol use and alcohol abuse is a practice traditionally associated with masculinity (Lemle & Mishkind, 1989). From a contextual perspective, Gough and Edwards (1998) state that the specific actions that male drinking cultivates such as type of discourse and the content of that discourse can reinforce hegemonic masculinity and quieten subordinated masculinities. According to Peralta (2007), alcohol consumption and the behaviour revolving around drinking alcohol is a social practice that enables men to behave in a manner that personifies hegemonic masculinity and reinforces existing gender structures of dominance. He stated that young men drinking in public may often exhibit a form of masculinity through drinking stories, the volume of alcohol one can tolerate, and the awareness that not drinking or drinking little can suggest weakness or homosexuality. The seemingly simple choice of drinking or not drinking potentially situates the person within a larger environment of dominant and subordinated classifications. Peralta (2007) lists

genitalia, dominance, sexism, racism, and denigration of homosexuality as being typical content of such discourse.

Being an alcohol drinker or non-drinker can be a powerful social statement in terms of how masculine an individual is judged to be (Conroy & de Visser, 2013). Males are more likely to consume alcohol, partake in binge drinking, and experience instances of alcohol-related harm (White et al., 2011). The Healthy Ireland Survey (2015) found that men consume alcohol more often than women, with 75% of young males aged between 15 and 24-years-old drinking six or more standard drinks on a typical drinking occasion. A significant feature of an individual's masculine identity in Western culture is perceived as drinking pints of beer, binge drinking, not vomiting, and exhibiting public drunkenness (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Iwamoto, Cheng, Lee, Takamatsu, & Gordon, 2011; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012).

Social ties and emotional connections among men may be threatened by being identified as a non-drinker and, as a result, male abstainers may have the integrity of their masculine identity challenged by both men and women. Indeed, abstaining from consuming alcohol is suggested to be of greater negative social consequence for men than women (Conroy & de Visser, 2013). They may be denigrated through being equated with populations frequently constructed as inhabiting an inferior social grouping (i.e., homosexuality) (Peralta, 2007).

The hegemonic perception of alcohol use as a barometer of masculinity is not ubiquitous, as differing attitudes have been evidenced among men in terms of how much drinking alcohol defines their masculinity. For some men, alcohol use is a distinct marker of manliness whilst other men substitute alcohol consumption for other forms of masculinity such as sporting competence in maintaining a masculine identity (de Visser & Smith, 2007). Conroy and de Visser (2013) found that some

young men utilised their competence in sports, another domain that is characteristic of hegemonic masculinity, to refrain from participation in alcohol consumption.

3.2.1.3 Physical prowess

Physical prowess and a man's ability to be physically tough are important factors in hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Robertson, 2003). Such characteristics are traditionally exhibited in competitive male team sports that subscribe to a hegemonic masculinity script. This is enacted by utilising narratives of war, gender, and sexuality to foster an aggressive and violent response in order to frame athletic performance (Adams et al., 2010). A qualitative study by Robertson (2003) revealed how sport can act, both symbolically and practically, as a vehicle to nurture, exert, or maintain dominant masculine discourses and practices. Dominant masculine norms can also impinge on male involvement in a sporting arena in terms of pain being perceived as weakness or emasculating. Young men can experience stigma and even ostracism if they are unable to suppress the effects of pain or to play with pain that is not manifestly disabling (White, Young, & McTeer, 1995).

Recently, individual team members may feel less pressure, or are less concerned with external perceptions, to compete in accordance with the sporting tenets of hegemonic masculinity. Adams (2011) found that alternative forms of masculinity that embody a more relaxed, liberal, and inclusive attitude were being exhibited in college-based soccer sporting environments. Coaches may also espouse an orthodox version of masculinity that players no longer subscribe to in favour of a more inclusive approach to masculinity that promotes emotional support and a non-hegemonic perspective (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). As a result, the pressure to risk serious injury for team glory is lessened. Rapidly changing cultural norms potentially

nurture an increase in emotional intimacy and more open expressions of feelings (e.g., fear, pain) between male athletes, thus enabling non-deference to a hierarchical hegemonic sporting narrative (Anderson & Kian, 2012).

3.2.1.4 Help-seeking

Courtenay's (2000) application of hegemonic masculinity theory suggests that in order for a man to seek help, he would be required to ignore socially constructed boundaries of gendered behavioural expectations. Seeking help would risk reproach for inadequately representing the idealised form of male gender performance. Indeed, males who need to fulfil the hegemonic need for dominance incorporate unhealthy beliefs and behaviours, including dismissal of health needs in order to be recognised as the stronger sex. There is substantial body of research evidencing an association between hegemonic masculine norms with reluctance for men to willingly seek professional help for problems with health and well-being (Brownhill, Wilhelm, Barclay, & Schmied, 2005; McCusker & Galupo, 2011; Vogel et al., 2011; Berger et al., 2013; Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is frequently invoked in research evaluating men's experiences when they feel their masculine identity is threatened as a result of mental (Valkonen & Hänninen, 2013) and physical illness (Emslie et al., 2009). Adhering to the hegemonic concept is also associated with a resistance to taking medication (Berger et al., 2013), increased levels of self-stigma (Vogel et al., 2011), and why men report depression at a lower rate than women (Brownhill et al., 2005).

Men's health and their engagement with the healthcare system are largely influenced by hegemonic masculine expectations. The act of help-seeking does not align with their beliefs of how men should think and behave (Yousaf, Popat, &

Hunter, 2015). The inability of a male to live up to the masculine standards that he has subscribed to may generate negative mental health (Valkonen & Hänninen, 2013). Seidler, Dawes, Rice, Oliffe, and Dhillon's (2016) systematic review identified that adherence to traditional masculine norms posed numerous issues for males suffering from depression in terms of expression, attitudes to help-seeking, and what type of help males are willing to accept. A systematic review of empirical research papers on male delay in seeking help for both medical and psychological issues identified unwillingness to express emotions and embarrassment as significant causes (Yousaf, Grunfeld, & Hunter, 2013). Pattyn, Verhaeghe, and Bracke (2015) found that, compared to women, men tend to attribute more negativity to mental health illness and perceive suffering from negative mental health as more shameful.

For those that do seek help, exceptions can be made to the acceptability of contravening the social norm. A hegemonic identity requires young men to be reluctant to seek help and endure pain in a manly fashion, the exception being when men are seeking help to help preserve or restore an enactment of masculinity such as maintaining sexual performance (O'Brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005). In one study of older rural men that used health care services, masculine identity was maintained by classifying women as being frequent and trivial attendees of health care and identifying themselves as valid health care users (Noone & Stephens, 2008). Indeed, males that seek psychological help for negative mental health are likely to be perceived as being more feminine by both men and women compared to men who shun help (McCusker & Galupo, 2011).

3.2.1.5 Sexuality

Heterosexuality is fundamental to the composition of hegemonic masculinity and it is also constructed as a gender position that is perceived as neither homosexual nor female. This suggests that performing heterosexuality is essential in the configuration of hegemonic masculinity (Jewkes & Morrell, 2017). De Visser et al. (2009) found that young men tended to associate heterosexuality with masculinity and homosexuality with femininity. Connell (2005) stated that hegemonic masculinity was underpinned by hierarchies of dominance and subordination between male groups based on sexual identification. Heterosexual males maintained dominance with homosexual males being subordinated through numerous practices such as political and cultural exclusion, religious intolerance, legal violence, street attacks, economic discrimination, and personal shunnings. The term 'gay' may often be used to designate someone or something as inferior even if there is no reference to sexuality (Pascoe, 2005).

A male who wants to be perceived as heterosexual or masculine may adhere to particular behaviours to exhibit this identity. The practice of non-masculine behaviours in areas not related to sexuality, such as abstaining from alcohol or having no interest in sport, may be noted as being 'gay' or initiate questions about potential homosexuality (de Visser et al., 2009; Conroy & de Visser, 2013). Fear of being associated with non-masculine behaviours affected help-seeking behaviours also. Cochran, Sullivan, and Mays (2003) found that homosexual men are more likely to seek mental health treatment than heterosexual men suggesting that a script of not seeking help is interpreted as a masculine trait.

Competitive sport has traditionally been a vehicle for men to exert behaviours of masculine dominance (Robertson, 2003; Adams et al., 2010). Openly gay athletes

damage the association of sport with hegemonic masculinity since people often view heterosexuality and athleticism as intertwined (Anderson 2002). In a qualitative study conducted by de Visser et al. (2009), young men deemed an openly gay athlete, who displayed muscularity and athletic aggression, as more problematic than an athlete who abstains from alcohol or an athlete who was perceived as vain. However, there is recent evidence of declining homophobia among certain sports media that are deemphasising warrior narratives or promoting an inclusive vision of masculinity (Adams, 2011; Channon & Matthews, 2015).

3.2.2 Critique of hegemonic masculinity

Moller (2007) is critical of using hegemonic masculinity in research contexts such as the analysis of masculinity at school, sports cultures, and the interpreting of masculine images in the popular media. By applying Connell's conceptual framework, Moller argues that researchers risk limiting their understanding of male experience and meaning. He states that Connell's theory is not conducive to research that aims to explore diversity and complexity, and possibly may even hinder research capacity in understanding how performance of masculinity may generate new socio-cultural behaviours, meanings, groupings, and feelings.

Demetriou (2001) states that Connell's theory operates on a dualism between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity that consequentially marginalises masculinities recognized as being non-hegemonic. Demetriou claims that Connell's concept is not just a heterosexual configuration of practice but, rather, that hegemonic masculinity is a hybrid bloc that assembles practices from various and diverse masculinities that enforce the maintenance of patriarchy.

Inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2012) is a theory which posits that how young men perceive hegemonic masculinity is experiencing a change. Anderson (2009) states that there is a prominent change occurring in heterosexual identity within the young white university-aged male population. This approach argues that social changes have impacted the dominance of hegemonic masculinity and negative processes associated with it (e.g. homophobia) that have motivated men to not enact certain behaviors for fear of being publicly perceived as being homosexual. Inclusive masculinity states that society is steadily becoming hospitable to men behaving in non-hegemonic manner in order for them to be accepted. Indeed, men may now engage in practices that are traditionally perceived as being feminine without being fearful of being labeled homosexual or weak.

3.2.3 Related masculinities

3.2.3.1 Metrosexuality

Metrosexuality is a model of masculinity that emerged in the 1980s among young men with high incomes dwelling in Western cities (Simpson, 1994). The increase in male grooming practices and men's fashion combined with an increase in salaries among single adult men promoted the emergence of the metrosexual (Segal, 1993; Simpson, 2002). From its beginnings in the gay liberation movement, metrosexuality is a form of masculinity that places an emphasis on self-presentation, appearance, and grooming with less regard for masculine aspects of dominance (Segal, 1993). Metrosexuality consequently challenges such masculine notions through the provision of alternate avenues for men to express themselves (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1993). The metrosexual can be differentiated from hegemonic masculinity by the man's attempt to develop non-dominant relationships

with women, children, and other men (MacKinnon, 1992). However, Ricciardelli, Clow, and White (2010) state that metrosexuality was not an actual alternative to hegemonic masculinity but a different avenue through which hegemony could be expressed. Indeed, metrosexuality is linked to style and success (de Visser et al., 2009), aspects that require success in the hegemonically masculine domain of economic power.

3.2.3.2 Laddism

The 1990s saw the emergence of a form of masculinity that deviated considerably from the metrosexual model in that the emphasis focused on youthfulness, hedonistic consumption, bachelorhood, the objectification of women, and approval of sexual conquest (Attwood, 2005; Jackson, Stevenson, & Brooks, 2001). This masculine dynamic is attributed as a riposte to feminism and metrosexuality (Nixon, 2001). Benwell (2003) stated that the emergence of the ‘new lad’ was a clear reaction to the ‘new man’ and was an effort to regain the masculine power that had been conceded to feminism by the ‘new man’. The construct of the ‘new lad’ embodied masculine principles of sexism, homophobia, and laddism but differed from such masculinity in its “unrelenting gloss of knowingness and irony, a reflexivity about its own condition which arguably rendered it more immune from criticism” (Benwell, 2003, p.13). The new lad was characterised by rejection of gender equality and renewing an increasingly sexist and sexualised perception of gender (Benwell, 2003). Laddism favours stereotypical masculine interests such as sports, cars, and potentially damaging health behaviours that include risky sexual practice, and both alcohol and drug abuse (Attwood, 2005; Jackson et al., 2001). Ricciardelli et al. (2010) argued that the media, specifically male-oriented magazines

such as *Loaded* and *FHM*, have been instrumental in the construction of Laddism by reducing softer forms of masculinity and emphasising drinking excessively and adopting a predatory approach towards females.

3.3 Masculinity and the media

The influence and accessibility of the media on the current generation of young people is on a scale not experienced by previous generations. Ward, Seabrook, Manago, and Reed (2016) stated that sheer volume and presence of sexually objectifying media content in the modern world makes it exceedingly difficult for any individual men or women who do not want to view it. Features of hegemonic masculinity have been reflected in media depictions of men. Ricciardelli et al. (2010) analysed various male lifestyle magazines to investigate how masculinities were being portrayed in relation to body, aesthetics and grooming, and fashion. The results revealed that the publications promoted and represented numerous forms of masculinity such as metrosexuality and laddist masculinity. Despite how prominent these forms of masculinity were in each publication, the authors stated that elements of hegemonic masculinity were constant throughout. Connell (2005) posits that hegemonic masculinity's power and ability to maintain dominance is cultivated through its malleability as it adapts itself into emerging forms of masculinity.

Media may also contribute to increasing young men's beliefs about manhood and personal enactment of masculinity. Giaccardi, Ward, Seabrook, Manago, and Lippman's (2016) research, conducted with undergraduate males aged 18 to 26-years-old, showed how televised sports, reality television programs, and men's magazines were each associated with increased endorsement of stereotypical gender beliefs and adherence to traditional masculine ideologies. Ben-Zeev, Scharnetzki, Chan, and

Dennehy (2012) found that media displaying male emotional withdrawal, such as avoiding an emotional-charged discussion or redirecting the discussion, might consequently have an adverse impact on facilitating male emotional communication. Media may also have an impact on health behaviours as Gough's (2007) analysis of newspaper articles about men and diet found that media consistently construed health-oriented diets as emasculating. The media stances consistently employed a hegemonic masculinity viewpoint that focused on health-defeating diets and perceived dieting as feminine.

The influence of the media may also affect how young men are viewing their bodies. Gill, Henwood, and McLean (2005) posit that in a consumer culture, the masculine values associated with a muscular body being athletically optimised is being diminished in favour of the aesthetic appearance of a muscular body. Lanzieri and Cook (2013) looked at popular magazines that held the highest circulation rates and found that magazines that focus specifically on male readers, both heterosexual and homosexual, exhibited male images with greater muscularity when compared with magazines that focuses on a general readership. Young men who did not self-compare with idealised masculine images and focused on the reading of the magazines were more positive about their bodies. Those who did compare their bodies with the images were more likely to take supplements to increase muscle mass and show more commitment to attaining a muscular frame. Interestingly, fashion magazines, as opposed to sports magazines, were associated with decreased muscularity in boys (Botta, 2003). Ryan and Morrison (2009) employed a qualitative approach, using thematic analysis, to investigate the rationale behind young Irish male investment in body image. Media and body comparison were two themes that, along with sexual partners, peers, negative commentary, and family, emerged as being

important in a young man intensifying his investment in his body image. Positive aspects also emerged such as enhanced athletic ability, the desire to attain a healthy body, and a drive for improved psychological well-being to feel better about themselves and their appearance.

In a classic study, Franzoi (1995) explored the effect of gender and gender concepts on young adult attitudes toward their body parts, or body-as-object (BAO), and body functions, or body-as-process (BAP). The men viewed the optimisation of their body as a dynamic process, or BAP, where bodily function (e.g. muscular strength, agility) was more important than physical beauty or aesthetic of the body. The goal was the optimisation of the body through competitive training to become a more skilled or strong athlete. In contrast to this, the traditional female focus tended to prioritise body parts (e.g., face, chest) rather than body functions, BAO, interpreted the body as a structure of separate parts that the individual will be aesthetically judged on.

Farquhar and Wasylkiw (2007) applied Franzoi's (1995) framework to their research that posited the reason behind increasing levels of body dissatisfaction among males was comparisons with idealised masculinity images in the media. They looked at the effect of viewing advertisements with male models in *Sports Illustrated*, a popular American sports-focused magazine, on male adolescents. Viewing media ideals of male images that emphasised BAO tended to increase negative self-evaluations whereas viewing media ideals that emphasised BAP resulted in an increase in positive self-evaluations. This finding suggests that how a male adolescent conceptualised his body, not just what type of body he has, impacted his attitude toward himself and his body. Farquhar and Wasylkiw argued that complex arrangements underpin the generation of body dissatisfaction in men that include

social comparison (i.e., comparison of the self with media ideals), attention (i.e., concentrating on aesthetic and/or instrumental qualities), and socialisation (i.e., defining what encompasses self-worth). Farquahar & Wasylkiw's (2007) research deemed Franzoi's (1995) framework of a binary body conceptualisation useful to investigate if modern notions of masculinity are influenced by idealised images of the male body in the media.

Not all research subscribes to the suggestion that males experience negative repercussions from viewing masculine ideals in the media. Berg et al. (2007), in their examination of the impact of media image body comparison, found that media body comparison was not a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction. Michaels, Parent, and Moradi (2013) found that undergraduate males did not experience any negative body image when exposed to muscularity-idealising magazine images. Alternately, Mulgrew, Johnson, Lane, and Katsikitis (2013) did find a negative influence when exposing males to media images. Interestingly, they found that men who were exposed to traditional sporting masculine images experienced a reduction in levels of appearance satisfaction and fitness satisfaction when compared to men who viewed objectifying masculine images. A qualitative study by Beagan and Saunders (2005) found that many males seek to hone a muscular physique in order to be recognised as more masculine, earn increased social respect, and also aid them in sexual conquests.

3.4 Objectification theory and men

Objectification theory was proposed by social psychologists Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts (1997). It is originally a framework that places female bodies in a sociocultural context with the goal of revealing the lived experiences and mental health risks of females who encounter sexual objectification. Objectification theory

contends that the cultural practice of objectification may, depending on individual differences, cultivate varying levels of self-objectification. The adoption of an observer's perspective ethos on their physical selves may generate a situation where an individual views himself or herself as an object to be looked at and evaluated. The dominant factor behind all types of sexual objectification is the individual's experience of being treated as a body or assortment of body parts primarily valued for its use to, or consumption by, others. The authors provide a framework that enables an understanding of the psychological and emotional consequences that occur within a female as a result of being treated objectively.

Although objectification theory was originally developed to explicate female body image concerns, there are researchers who posit that this theory is applicable to male body image concerns also. Martins, Tiggemann, and Kirkbride (2007) suggested that heterosexual men could become increasingly objectified from a sociocultural perspective cultivating a desire for an attractive appearance. In such an environment, the possibility of heterosexual men evaluating their own appearance from an observer's point-of-view will be greater and, according to the authors, could lead to increased rates of the negative effects of self-objectification. Tiggemann and Kuring (2004) successfully tested the theory's applicability to males but pointed out that the construct and assessment of self-objectification seems to be gender-specific. Hebl, King, and Lin (2004) found that both men and women experienced negative consequences as a result of self-objectification. Martins et al. (2007) suggested that objectification theory was a useful framework for analysing the experience of homosexual males, as they also inhabit a sub-culture that places importance on physical appearance. Their results suggested that gay men experience high levels of self-objectification. Morry and Staska's (2001) research found that fitness magazines

generated self-objectification in men as a result of internal physical fitness ideals. Strelan and Hargreaves (2005) revealed that objectification could be successfully applied to males in their study, which found that men experienced the negative impact of self-objectification as a result of exercising for body objectification motives. Ward et al. (2016) employed the self-sexualisation component, when “a person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics” (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 1), of objectification theory to investigate how different forms of media contribute to self-sexualisation among male and female third-level students. They found that different forms of media output (i.e., music videos, romantic-themed movies, popular reality programs) were associated with how both genders viewed their figures and their levels of self-value.

Objectification theory posits that exposure to sexual objectification occurs through male gaze or visual inspection of the female physique. Traditionally, women have been constantly subjected to sexualized images of the female body from the mass media in manner that reveals how such objectification has infiltrated the cultural milieu. This is reflected in:

- (i) Interpersonal and social encounters: (a) Women are stared at more than men (Hall, 1984); (b) Women are more likely to feel that they are being looked (Argyle & Williams, 1969); (c) Men gaze more at women in a nonreciprocal manner than women to do at men (Cary, 1978); (d) men are more likely to comment in a sexually evaluative manner when gazing at women (Gardner, 1980).
- (ii) Visual media’s portrayal of these encounters: In advertisements, men are portrayed staring at women more often when compared vice-versa (Goffman, 1979; Umiker-Sebeok, 1981).

- (iii) Encounters with visual media: Visual media that highlights bodies and body parts and directs viewers to use an implicit sexualizing gaze as a result of visual media's portrayal of these encounters (Mulvey, 1989).

The most salient impact of objectifying treatment is how it can potentially manifest a peculiar view of self in some females. The authors emphasise the importance of stating that bodily objectification does not impact all women in an equal manner. Although applying this type of research to men is still novel, there is a growing body of research that demonstrates the occurrence and implications of male body objectification.

3.4.1 Consequences of internalising an observer's perspective on the physical self

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explored the various psychological and experiential consequences of internalising an observer's perspective on the physical self and identified. However, recent research is revealing that different signifiers of body identification are also affecting young men:

3.4.1.1 Shame

Empirical research revealed that females have traditionally experienced more shame than males, with the majority feeling that they are overweight and, as a result of this, are ashamed (Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, & Rodin, 1987; Stapley & Haviland, 1989). However, recent research suggests that body objectification affects both men and women. Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, and Seabrook (2015) found that using social media predicted objectified body consciousness, which also generated increased body shame and reduced sexual assertiveness in both sexes.

3.4.1.2 Anxiety

A culture that objectifies the female body can instigate a constant torrent of anxiety-provoking experiences. Empirical research has revealed that females experience more anxiety about their appearance than males (Dion, Dion, & Keelan, 1990). The drive for muscularity, the desire to enhance muscularity among men, adopts that men should have a muscular physique and some men may experience social anxiety as a result of this (Thompson & Cafri, 2007). Men that desire a muscular appearance may avoid important occupational and / or social events as a result of anxiety over what they perceive as appearance flaws or an excessive want to maintain a strict diet and time-consuming exercise regime (Murray et al., 2010).

3.4.1.3 Awareness of internal bodily states

The repetitive nature of internalising an observer perspective of the physical self, as a result of an objectifying culture, may erode women's awareness of internal bodily states through a loss of access to their own physical experiences. For instance, dieting is an important aspect in lives of many females in order to attain or preserve a slim body ideal (Silberstein et al., 1987; Thornberry, Wilson, & Golden, 1986). The restrained format of eating may generate an insensitivity to internal bodily cues (Heatherton, Polivy, & Herman, 1989). However, Martins et al. (2007), using Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory, found that self-objectification in both homosexual and heterosexual men could also result in disordered eating habits.

Tiggeman et al. (2007) also found that many men are experiencing body dissatisfaction in terms of wanting to be thinner and possess more muscle. Men are also more inclined to link attractiveness with high muscular definition and leanness

(Salusso-Deonier, Markee, & Pederson, 1993). These associations may result in men being more likely to have what McCreary and Sasse (2000) theorise as the Drive for Muscularity. The focus on body appearance in the drive for muscularity suggests, although McCreary and Sasse (2000) did not link it with objectification theory, that it has potential to align with objectification theory. McCreary and Sasse (2000) created the DMS questionnaire and found that the drive for muscularity is associated more with reduced levels of self-esteem and increased levels of depression in males and not in females. The drive for muscularity was associated with partaking in a larger volume of weight training and dieting in order to increase body weight.

3.4.2 Objectification theory and mental health risks

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) suggested that the accumulation of such negative subjective experiences could increase susceptibility for women to a subset of mental health risks:

3.4.2.1 Depression

Objectification theory employs three strands in explaining high levels of depression among women: (i) biological disruptions, occupational and social discrimination; (ii) the reduced social standing of women and their comparative shortage of power; and (iii) traditionally feminine characteristics. They navigate the focus towards the experience of being a woman in a culture that objectifies the female body. Sexual objectification generates a deception of self, along with repetitive feelings of shame and anxiety. These feelings, combined with a decreased opportunity for pleasure, may be a primary factor for depression among some females (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Depression and body image has become an issue for young men also as undergraduate males who exhibited body dissatisfaction were associated with higher levels of depression (Olivardia et al., 2004). The drive for muscularity is a potential body-image disorder in males as a result of its association to lower levels of self-esteem and depression (McCreary & Sasse, 2000). Men who exercise in order to improve their aesthetic appearance are more likely to have lower body esteem (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). Muscular strength has recently been found to be significantly associated with self-esteem specifically in men in the emerging adulthood demographic (Ciccolo et al., 2016).

3.4.2.2 Eating Disorders

An eating disorder is another mental health risk that can be intimately associated with bodily objectification. Eating disorders have traditionally been a condition that affected women more than men (Johnson, Lewis, & Hagman, 1984). According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), an eating disorder is a passive, pathological strategy that reveals a female's powerlessness in attempting to control the objectification of her body. However, there is evidence of eating disorders among men as a result of body-dissatisfaction and self-objectification. Undergraduate males who were dissatisfied with their body appearance were likely to have some form of eating disorder and also take performance-enhancing steroids (Olivardia et al., 2004). Striegel-Moore et al. (2009) investigated gender differences in eating disorders and found that a substantial minority of men disclosed symptoms of having an eating disorder. Thapliyal and Hay (2014) conducted a systematic review of qualitative studies that explored the treatment experience of males with an eating disorder. The review revealed that the drive for muscularity is an increasing concern.

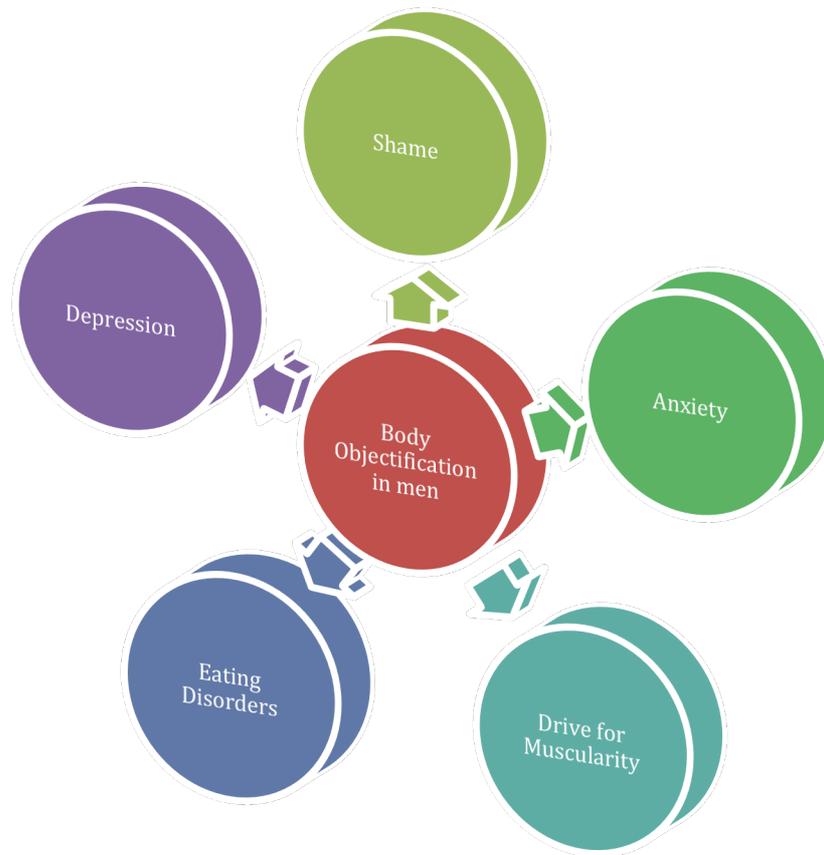


Figure 3.2. Diagram of male body objectification.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter described and explored two prominent gender theories that are being used by this thesis. It also reviewed research on the impact of media on young men's notions of masculinity and body appearance. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity was described and relevant research was outlined that highlighted a number of different characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. The traditionally female focus of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) theory of body objectification was described but with an emphasis on research that has applied the theory to understand relatively recent male objectification motives. From the extensive review of the research, there has were no studies that explored the potential compatibility of body

objectification theory and hegemonic masculinity. This thesis will adopt this novel gender perspective approach to investigate if objectification is impacting current traditional norms. Specifically, it will inquire if there is a link between hegemonic masculinity and the rise in objectifying male practices. The chapter also looked at research on the influence of media on current male notions of masculinity and highlighted the impact the medium is having on young Irish men's objectification practices.

Chapter 4: Rationale for this PhD Thesis

4.1 Aim of chapter

This chapter provides the rationale for this thesis by situating the focus of the research query in a theoretical context. It will outline the relevant developmental and gender theories that provide a backdrop to how young men could be affected by a long-term period of financial recession. This involves exploring if successful transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood in the context of an economic recession. It will also investigate how young Irish men could draw on developmental assets to weather a chronically adverse period. Finally, this thesis aims to explore if hegemonic masculine norms have been affected adversely by restricted opportunity.

4.2 The Great Recession and emerging adulthood

There has been scant research conducted on the implications of a negative economic climate on the male developmental transition into young adulthood. This is the context in which this study focuses on understanding the impact on identity that occurs as a result of the developmental challenges that young men face in a challenging economic environment. This thesis will investigate how important emerging adulthood concepts, such as financial independence, independent living, and agentic development, are affected by an adverse economy. In the face of blocked conventional routes, it may be that individuals develop and exploit informal social resources and social capital, thereby generating their own pathway to development. This potential resource is a form of adaptation and resilience, responding to the removal of a clear pathway of progression into employment and personal independence. However, it may also be a frustrating time in which reliance on family

is required or which may provoke uncertainty and lack of confidence to meet developmental challenges. Thus, the study will explore the responses that are described and consider them in terms of adaptation and challenge. Framed in these theoretical terms, the study will generate findings that are relevant to youth workers, college administrators, and service planners.

The research will allow a gender-specific perspective to be developed. It is important to note that, throughout their socialisation, males are inculcated to a societal perspective in which they are agentic and active. Being powerless in the face of an economic collapse severely challenges the capacity to respond in an agentic manner. The Great Recession may have resulted in Arnett's (2000) developmental period of emerging adulthood being experienced as a time of frustration and disempowerment. The vast impact of the economic collapse merits exploration into how emerging adult males have navigated a developmental stage where life choices and lifestyle options have been relatively altered or reduced.

Individuals in the emerging adulthood stage are also at risk of being negatively affected by numerous factors. Emerging adults are susceptible to depressive symptoms and challenges such as loneliness upon leaving the family home, as well as insecurities in respect of identity, and romantic break-ups (Nelson & Barry, 2005). Emerging adult men who experience significant fluctuations in employment are more prone to long-term negative effects in their early thirties such as lower-income, lower occupational status, and job satisfaction (Krahn et al., 2015). Financial troubles have the potential to seriously affect both the well-being and mental health of young adults (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). Financial strain may result in many emerging adults having to return to the parental home or refraining from seeking independent accommodation. Kins and Beyers (2010) state that

successful transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood is heavily influenced by living status. Independently living emerging adults are more likely to achieve a mutually supportive relationship with their parents, attain financial independence, and achieve role transition. In contrast, emerging adults not in employment or education who live with their parents are believed to have the most difficulty in transitioning to adult status.

An important aspect of Arnett's (2000) theory is that emerging adulthood is a construct of the industrialised societal culture that the individual inhabits. The culture enables a prolonged period of exploration. However, recent economic events have meant that this period of identity exploration may be experienced as frustrating, disempowering, and unachievable or negatively affected. There is little research using emerging adulthood theory to explore how adult development is affected by a recession. The context in which emerging adulthood theory will be employed in this research is a Western country (i.e., Ireland) that was one of the most harshly affected by the economic recession (Callan et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2014). The impact of the Great Recession in Ireland merits exploration into how young men in the emerging adulthood period coped and readjusted in a developmental stage where recent lifestyle options have been dramatically reduced. This research argues that the emerging adulthood stage is fundamentally affected by reduced opportunity, financial problems, and emigration, generated by poor economic circumstances in modern industrialised societies. Also, that an emerging adult's ability to plan and achieve self-efficacy is affected by economic hardship.

4.2.1 Emerging adulthood and undergraduates

Given their exposure to financial difficulty, the Irish undergraduate population are particularly vulnerable to negative economic ramifications such as a reduction in quality of life. A Higher Education Authority (2013) survey revealed that Irish student income fell by a quarter between 2010 and 2013, with a fifth of Irish undergraduates experiencing financial hardship and nearly half of the respondents experiencing poor well-being. Headstrong (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) revealed that Irish undergraduates, aged between 17 and 25-years-old, experienced stress as a result of college, finances, and work. Threats to mental health was evident as 40% of the sample experienced depression, 37% experienced anxiety, 30% experienced stress, and 43% of the sample experienced feelings of worthlessness at some point.

Attending university can be a particularly stressful and disruptive experience for emerging adults as this transition may cause a reduction in psychological well-being and cognitive-affective strengths, with young men being increasingly susceptible to reduced social well-being (Conley et al., 2014). This transitional period may also result in undergraduates experiencing numerous stressors from academic and financial difficulties (Peer et al., 2015). Positive mental health in university is more probable for students who have achieved a high identity synthesis and emotional support from family and friends (Azmitia et al., 2013). Students who do not leave the family home when attending university may also experience stressors. They may be more likely to believe that their family are not aware of the responsibilities and requirements of being a university undergraduate and treat them in a similar manner to when they were being educated in secondary level schools (Flanagan et al., 1993). The literature identifies how salient the transition to university is in an emerging

adult's life but there is little research on whether this transition is affected by the difficulties associated with an economic recession.

4.2.2 Emerging adulthood and emigration

The Great Recession heavily affected rates of Irish youth emigration. An NYCI (2013) report revealed that between 2008 and 2012, levels of Irish youth unemployment had trebled. It also revealed the severity of the impact on the youth population, with young people being twice as likely to be unemployed in comparison to older workers. An ESRI report in 2014 found that people in their early twenties underwent the greatest increases in unemployment (from 6% to 23% between 2007 and 2012). The report also revealed that unemployment among men soared between 2007 and 2012. Indeed, a third of young Irish men were unemployed leaving Ireland with one of the highest levels of unemployment among young people in Europe. Such high levels of youth unemployment seemed to impact emigration levels as 43% of Irish emigrants in 2011 were aged between 15 to 24-years-old (NYCI, 2013). The Irish Central Statistics Office (2013) reported that emigration reached a figure of 89,000 in 2013, a rise of 2.2% on the 2012 number of 87,100. Emigration peaked in 2013 although figures remained high in the following years with 81,900 emigrating in 2014 (CSO, 2015), 80,900 in 2015 (CSO, 2016), and 76,200 in 2016 (CSO, 2016). Despite the high number of Irish emigrants in recent years, there is a lack of robust data on contemporary Irish emigration and the NYCI (2013) called for this deficit to be tackled in order to create accurate and effective policy planning.

Rather than depicting young men as powerless in the face of adversity, this study aims to explore how they may reinterpret and reframe traditional benchmarks of independence in adulthood, such as financial assets, occupational stability, and

independent living. The research will draw on the theory of emerging adulthood to establish how recession challenges and threatens young men in transitioning successfully into adulthood, as well as a young person's potential for promoting creative solutions to the economic restrictions that they face.

4.3 The Great Recession and developmental assets theory

The research also embraces the positive approach of PYD (Lerner et al., 2009) in order to identify positive attributes that young people harness to overcome the challenges associated with economic adversity. Developmental assets theory is a form of PYD that specifically relates to adolescents (Benson, 2003). An adolescent's developmental assets are individual assets comprised of social competencies, positive identity, positive values, and commitment to learning, and these represent the talents, energies, strengths, and constructive interests that are embodied in a young person (Benson et al., 2011). Benson (2003) posits that a young person has the potential to thrive when one's individual strengths are in alignment with the external assets of a community, which include constructive use of time, boundaries and expectations, support, and empowerment. Being a member of a community may also nurture well-being and positive development in a young person by practically using and encouraging his/her development assets.

Scales et al. (2016) explored utilising developmental assets in the emerging adulthood stage and identified eight constructs (described in Chapter 2) for successful transition into young adulthood. However, the authors emphasize that this positioning of assets in the context of emerging adulthood requires further research, to build upon and improve their elaboration of successful young adulthood. There is scant research exploring the impact of an adverse economy on an emerging adult's developmental

assets. As a result of the Great Recession, Ireland provided a suitable context for exploring how a young person's developmental assets are affected by an environment of economic instability, and high levels of unemployment among young people. This thesis incorporates factors such as the impact of the recession and the age of participants to explore if specific assets (i.e., positive peer influence, academic motivation, caring, responsibility, interpersonal confidence, personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, a positive view of personal future) are used by emerging adult men to manage adversity.

4.4 The Great Recession and masculinity

Men seem to be particularly susceptible to adverse economic conditions. Periods of economic recession and decline have a greater impact on suicide rates in men than in women (Barth et al., 2011). Periods of economic recession in the 1990s in Asia and Eastern Europe both resulted in increased rates of suicide among men (Chang et al., 2009; Gavrilova et al., 2000; Brainerd, 2001). The Great Recession also saw men appear to be at greater risk for negative mental health as, since 2007, there has been a fourfold increase in suicides among males in Western countries (Reeves et al., 2014). Barth et al. (2011) suggest that reduced economic success can have a negative effect on men's masculine identity and may result in helplessness and depression. This is possibly as a consequence of being unable to adhere to hegemonic masculine roles, such as being the breadwinner (Chang et al., 2013; Katikreddi et al., 2012).

Gender differences in suicide during a recession may also be a consequence of men undergoing a role reversal. The argument behind this contention is that an identity conflict is posed by experiencing shame as a result of unemployment, and that this is compounded by being less inclined to seek help (Chang et al., 2013).

Connell (2005) stated that a disruption in the configuration of masculinity could emerge when men are not able to be the breadwinner. Such scenarios may emasculate men who subscribe to hegemonic masculinity ideals, in that they may be vulnerable to negative mental health when their masculine identity is threatened by being unable to be a breadwinner during an economic crisis, a period when provision is needed the most. A central aspect of this thesis is to explore if hegemonic notions of masculinity, using Connell's (2005) framework, are still prominent and what exactly instigates high levels of mental distress among young Irish men during recessions.

The impact and long-term repercussions of the Great Recession on Ireland has been catastrophic. Out of the Irish population, it is young people who experienced the most significant reductions (NYCI, 2013). In terms of gender, Irish men experienced higher levels of unemployment than females (Callan et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2014), largely due to the collapse of the construction sector (Pieta House, 2015). The period of recession from 2008 to 2012 had a significant negative effect on male suicide rates which rose by 57% when compared to male suicide trends before the Great Recession began (Corcoran et al., 2015). Connell (2005) details the importance of certain characteristics to a masculine sense of identity. The inability to achieve such hegemonic norms may be threatened by aspects of recession such as unemployment or lack of financial independence. Viewed from the perspective of Emerging Adulthood (Arnett, 2000), the current economic circumstances pose various difficulties to males at a point in their life-course that is critical to the emergence of a stable self-concept that is independent yet socially connected. Ascertaining a masculine identity is an area of concern for young men in this age bracket since identity exploration is a central facet of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). There is a vast body of research that detailed the effect of economic adversity on male rates of

suicide and negative mental health but there is little research into exploring what exactly is causing such negative implications for masculine identity.

4.5 Contemporary perceptions of masculinity

In order to fully understand how the Great Recession affected masculine identity, a primary focus is to describe how, alongside the economic change of recession / austerity, parallel changes have been occurring in the social context of being masculine, which supplies the contemporary perspective of masculinity that they are using to react to economic changes. Traditionally, male perspectives focused on the body as a vehicle to optimise for athletic ability whilst women tended to prioritise the appearance of body parts (Lerner et al., 1976; Franzoi, 1995). However, there is a substantial body of research that has explored how young men are beginning to experience different types of pressure as a result of media in terms of objectifying their appearance (Ward et al., 2016; Ryan & Morrison, 2009; Farquhar & Wasylkiw, 2007) whilst promoting adherence to traditional masculine beliefs (Ben-Zeev et al., 2012; Giaccardi et al., 2016). Indeed, media is a major aspect of day-to-day lives for young people as Coyne, Padilla-Walker, and Howard (2013) found that emerging adults are accessing media content through traditional (i.e., television, movies, music) and contemporary (i.e., social media, smart phones) avenues for up to 12 hours-per-day.

Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory, although initially formulated to investigate female body image concerns, has also been applied to body image concerns among young men (Martins et al., 2007). Many of the issues that affect women as a result of body objectification are being found to impact men also in terms of shame (Manago et al., 2015), anxiety (Murray et al., 2010), depression

(Olivardia et al., 2004), muscularity (Tiggeman et al., 2007), self-esteem (Ciccolo et al., 2016), and eating disorders (Thapliyal & Hays, 2014).

This thesis aims to understand how influential hegemonic masculine norms currently are among young Irish men and if subscribing to a hegemonic masculine identity demands competence in hegemonic domains in terms of help-seeking and alcohol consumption. It also aims to evaluate how more recent developments, specifically increased concern with body image, are affecting the masculine identity of young men. A central aim is to explore if the recent increase in male objectification is a result of hegemonic masculine characteristics, such as competition or dominance, or whether it is a result of increasingly gender convergent behaviours in light of the diminishing pressures of masculine norms.

4.6 Research aims

The central research aim of this thesis was to investigate young Irish emerging adult men's experiences of developing in a prolonged time of severe economic uncertainty. The core aim was to generate a body of research that would enable a clearer understanding of the barriers and difficulties that these young men experienced during the Great Recession with regards to their young adult development and masculine identity.

The impact of austerity on the development of young Irish men is compounded by a gradual change in the Irish social context of what is to be masculine. In order to gain a comprehensive account of the impact of the Great Recession on masculine identity and young adult development, Study One investigated the impact of both contemporary and hegemonic masculine norms on young Irish men. Young undergraduate men and women explored the influence of

Irish hegemonic masculine norms on young Irish men and how these men differ with Irish men from previous generations in terms of masculine norms and identity. This study investigated:

- How do male and female students perceive current masculine characteristics in comparison with hegemonic conceptualisations of masculinity?
- Do hegemonic notions of masculinity have a positive or negative influence on contemporary forms of masculine identity?
- Is body objectification becoming gender convergent?
- Are recent cultural developments, such as social media, increased gym-use, and appearance, affecting young male identity?
- Are there any theoretical implications as a result of these experiences?

Study Two looked at the impact of the Great Recession on the well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity of emerging adult undergraduate Irish men. This study explored young Irish men's experience of being an emerging adult in university in adverse economic conditions and how the emerging adulthood stage was impacted by the recession. It also identified what developmental assets that the students developed and used to cope with economic adversity, how the young men were impinged by a reduction in opportunity, and the impact of altered gender roles generated by the recession and societal change. This involved looking at:

- Did the economic collapse impact the transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood in terms of financial independence, agentic striving, and independent living?
- How do young men cope with prolonged economic adversity?
- Have hegemonic masculine roles been affected by restricted economic opportunity?

The third and final study looked at the experience of long-term emigration on young Irish men who had left directly because of the recession and how this affected their well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity. It explored how the men made sense of integrating into a new culture and whether this impacted their sense of identity. The men also talked about what being Irish meant to them and how they viewed Ireland from their perspectives of being long-term emigrants. The men also explored what being Irish meant to them and how they felt about Ireland in their current situation. Their experiences of overcoming initial difficulty and experiencing different masculine norms were also discussed.

- How is a young male emigrant's sense of adult identity affected by migrating to a foreign country?
- How do young male emigrants navigate the experience of emigration in order to become successfully integrated?
- Are hegemonic Irish masculine norms impacted by living and gaining employment in a foreign country?

4.7 Conclusion

The long-term ramifications of the Great Recession in Ireland provide this study with a novel approach to build upon current knowledge of developmental transition and current notions of masculinity. This research aims to study the formation of adaptation and resilience among young males in a time of clear adversity such as students about to graduate from university, and young men who have recently emigrated. It also aims to explore how young Irish men interpret and experience masculinity during times of restricted opportunity. Thus, different perspectives will be provided on how the recession has affected the adult development of young Irish men.

Framed in these theoretical terms, the study will generate findings that are relevant to youth workers, college administrators, and service planners.

Chapter 5: Methodology and Methods Used

5.1 Aim of chapter

The aim of this chapter is to explicate the research methodologies incorporated by the three empirical studies presented in this thesis and the rationale in selecting these methodologies. There will also be a chronological outline of the choices that were made with regards to the procedures used to recruit participants, collection of data, and analysis of data. Finally, this chapter will detail the appropriate ethical and quality considerations, and limitations of the research. The main body of the methodology section is presented in this chapter with a brief summary of the methodology also included in each empirical chapter.

5.2 The choice of a qualitative research design

Jewkes and Morrell (2017) suggest that using quantitative methods to research hegemonic masculinity is difficult due to Connell's (2005) stance on masculinities being fluid, dynamic, and a position that is inhabited situationally "in that the position occupied, practices, and values espoused in one context may be different from those of another" (Jewkes & Morrell, 2017, p. 3). Connell (2005) states that masculine ideologies are fluid and can be perceived as positions that are engaged in situationally depending on the position being engaged, practiced, and values embraced in a given context, which may vary from the position engaged in another context. Since Study One evaluated the impact of hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms on the masculine identity of emerging adult males, and in recognition of the fluidity of masculine ideologies, a qualitative approach of thematic analysis was deemed

appropriate. This allowed the research to explore themes relevant to a context-driven topic.

Study Two looked at young Irish men whose development had largely occurred during the Great Recession. Due to the broad exploratory nature of Study Two, thematic analysis was also employed. Similar to Study One, Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity was applied to gain an understanding of how hegemonic masculine ideologies are affected by periods of adverse economic conditions. The topic of masculinity and recession has been scantily researched in the literature. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it enabled the exploration, description, and interpretation of the personal and social experiences of individuals who have experienced the brunt of the economic slump (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Study Three explored how the experience of long-term emigration has affected the adult development and masculine identity of young Irish emigrants. A primary aim was to explore the young men's lived experiences of integrating into a new culture whilst also looking at how their masculine identity and young adult development had been impacted by this transition. The relative homogeneity of these participants' formative experience supported a comparative methodology that focuses on the individual. This stands in comparison with Study One and Two, which focused on exploring the broad topics of masculinity and recession with less focus on individualised accounts. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed for Study Three as this methodology focuses on meaning, sense-making, and communicative action. All of the participants had been through a comparable experience of moving away from Ireland specifically for work. This provided a basis for exploring how each individual made sense of what happened and the meaning

they ascribed to emigration within in the context of the developing self. A principal reason in choosing IPA was the methodology's emphasis on adopting an idiographic, phenomenological approach, a feature that would facilitate the goal in Study Three of exploring how migration impacts individual identity (Smith et al., 2009).

5.3 Epistemological position of Study One, Study Two, & Study Three

5.3.1 Mixed methods research

This thesis employed a mixed methods approach since Study One and Study Two both used thematic analysis whilst Study Three applied an IPA approach. A mixed methods approach can generate difficulty in that different studies may have different epistemological stances. Greene (2008) argued that a mixed methods approach should be recognised as a distinctive methodology in its own right. Opinion is divided concerning the incorporation of various research methods that are underpinned by different epistemological stances (Creswell, 2011). However, Greene and Caracelli (1997) argue that incorporating different ontological stances can generate conflicts that may be of benefit.

This thesis adopted a mixed methods approach for a number of reasons. Due to the broad nature of both Study One and Two, which focus on exploring the fluid, contextually-specific concepts of masculinity and young adult development (Connell, 2005), thematic analysis was deemed appropriate. The researcher, in his approach to Study One and Study Two, believed that masculinity was a social construct and required a methodology that suited a constructionist approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) situate thematic analysis firmly within the constructionist paradigm, enhancing the methodology's suitability for both studies.

The methodology in Study Three differed in that the impetus was to explore the experience of emigration for young Irish men and the effect this had on them, so the focus was on an individual's lived experience, sense of self, and identity. The interpretivist epistemology underpinning IPA was deemed appropriate by the researcher for this style of research as he was a proponent of the perspective that "IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of the experience" (Smith, 2011a, p. 9). IPA and thematic analysis were deemed to be compatible research analyses for this thesis. This was due to the broad focus on masculinity in Study One and Study Two, relevant to thematic analysis, and the prioritisation of a more detailed analysis of the experience of emigration on young Irish men in Study Three that was enhanced by using IPA.

5.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is a philosophical model concerned with theories of knowledge, which attempt to inform us about *how* we can know and *what* we can know (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). To use a qualitative methodology effectively, epistemological identification is fundamental in planning a methodological approach due to the links between different epistemological positions and certain types of methodology. This identification enabled the researcher to determine what epistemological position suits the research design and how it is conducted (Lyons & Coyle, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5.3.2.1 Study One & Study Two: Social constructionism

All participants in this research were within the age range and cultural bracket of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This developmental stage was central to the research analysis and resulted in the researcher adopting a social constructionist approach for Study One and Study Two. The rationale behind this is that the emerging adulthood stage is a developmental stage that is non-universal and is a construct that only exists in certain cultures (Arnett, 2000; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004). Women were included in Study One since its focus on current perceptions of masculinity required the opinions and experiences of both sexes to understand how the social construction of masculinity contributes to gender relations and gender norms (Schippers, 2007). Both first and final year undergraduate males were included to explore the retrospective positions of men at the beginning and the end of the undergraduate college experience. Thus, a number of analytic channels and possibilities were incorporated in the research design, with the intention of working inductively to prune these into a coherent, focused picture once data had been collected.

Constructionism postulates that the world and what one's knowledge of it is do not reflect the true nature of the world. One's knowledge of the world, the self, and other objects is constructed through the multitude of discourses and systems of meaning that each person inhabits (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985, 1999; Braun & Clark, 2013). As these develop and change, so does truth implying that there is not a single knowledge, rather there are *knowledges*. How one understands the world is related to one's specific social and cultural contexts. From a constructionist viewpoint, meaning or experience is socially produced and reproduced, as opposed to existing from within the individual (Burr, 1995).

Knowledges are seen as social artefacts and, as a result, are perceived as social, moral, political, cultural, and ideological. Knowledge is still produced in an empirical manner that is based in data and where an understanding of some type is pursued. Constructionism differs from realist and positivist perspectives through its stance that there is no singular underlying reality that provides an underpinning for true knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

With respect to exploring masculinity with young men attending university in Ireland, their sociodemographic background distinguishes them from some parts of the population demographic. Thus, they were not alienated or marginalised to the extent that entering college was an unattainable goal. They came from a relatively diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds, from parents working in farming, salaried positions, and self-employed in business, but reference was not made to having experienced high levels of social disadvantage. Consequently, the *knowledges* possessed by participants in this research positioned them in a place of relative privilege compared to others who had experienced systematic disadvantage. Their families appear to have benefited from the economic boom in Ireland in the years leading up to 2008. Nor were their families' economic position rendered so unsustainable as to make the young men unable to come to college. The level of participation of young adults in third-level education in Ireland is quite high, so they were not privileged in this sense, but do appear to have avoided the worst of the economic collapse.

5.3.2.2 Study Three: Interpretivism

IPA methodology recognises that the researcher's engagement with the participant's text is an interpretative act. It adopts an epistemological stance that, in

using careful and explicit interpretative methodology, enables access to an individual's cognitive world (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). An interpretative framework differs epistemologically from social constructionism in that this approach views the correspondence between analysis and an individual's experiences as not being precise (Lyons & Coyle, 2015). Research analysis that incorporates an interpretivist approach argues that knowledge is relative. Consequently, the analysis should prioritise the identification of patterns of meaning-making whilst also showing awareness of how the researcher and the individual being researched are making sense of the phenomena (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000).

5.4 Thematic analysis: Study One & Study Two

For Study One and Study Two, the researcher selected thematic analysis as the optimal qualitative method of research. The main theoretical focus going into Study One revolved around Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity. In order to garner broad perspectives on hegemonic and current masculinity norms, thematic analysis was deemed an appropriate methodology. Female participants were included in Study One as the opinions and experiences of both men and women are required to fully understand the impact of hegemonic masculinity in relation to other masculinities, to femininities, and on gendered behaviours (Schippers, 2007; de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; Oliffe, Kelly, Bottorff, Johnson, & Wong, 2011; Schofield, Connell, Walker, Wood, & Butland, 2000). Following data collection, further theoretical perspectives were identified as having a role to play in helping to make sense of the findings, hence body objectification theory, for instance, emerged from the analysis as a relevant theory.

Study Two was underpinned by Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood, a developmental theory that is specific to certain cultures. This resulted in a constructionist approach being employed by the research as its goal was to explore the cultural impact of the Great Recession on young Irish people. Undergraduate males in their first year and in their final year were recruited in order to investigate if men in their final year experienced different social pressures to men in first year. Thematic analysis was recognised as an appropriate methodology due to its ability to be used in research that adopts a constructivist epistemology.

Thematic analysis is effectively independent of theory and epistemology and is applicable to numerous theoretical and epistemological approaches. As a result of theoretical freedom, thematic analysis delivers a flexible and useful research method that can cultivate a rich and detailed, yet complex, review of the collected data. It is recognised as being compatible with both essentialist and constructionist theory within psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was used in this research as a largely inductive device to construct themes. Both Study One and Study Two had pre-existing theoretical influences, such as emerging adulthood and hegemonic masculinity, but these were used as a broad framework to shape the findings, rather than having a strong or explicit impact on the findings. The themes developed in Study One and Two were largely inductive, with both pre-existing theoretical expectations and emergent theoretical perspectives introduced during the discussion and post-analysis phases.

Thematic analysis identifies, analyses, and reports patterns or themes within the data set through a process of rereading verbatim transcripts and individual coding. It is an approach that can highlight similarities and differences across the data set, cultivate unanticipated insights, and produce results that are accessible to the general

public and allow for social, as well as psychological, interpretations. Its aim is to minimally arrange and describe the data set in detail and is advantageous with regards to summarising key features of large bodies of data. Since it is not informed by any detailed theoretical or technical approaches, thematic analysis has potential to provide a more accessible form of exploration for individuals in the beginning of an early qualitative research career (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

5.4.1 Limitations of thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is subject to a number of disadvantages or limitations. A fundamental aspect of applying this approach is in creating a rich analysis or in being able to respond to a research question. Nevertheless, its flexibility can be detrimental as it potentially enables a wide range of analytic choices. This can result in the possibility that a broad range of analytical positions can be taken up in relation to the data set and resultantly the development of specific procedures for higher-phase analysis is made problematic. A further upshot of this is that additional difficulty may arise from the researcher being unable to plot a course when deciding what features of the data to focus on (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

When compared with other qualitative analytic methods, thematic analysis is restricted to descriptive analysis in terms of its level of interpretation if it is not applied within a theoretical framework that can empower the analytic statements. When compared to other qualitative analytic approaches (e.g. narrative or biographical approaches), thematic analysis is not used to preserve continuity and contradiction through comparison of individual transcripts. Unlike discourse analysis or content analysis, thematic analysis is unable to make claims about participants' use of language in respect of detailed functions of discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5.5 Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Study Three

IPA is a qualitative approach that focuses on the detailed analysis of an individual's personal lived experience, what this experience means to the individual, and how the individual makes sense of that experience (Smith, 2011a). Three principal areas of knowledge underpin IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology is a philosophy that focuses on the analysis of experience. It aims to explore what the experience of being human is like, in its variety of characteristics, with a primary focus on the things that matter to the individual, and which make up one's lived world. Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre, are key characters in phenomenological philosophy. Husserl (1970/1927) emphasised the importance and relevance of focusing on the experience and how the individual perceives the experience personally. For Husserl, transcendental phenomenology strived to understand experience by reducing the experience back to its core structure that transcends personal and contextual assumptions. Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1962), and Sartre (1956/1943) disregarded Husserl's transcendental reduction of phenomenology as they believed that an individual's observations are made from a certain position. This viewpoint caused them to adopt an increasingly interpretative position when looking at a phenomenon with the aim of understanding one's engagement in the lived world rather than perceiving an individual as a creature of isolation. Phenomenology is key for psychologists in that it offers a rich understanding in how to analyse and understand lived experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation championed by Schleiermacher (1998), Heidegger (1962), and Gadamer (1990/1960). It is unconnected to phenomenology. Hermeneutics was originally concerned with attempting to provide a stronger basis to interpret biblical texts. The main areas that concern hermeneutic theorists revolve around identifying the methods and aims of interpretation itself, trying to ascertain the original meanings of an author, and what is the relation between the context of a manuscript's production and the context of a manuscript's interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). An individual's experience is not something that can be gathered in a straightforward fashion, as this process requires the researcher to engage and interpret. As result, IPA is bound to the hermeneutic perspective. The IPA approach also involves the researcher making sense of the individual who is trying to make sense of what is happening to them (Smith, 2011a).

Another influence on IPA is idiography, which is an approach that focuses on the particular as opposed to the nomothetic approach that focuses on making statements at a group level. This approach involves a commitment to analyse each participant in a sample in detail. This is important when seeking to understand how a specific experiential phenomenon (e.g., migration) is understood from the perspective of particular people, in a specific context (e.g., young Irish male emigrants during a recession). IPA uses an analytic process when moving from individual cases to making more broad statements. However, there is also room for retrieving particular items about any of the individuals that were involved, which is a vital aspect for psychological research (Smith et al., 2009).

5.5.1 IPA & Study Three

IPA has been a fruitful qualitative approach when researching areas such as identity, migration, and masculinity that are relevant to the research aims of Study Three (Smith et al., 2009; Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000; de Visser & Smith, 2006). According to Smith et al. (2009), the issue of identity is a topic that often emerges from IPA research with the area of major life transitions and identity change being a common theme in a host of IPA studies. IPA research conducted by Timotijevic and Breakwell (2000) explored how the identity of emigrants from former Yugoslavia was affected by moving to the UK. Their findings revealed that the migrants' reconstruction of identity was a continuous process after arriving in the UK. They also faced threats to their self-esteem, self-efficacy, distinctiveness, and continuity as a result of the experience. IPA has also been used for a single case study to explore how men position themselves with regard to various discourses of masculinity and how this could impact their masculine identities (de Visser & Smith, 2006). In a study by de Visser and Smith (2007), IPA was employed to explore how alcohol consumption among young men impacted their sense of masculinity identity. From an emigration perspective, IPA enables an individual's experience to be investigated from a cultural context. This approach identifies contextual elements in a person's life that possibly may or may not influence one's meaning-making process (Shaw, 2001). IPA's idiographic approach is one that aligns with the goals of Study Three, which is to explore in detail the lived experiences of young men's transition to a new country.

5.5.2 Limitations of IPA

Chamberlain (2011) argued that IPA could be a troubling methodology. One limitation he perceived was an increase in the practice of coding that potentially

resulted in value being placed upon themes and subthemes instead of interpretation. Such an approach implies that analysis is completed when central themes are identified and explained from the data corpus, limiting effective interpretation. Chamberlain further argued that this process is highly similar to the grounded theory approach and often generates comparable results, at the expense of the phenomenology. Also, the theme-focused importance may produce an analysis that is akin to Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. Smith (2011b) responded to Chamberlain's criticisms by emphasising the need for the researcher to be bold in exhibiting their analysis and findings. This involves being confident in one's interpretation of the evidence that is being used to support the claims that are being made. Smith further argued that IPA guidelines are to be used flexibly rather than to be adhered to in a fixed process.

My supervisor and I, in order to ensure we followed the IPA guidelines championed by Smith et al. (2009), met regularly in order for him monitor the frequency and volume of my initial coding. My supervisor frequently challenged assertions that I was making in my interpretation of the evidence. Such challenges caused me to re-evaluate how I had interpreted data and helped the analysis by ensuring that I was following the IPA approach emphasised by Smith (2011b).

5.6 Other qualitative methodologies

5.6.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory emerged from research programs in American hospitals during the 1960s that encountered difficulty in investigating phenomena that was not officially recognised but was physically present in the research sample (Glaser & Strauss, 1965). Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed to generate theory inductively by

scrutinizing such data in detail. Early formations of grounded theory adopted an epistemological stance of positivism, a position that suggests it is feasible to describe what is ‘out there’ and that an ultimate ‘truth’ exists (Payne, 2015). There are also constructivist versions of grounded theory with distinct methodological instructions with the goal of maintaining an interest in universal claims (Glaser, 1992). This methodology’s primary aim is the construction of theory and social processes that account for phenomena (Willig, 2001). Grounded theory requires the use of the constant comparative method where the researcher produces concepts from the data by coding and analysing simultaneously and applying theoretical sampling to generate a data-grounded theory (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Kolb, 2012). However, a core feature of this thesis was to use pre-existing theories, such as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), as theoretical frameworks to investigate if these concepts had been affected by economic adversity. This resulted in Grounded Theory being deemed an unsuitable approach for all three studies.

5.6.2 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a form of qualitative analysis that focuses specifically on the thorough analysis of patterns of meaning within texts and the effects that such patterns of meaning possess (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The primary aim of discourse analysis is to understand how language is used to construct social reality (Starks & Trinidad, 2007), including strategies to preserve power dynamics. The discourse analysis cluster contains a number of analytical approaches. Discursive analysis is more focused on the detail of natural discourse whilst Foucauldian discourse analysis prioritises topics such as ideology, identity, power relations, and social change (Coyle, 2015). Discourse analysis, and the discourse-dynamic approach, was deemed

to be unsuitable for this research because of the methodology's particular focus on the influence of language in the construction of an individual's social reality (Willig, 2008). This contrasts with the aim of Study One and Study Two to evaluate group conceptualisations about economic adversity, masculine identity, and young adult development. Discourse Analysis was deemed unsuitable for Study Three as it aimed to generate a detailed understanding of a specific lived experience rather than investigate how language is utilised to cultivate and enact identities and activities (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

5.6.3 Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis prioritises the narrative that an individual constructs to provide meaning and order to a constantly changing world (Murray, 2008). It is comprised of numerous approaches towards narrative analysis such as story analyst, where the narratives are the sole form of analysis, and storyteller, where the analysis is the story (Smith, 2015). Narrative analysis, both as a result of its relative novelty in psychological research and due to the broad nature of Study One and Study Two and Study Three's focus on lived-experience, was deemed to be an unsuitable choice.

5.7 Methods used

This section will outline the procedures that were employed to conduct the three empirical research studies. It details the processes of applying for, and receiving, ethical approval, selection and recruitment of a relevant participant base, interviewing the selected participants, and the consequent analysis of the interviews.

5.7.1 Ethical approval

The ethics form for Study One and Study Two were submitted to the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee in September 2014. Ethical approval was granted in October 2014, after addressing minor revisions. The ethics form for Study Three was submitted to the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee in February 2016. Full ethical approval was granted in March 2016, following minor revisions.

The principal ethical issues for each of the three studies pertained to the potential negative impact of the interviews on the undergraduate and emigrant participants. Each participant was made fully aware of the purpose of the research and what was required before participating. An information letter detailing exactly what research participation entailed was provided to the participants (see Appendix A). Participants signed a consent form if they still wished to partake in the research (see Appendix B).

For Study Three, the primary ethical issue was developing a protocol to screen and identify potentially vulnerable participants. The following four-step protocol was approved by the NUIG Ethics Committee and applied by the researcher to gauge any potential distress in the participant:

- (i) Researcher gained contact details of participants through email contact.
- (ii) Researcher contacted the participant to pre-screen.
- (iii) Conversation was general at the beginning and then leads into discussing topics that will be potentially broached during the interview.
- (iv) If participant conversed the research topics in a non-distressed, rational manner, he was deemed suitable. If the participant disclosed information in a manner that exhibited any vocal signs of distress or unease, he would be informed that the study may not be suitable for him and to contact an

organisation on the debriefing sheet if he felt he had been negatively affected by the conversation.

5.7.2 Recruiting participants

In order to properly adopt a qualitative approach, the sample for Study One, Study Two, and Study Three, were purposively selected to align with the research questions. Each study used a homogenous convenience sample. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to ensure that the research topic was a relevant subject for participants.

In Study One, the research aim was to recruit both male and female undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25-years-old and who grew up in Ireland during the Great Recession. Study Two. Thirty-one participants were recruited through SONA, the NUIG School of Psychology research participation site, and through an email campaign (see Appendix C) to students of each discipline in NUIG.

The research aim in Study Three was to recruit male emigrants aged between 18 and 25-years-old and who left Ireland as a result of the Great Recession. Contact was made with relevant Irish groups such as the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs but no official Irish emigrant group was identified. A short research description was posted (see Appendix G) on the Facebook social media site on a variety of different groups such as ‘Irish and New in Toronto!’ and ‘Irish Around Melbourne’. 12 male emigrants responded to the posts and were consequently recruited.

5.7.3 Research design

Study One and Study Two were cross-sectional thematic analysis studies. The data utilised for Study Two was a subset of the participant data from Study One.

Participants differed in year of study, gender, and age in Study One and in year of study and age in Study Two. Study Three was a cross-sectional (location, age, duration of emigration) IPA study. Each participant was given a pseudonym. All participants identified as Irish, although four participants (i.e. Gerry, Paul, Rebecca, Kate) were born or lived abroad for a number of years.

5.7.3.1 Redesigning Study One & Study Two

Study One initially aimed to explore two areas in the interview schedule: (i) how do hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms affect the masculine identity of young Irish males, and (ii) explore the impact of the Great Recession on the well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity of young Irish male undergraduates. The breadth of data collected meant that Study One could be split into two separate studies. Initially, Study Two was going to investigate the impact of the Great Recession on the well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity of young Irish men who had become unemployed directly as a result of the recession. The intention was to expand beyond the college student demographic in order to encompass more diverse socioeconomic groups (and to explore the views of college students who had become unemployed). Several links were made with relevant organisations (i.e., Jigsaw Galway, COPE Galway, Galway People's Resource Centre, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed). There was also an advertising campaign that concentrated on social welfare offices, counselling services, and popular leisure locations such as cafes and bars. However, there was no response from the advertising campaign or any service-users from the organisations that agreed to help. It became apparent after a few months that it would be extremely difficult to recruit any potential participants for the research. Upon discussion with both my

supervisor and the members of my Graduate Research Committee, it was decided that Study Two would utilise data collected from the interview corpus for Study One since the breadth of data meant two separate studies was entirely plausible.

In order to explore why young men are more susceptible to poor mental health during economic recessions, it was firstly important to evaluate what masculine norms, whether hegemonic or contemporary, are deemed to exert the most influence. Study One focused on exploring how both hegemonic and contemporary masculinity norms influence the masculine identity of emerging adult males. Study Two then investigated how the well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity of young Irish men were affected by the Great Recession.

5.7.4 Study One design

Study One was a cross-sectional thematic analysis study that aimed to explore how both hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms affected the masculine identity of emerging adult males. Although Study One primarily focused on young men's sense of masculinity, it was important to include a female perspective. Schippers (2007) revision of Connell's concept suggests it is important to recognise how both hegemonic masculinities *and* hegemonic femininities are involved in the psycho-sociology of gender relations and gendered behaviours. The rationale for this is that the opinions and experiences of both genders should be explored to fully understand the gendered narrative of any phenomena. The accounts of female participants would be used to gain a more comprehensive account of the masculine ideologies young men adhered to, offering a point of triangulation. A goal of the Study One analysis was to clarify the impact of recent changes in gender identity and gender practice on social constructions of gender.

A semi-structured qualitative design was employed for this study. Initially the research planned on incorporating both individual interviews and focus groups but this approach was cancelled due to a lack of response from the student cohort to partake in a group discussion. Ultimately, individual interviews were deemed appropriate due to the complex nature of the research question and the potential social pressures young men may encounter in responding to questions on this topic in a same-sex group setting.

Thirty-one undergraduate students participated in the interviews for Study One (see Table 5.1). The interview of one male participant was omitted from the data collection as his interview was deemed too short and non-responsive by both my supervisor and I. The data sample comprised of 8 females and 22 males ranging in age from 18 and 25-years-old. All the participants were students at the National University of Ireland, Galway and were at different stages of an undergraduate degree programme with 10 men and all 8 women being in final year and 12 men being in first year. This imbalance between participant sex was purposive as a primary focus of the research was to evaluate if student experiences among young men in a recession differed between final-year men and non-final year men. The inclusion of women participants enabled the researcher to explore if there was any nuanced difference between genders in final year of undergraduate study.

Table 5.1

Study One & Study Two participant details

Name	Gender	Age	Year of study
Alan	M	18	First year
Andrew	M	19	First year
Anthony	M	20	First year
Ben	M	22	Final year
Bill	M	22	Final year
Brian	M	21	Final year
Ciara	F	22	Final year
Colin	M	22	Final year
Dean	M	25	First year
Emily	F	21	Final year
Emma	F	22	Final year
Gerry	M	22	Final year
Glenn	M	20	Final year
Hal	M	18	First year
Harry	M	20	Final year
Jessica	F	23	Final year
Joanne	F	25	Final year
Julian	M	19	First year
Kate	F	22	Final year
Larry	M	19	First year
Mark	M	20	First year
Matthew	M	21	Final year

Paul	M	22	Final year
Philip	M	25	First year
Rebecca	F	24	Final year
Roger	M	19	First year
Sarah	F	23	Final year
Simon	M	25	First year
Tommy	M	19	First year
William	M	22	Final year

5.7.5 Study Two design

Study Two was a thematic analysis study that utilised a subset of the data from the male participant interviews in Study One. Study One was designed to explore the social context of being masculine in the current climate in order to provide an understanding of contemporary masculine norms. Building upon this, Study Two examined how the Great Recession impacted the masculine identity, well-being, and young adult development of young Irish male undergraduates. A semi-structured qualitative design was employed for this study.

The participant base for the interviews in Study Two consisted entirely of the twenty-two undergraduate student men from Study One. Participant details are described in Section 5.7.4. The age range was based between 18 and 25-years-old to allow an exploration of the Great Recession's impact on the emerging adulthood stage, in terms of its potential restrictions on this developmental phase, and the developmental assets that may be nurtured as a result (described in Chapter 3).

5.7.6 Data collection for Study One & Study Two

A semi-structured interview schedule was devised for the individual interviews in Study One and Study Two that enabled the translation of a general area of research interest into more specific strands. The interview schedule was comprised of open-ended questions and probes aimed at directing participants towards their thoughts and perceptions of contemporary masculine identities among young adult males and hegemonic notions of masculinity. The interview schedule was designed to revolve around two main areas: (i) the participants' experiences of the recession; and (ii) their perceptions of hegemonic and contemporary masculine identities.

The researcher contacted each participant to identify a location that was quiet, safe, and accessible to conduct the interviews. The entire sample was interviewed in meeting rooms in the NUIG School of Psychology. As each interview was conducted, the interview schedule was refined in order to develop a cohesive, sequenced array of questions that was designed to cultivate discourse about the participants' experiences of being a young Irish male undergraduate during a prolonged period of economic recession. The main research questions aligned with topics of discussion: (i) the impact of the Great Recession on their individual and family life; (ii) how their university experience had been influenced by an adverse economy; (iii) current notions of modern masculinity in light of the recession; (iv) their future outlook. Both my supervisor and I were particularly attentive to question phrasing and numerous drafts of the interview schedule were suggested and revised to cultivate a non-leading and understandable list of questions. Two pilot interviews were conducted with fellow PhD candidates and these led to the removal and addition of certain questions and minor reformatting of the interview schedule sequence. Interview rooms were comfortable, heated spaces that were free from interruption from external individuals.

An audio recorder was placed between the interviewer and the interviewee and its presence was pointed out by the interviewer at the beginning of each interview. The interviewer aimed to generate a comfortable atmosphere for each interviewee to make them feel at ease and be able to talk about their experiences.

5.7.7 Study Three design

Study Three was a cross-sectional study that aimed to explore the emigration experiences of young Irish male adult emigrants who had left Ireland between the ages of 18 and 25-years-old as a result of the Great Recession. At the time of the interview, participants ranged in age from 24 to 31-years-old and all had left Ireland between the age of 20 and 25-years-old. Each participant was interviewed through Skype or Facebook Messenger.

5.7.8 Data collection for Study Three

The primary aim of this study was to explore if the experience of long-term emigration impacted the masculine identity, well-being, and adult development of young Irish males who emigrated as a result of the Great Recession. IPA is a methodology that aims to describe and interpret an individual's lived experience and, as such, is optimised by data collection methods that enable individuals to provide a rich, detailed account of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, a semi-structured interview schedule was devised for the Study Three individual interviews that allowed the participants to discuss, and elaborate, on their experiences. The interview schedule contained open-ended questions and probes that navigated participants towards their experiences of being a young Irish male emigrant and how this experience affected their identity.

The researcher contacted each participant in order to agree on a time that was suitable to the participant to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted through visual calls on Skype or Facebook Messenger. Participants were in a quiet room in their private accommodation. Upon completion of each interview, the interview schedule was revised and reworked to generate a suitable, concise list of questions that enabled the participants' to openly discuss their experiences of being a young Irish male emigrant. The areas of discussion were aligned with the main research questions: (i) the impact of the Great Recession on their individual and family life; (ii) their period of acclimatisation to a new country; (iii) the impact of emigration on their national and masculine identity; and (iv) how the experience has affected their adult development. Similar to Study One and Study Two, both my supervisor and I were mindful of how questions were being phrased. Multiple drafts of the interview schedule were discussed and revised in order to generate a schedule that was non-leading and clear. One pilot interview was conducted with an Irish emigrant in London and this led to further reworking of the schedule. An audio recorder was placed beside the interviewer's laptop. The audio recorder being out of clear sight may have decreased the chance of it potentially causing any self-consciousness among participants. The interviewer hoped to cultivate an atmosphere that was conducive to the interviewees feeling at ease and being able to discuss their experiences. After a discussion between my supervisor and I, the pilot interview and four others were omitted from the final collection of interviews (i.e., the recorder's batteries wasted during one, the internet connection continuously disconnected for two others disrupting the flow of the conversation, and the final one did not divulge much detail). This resulted in seven participants being used for Study Three. See Table 5.2 for Study Three's participant details.

Table 5.2

Study Three participant details

Name	Age	Country of Emigration	Age of Emigration
Ben	29	Australia	25
Dean	28	Australia, Canada, Japan	23
Michael	31	Australia	25
Philip	24	Denmark, Germany	20
Ronny	31	Australia	25
Sam	27	USA, Thailand	22
Sean	30	Canada	25

5.7.9 Participant welfare

Participants were susceptible to a certain degree of risk in taking part in the study due to the likelihood that they would be discussing topics that could be potentially distressing (i.e., financial hardships, future uncertainty). These issues were addressed by emailing information sheets to willing participants upon their declaration of interest. The information sheet detailed what taking part in the interview would involve and a general summary of the topics that would be covered. In the time directly before the interview began, participants were again provided with the information sheet and given ample time to reread it if they so desired.

The information sheet also informed the students that they could withdraw at any time without having to provide a reason for doing so, that they could ask for a break at any time, and that they had the right not to answer any questions if they did not want to. The researcher also orally informed the participants of their rights before

the interview began. Although the information sheet mentioned that all interviews were being recorded, participants were asked if they were okay with the interview being recorded before the audio recorder was switched on.

Once the interviews ended, participants were provided with a debriefing sheet (see Appendix D). Participants in Study One and Study Two were given the debriefing sheet by hand while Study Three participants were emailed the debriefing sheet immediately after the interview's conclusion. This contained contact numbers and websites for organisations that were deemed appropriate for people that were experiencing any form of distress. Debriefing sheets also provided contact details for the researcher and the researcher's supervisor in case the participant wanted more information or had any queries or complaints about the research.

5.7.10 Transcription & analysis

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher or by a professional transcriber. The professional transcriber was paid for through the researcher's annual research budget. The PhD candidate reviewed all of the transcripts done by the professional transcriber in sync with the audio recording of the interviews to ensure each detail was included. A number of minimal corrections and the inclusion of added relevant punctuation marks were added to each transcript. In the coded extracts that were embedded within the analysis, brackets conveyed an action by the interviewee (e.g., (laughs)), a set of three full stops (e.g., ...) indicated an ellipsis or omission of text that not deemed relevant, and square brackets with text (e.g., [example]) designated text that the researcher included to explain the meaning of a quote.

Study One and Study Two were both analysed using thematic analysis. In order to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis with the data set generated by the participant individual interviews, Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide was adhered to:

- 1) *Familiarization with the data*: Data immersion was initiated through the repeated reading of the data collection by the researcher in order to search for emerging meanings or patterns. Potential coding notes were also taken with regards to what was of interest about the data.
- 2) *Generating initial codes*: Initial codes were developed from a systematic review of the entire data set. Interesting segments in the interviews that could form the core of potential themes were identified. A comprehensive list of identified codes from the data collection was then compiled.
- 3) *Searching for themes*: Individual codes were arranged into potential themes with all the relevant coded extracts gathered within these identified themes. Different levels of themes were then distinguished leading to the formation of main themes and sub-themes.
- 4) *Reviewing themes*: The entire data set was reread and all coded data extracts were reviewed in order to ensure that the extracts within each theme generated a coherent pattern. Also, any relevant extra data that was missed in previous coding processes were coded within themes.
- 5) *Defining and naming themes*: Each theme was defined and further refined through identification of the essence of what the theme encompassed and figuring out what feature of the data is captured by each theme.

- 6) *Producing the report*: A concise, coherent, and evidenced analysis was written-up. Particularly relevant extracts were inserted within an analytic narrative that formed an argument with regards to the research question.

Study Three was analysed using IPA, which required a different approach to the first two studies. In order to adhere to the idiographic nature of IPA analysis, the analysis focused on the individual qualities of each interview instead of a general focus on the interview corpus. Smith et al. (2009) set out six key steps when using IPA analysis:

- 1) *Reading and re-reading*: The audio recording of each transcript was replayed while reading the transcript for the first time. Each transcript was read multiple times to garner recollections and observations about the interview.
- 2) *Initial noting*: During the reading and re-reading stage, notes were included in the Word document (See Appendix E). These initial notes enabled the generation of: (i) descriptive comments: describing the content of what the participant is talking about (normal text); (ii) linguistic comments: analysis of the exact use of language by the participants (*italics*); and (iii) conceptual comments: engaging the transcript in a more interrogative and conceptual approach (underlined).
- 3) *Developing emergent themes*: Themes were gradually generated through a process of focusing on the original words and thoughts of the participants and also the primary researcher's interpretation of these.
- 4) *Classifying theme connections*: Collating emergent themes with shared meaning in groups through: (i) Abstraction: putting similar themes in the same group and developing a pertinent name for each group; (ii)

Subsumption: The super-ordination of emergent themes to bring together other related themes; (iii) Polarization: Transcripts were analysed for oppositional relationships between developing themes; (iv)

Contextualisation: Identifying temporal, cultural, or narrative elements in the analysis; (v) Numeration: Identifying the frequency that each theme is supported; (vi) Function: Analysing the particular function of themes within the transcript.

5) *Progressing to a new participant interview*: The aforementioned steps were carried out for every interview and ceased after the final interview was analysed. Rigorously adhering to the steps enabled the emergence of novel themes during the analysis of every interview.

6) *Investigating patterns across interviews*: Key themes emerged that reflected respondent's experiences of emigration. This step of analysis involved relabelling and reconfiguring the emergent themes that were identified for each participant as analysis shifted to an increasingly theoretical stage.

IPA requires the researcher to develop, firstly, a description and, secondly, an interpretation of each participant's interview. The description is the first level and is coherent, focused on the participant, and is a psychologically informed account of what the participants experience was like. IPA allows the researcher to go a step further by enabling a deeper exploration and understanding of the participants' experiences and opinions (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Resultantly, some themes focus on describing what is being said by the participant but with increased scope to interpret when possible. Interpretation entails the second level of analysis and it focuses on the social, cultural, and theoretical context that the description is

embedded in. This generates both a critical and conceptual interpretation of how the participant is making sense of their experience (Larkin et al., 2006).

In order to guide the analysis, I met frequently with my supervisor to review, identify, and agree upon emergent themes to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the interview content. This procedure involved reading through each individual transcript and identifying extracts where the themes were evident in the words of the participants. When there were disagreements about coding and analysis, my supervisor and I discussed such matters thoroughly until we resolved our analytical differences in a manner in which we were both happy to proceed.

5.7.11 Ensuring quality

5.7.11.1 Study One & Study Two

Qualitative research requires evaluation through criteria that is appropriate to it rather than criteria that is appropriate to a quantitative approach (i.e., validity, reliability, generalizability). Braun and Clarke (2006), in their article on conducting a high-quality thematic analysis, provide a concise checklist of criteria, composed of fifteen points, for a researcher to consider when using thematic analysis. Following the criteria determines the level of quality of how the application has been applied. The fifteen steps are encompassed within five processes, each of which were followed in detail:

- i) *Transcription*: To ensure no measure of detail was spared, I transcribed the majority of the interviews. The other interviews were transcribed by a reliable professional transcriber. Once she completed a transcript, I re-listened to the interview whilst reading the transcript to ensure it spared no detail.

- ii) *Coding*: During the coding process, each interview was given equal attention that was rigorous and comprehensive. Upon identification, all the relevant quotes were collected. Coherent, distinct themes were identified.
- iii) *Analysis*: Data were analysed in an interpretative fashion. Chosen extracts matched the analytic assertions. The analysis provided an organised and compelling story through the data, and contained a healthy balance of analysis and extracts.
- iv) *Overall*: Each step of analysis was given adequate time to facilitate a complete analytic approach.
- v) *Written report*: The epistemology behind the thematic analysis approach was clearly explained. The method for Study One and Study Two was consistent with the reported analysis as well as the concepts and language matching the epistemology of the analysis. Finally, the researcher was active in this research process.

5.7.11.2 Study Three

Since Study Three employed IPA, a methodology with an epistemology that is different to the social constructionism in Study One and Two, it required a different set of guidelines to ensure quality in the analysis. Smith et al.'s (2009) IPA handbook, which contains a comprehensive guide to conducting IPA research, promotes Yardley's (2000) criteria for producing high-quality analysis. Yardley (2000) advocates four core guidelines to ensure quality in qualitative research. The following guidelines were followed closely for the research process in Study Three:

- i) *Sensitivity to context*: Being aware of the relevant literature and previous empirical studies that are related to the phenomenon being explored. A

comprehensive review was conducted before the research question was formed and interview schedule finalised. Theory that was suitable to the context of the research question was applied. I was also aware of the influence of socio-cultural factors (e.g., socioeconomic influences) on the participants' discourse, outlooks, objectives, and expectations of the interviews since their interest in the research may be a result of a personal experience to do with the recession.

- ii) *Commitment and rigour*: I displayed a high level of thoroughness and engagement with the study by adhering to guidelines in Smith et al.'s (2009) handbook and Smith's (2011a) guidelines. The participant base was chosen in order to provide the research question with a suitable sample.
- iii) *Transparency and coherence*: Exhibiting clarity in how the research process was executed in the study's write-up. The steps followed by Study Three were detailed previously in this chapter. The study's coherence is demonstrated by the strength of the connection between the epistemological stance and the research being carried out. The study employed an interpretivist epistemology that aligned with the IPA approach.
- iv) *Impact and importance*: Regardless of the quality of the finished research article, a crucial aspect is whether it reveals important findings that make a difference in theory, social change, or practice. Study Three's findings have theoretical implications for emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). It also has implications for policy in light of future recessions and understanding the difficulties encountered by emigrants upon integrating into new countries.

Although Smith et al.'s (2009) IPA handbook champions Yardley's (2000) approach, further guidelines for IPA were advocated by Smith (2011). These included demonstrating a clear alignment with the phenomenological, idiographic, and hermeneutic principles of IPA, displaying transparency, and offering an interesting analysis. Upon meeting these criteria, a study is deemed to be of sufficient quality to be accepted for publication.

5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined why Study One and Study Two adopted thematic analysis and Study Three used IPA. It has also illustrated why a social constructionist epistemology underpinned Study One and Study Two and an interpretivist epistemology was adopted for Study Three. The methods that were used were also discussed to provide transparency in order to enable a clear view of what was done from a methodological perspective.

Chapter 6: Study One – Investigating the Impact of Hegemonic and Contemporary Masculine Norms on Emerging Adult Undergraduate Irish Men

6.1 Aim of chapter

Chapter 6 presents the first empirical study undertaken in this thesis. The research explored both experiences of, and attitudes towards, notions of hegemonic masculinity and current male objectification practices from young male and female undergraduate students at an Irish university. This approach enabled the meaning of masculinity to be contextualised by using gender theory to critically question the influence of current masculine practices on modern masculine norms. This study applied two primary theoretical areas in order to evaluate if modern masculine attitudes are experiencing any change. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity states that the majority of men subscribe to behaviours and attitudes that maintain their dominance over female and non-dominant groups (i.e., homosexuals, ethnic minorities). Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) suggests that body objectification is primarily a female concern that is influenced by media and social pressures. However, the recent emergence and widespread influence of social media suggests that objectification could be an increasingly prominent characteristic in the meaning of masculinity. The research addresses five of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1:

- How do male and female students perceive current masculine characteristics in comparison with hegemonic masculinity?
- Do hegemonic notions of masculinity have a positive or negative influence on contemporary forms of masculine identity?
- Is body objectification becoming gender convergent?

- Are recent cultural developments, such as social media, gym-use, and appearance, affecting young male identity?
- Are there any theoretical implications as a result of these experiences?

6.2 Method

The study employed a cross-sectional thematic analysis approach with a relatively large group of 30 participants. The methodology was explained in detail in Chapter 5.

6.2.1 Participants, procedure, & interviews

Details about participants that participated in Study One (see Table 5.1), the Study procedure, and interview details, are presented in Chapter 5.

6.3 Results

This section will outline the six main themes that were identified through the analysis process. Themes were relevant to how emerging adults perceived current masculine ideologies, and the impact of body objectification in young men. The theme of competitive comparison explored the occurrence of objective body comparison among young men that was primarily fuelled by masculine competitiveness. Practices around alcohol and archetypes of masculinity (i.e., coaches, fathers) were also perceived to be traditionally Irish generators of hegemonic ideals that still impacted young male behaviour. The increasing emergence of open-mindedness, tolerance, and freedom-of-appearance among young Irish men was viewed in a more positive light as these factors were perceived as devoid of any hegemonic masculinity characteristics.

The Model (figure 6.1) below displays the complex interactions of Study One's findings. It implies that current masculine norms involve both traditional and tolerant attitudes that are heavily influenced by media, appearance, and socialisation. Competitive body objectification is motivated by the hegemonic desire to be recognised as dominant through possessing the most muscular figure. Gym-use was further motivated by the exhibitivite use of social media and by the media's portrayal of aesthetic masculine physiques as the ideal. A hegemonic aspect of current masculinity norms that is still entrenched is the influence of older role models and drinking groups.

Young men were developing a healthier attitude towards gender convergence and were more cognisant of non-hegemonic groups. Modern-day athletes also generated more open-mindedness among young Irish men. A seemingly positive aspect of objectification was that young men seemed less concerned with traditional masculine attitudes towards fashion and appearance and with men being able to express themselves more freely.

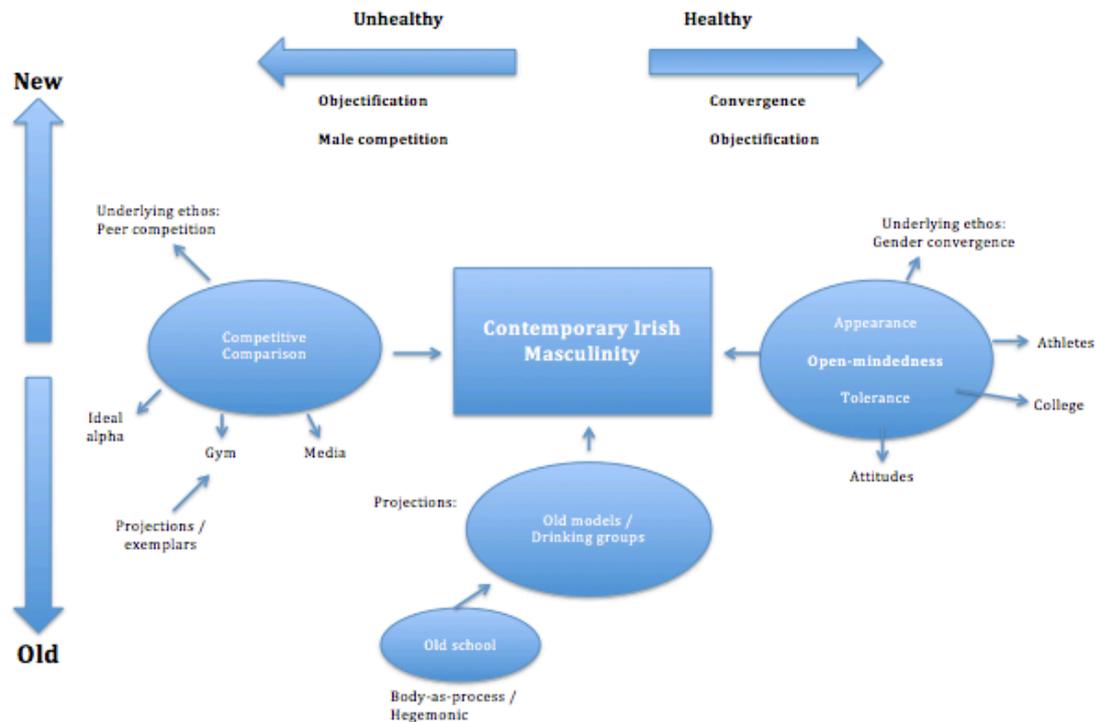


Figure 6.1. Model of Study One findings.

6.3.1 Competitive comparison

Participants talked about male body objectification as an important component of modern masculinity, cultivated through an integration of competition and aspiration to achieve dominant status among their peers. Competitive body objectification appeared to be nurtured by comparative practices on social media, and propelled through: (i) peer-to-peer pressure; and (ii) celebrity body ideals. The interviewees talked about how peer-to-peer body comparisons were being conducted through usage of social media. A few male participants talked about being more susceptible to negative feelings, pressure, and inferiority as a result. Participants also described how social media regularly portrays specific celebrities with ideal physiques and desirable lifestyles, prompting pressure on young men to achieve this ideal. Many of the students discussed how male objectification behaviours, such as physique-focused workouts and body posing or exhibition, occurred in both physical

(i.e., gym) and abstract spaces (i.e., online). Social media apps provided a universally accessible space for young men to exhibit and objectify body physiques in a competitive manner. The gym provided a specific location where young men could enhance their body's aesthetic appearance while concurrently exhibiting hegemonic masculine features of strength, toughness, and machismo. Despite the functionality of social media, the participants did not view social media as a wholly positive platform for individual well-being or personal goal-setting.

6.3.1.1 Social media & peer-to-peer pressure

Participants talked about how male peer comparison, through social media avenues, initiated a masculine competitiveness among some young men but with the underlying goal being body objectification. Brian talked about how these young men utilised the social media platforms (“they’d be kind of comparing to each other”). Glenn explained the culture among some young men to use social media in a competitive manner to exhibit physiques, and thus be recognised as the dominant male: “Social media is a very good example I think because you’d notice it on Snapchat. There’s kind of that lad culture that’s on at the minute which is outdoing the next person and stuff”. Colin recognised how the growth of social media increases the pressure on young people to be in pristine physical shape in order to post photographs online, saying “that [social media apps] leads to more pressure in terms of physical appearance and stuff like that ... Even then some people don’t mind it, some people it affects to a certain degree”. Joanne displayed shock at how men use smartphone cameras to share objectifying images that contradicted stereotypically masculine behaviours, remarking “Lads taking selfies. I never thought I would see it. It’s so weird, like, and they’re flexing their biceps”. Colin admitted ridiculing peers

who uploaded topless photographs on social media to mask the negative feelings he experienced about his own physique in comparison:

It's like "boys what are you doing? Come on, lads". And I just say that because they're absolutely shredded and it makes me feel bad about myself, I'm like "fuck. Damn it" ... kind of a competitive thing in that it's become a popular trend ... to be in better physical shape, which is to be ripped.

The competitive element is again outlined which Colin recognized as potentially damaging to his self-esteem. For Joanne, it altered her opinion of a man if he practiced these behaviours. She said they are "Just like posing. Or like shirtless and putting them up and sending them to people and these are guys I thought were normal and sound, not like that".

6.3.1.2 Social media & self-to-ideal

Participants felt that a weakening of masculine norms could help account for the acceptance of media pressure on young men to focus more on body appearance in a manner similar to traditional female objectification. Brian posited that increased interest in social media and magazine cultures was a fundamental factor behind young men focusing more on traditionally non-masculine behaviours:

We're [young men] watching more TV and you're on Facebook. And magazines and everything more so. Whereas, girls have been like that for ages, that girls dress nicely and put their make up on. Because of other girls doing it and because of what they see in magazines. Whereas, lads wouldn't read magazines like that whereas, now ... they are more, Facebook especially.

Brian believed that increased social media use among young men was a pertinent factor in converging pressure between genders to have a good appearance. Joanne

believed that the ubiquitous social media landscape was vital in body objectification being incorporated into masculine ideals, saying “this kind of change, I think, was inevitable just because it’s with more access to media, they’ve more access to this ideals of what you should be like so obviously people are going to try emulate it”. Gerry argued that the constant presence of social media, through mobile phone technology, and its ceaseless promotion of idealised standards was exhausting for young people:

The media is definitely kind of like pushing, “you should be wearing this or you should be doing that” ... twenty years ago not everyone had a smartphone because they, they weren’t around, but now where, where everything is like at the touch of your fingertips and instant, you can see like what other people are doing anywhere in the world and like you should be eating this, you should be not eating this, you should be drinking this, you should not be drinking this.

So I definitely think that has an effect on both men and women.

Joanne agreed with Gerry in terms of how media access is influencing what young people feel they should look like, saying “they’re constantly looking up, even fitness pages and you see these incredible looking trophy men and trophy women so of course you’re going to want to look like that”. Glenn was uncertain whether internal or external influences initiated more pressure on young men but believed media pressure was compounded further by a conformity effect:

I don’t know if it’s imposed on them by media or ... self-imposed as well. If everyone is doing certain things on Snapchat or on Facebook ... there’s a conformity effect in that other people will just start doing it anyways. It’s hard to tell exactly where, if it’s coming from. If it’s from external pressure or just internally maintained by people ... their own behaviour.

Some interviewees were unable to identify if increasing external pressures, such as social media, competition, or conformity altered young male ambition for self-presentation or if this motivation arose through an inherent drive. Examples of individuals, promoted through social media platforms, who had achieved hard-to-attain standards, were influential for some of the young men who wished to emulate these role models. William discussed an individual, promoted on Facebook, who achieved socially desirable, but exceedingly difficult, goals:

You can see some people who just have it down ... something come up on Facebook recently. It's a math's teacher in London and he's a model for some modeling agency. He also has a Ph.D. in engineering ... And when you set that line for people ... you kind of realise like, people are striving more and more to kind of attain these things ... Sometimes to their detriment.

Harry also provided an example of how the promotion of a bodybuilding celebrity on social media generated pressure on young men to conform to objectifying behaviours:

Young males like myself ... there's pressures to conform from media, Facebook, that sort of thing ... one example now that's just taken over like all young lads ... a bodybuilder [Aziz Shavershian] in Australia ... a lad that did his own thing ... real aesthetic kind of guy. He died in 2011 and ever since then there's just been a big revolution in a way ... that's all over Instagram now ... you see it everywhere on Facebook like, young lads want to look like that ... they want to be remembered in a way ... that's one example of like media ... they're pushing an image on people and that's just lads.

Harry provided an insight into the type of body image pressure that specifically young men experienced and how social media was a catalyst for the perpetuation of such pressure.

6.3.1.3 The gym: An arena of modern masculinity

Many of the men talked about how gym-use has become crucial for some young men in terms of improving body aesthetics. Ben described how this practice has exploded among his social group over recent times: “nearly all my friends would be members of a gym whereas ten years ago, I’m not sure if that would have happened”. Glenn, aware that the gym is traditionally used for athletic preparation, conveyed disinterest at the increase in gym-use for aesthetic reasons, saying it “seems to be like everyone’s in the gym at the minute for whatever reason. They’re not trying to train for fucking sporting events anyway (laughs). That’s definitely one big thing”. Glenn seemed to view gym use as acceptable only when being used for sporting reasons and found it comedic that the gym was now being used for aesthetic reasons. Harry, who identified as a regular gym-user, was the only participant who associated positive wellbeing with honed aesthetic appearance and this motivated his gym-use: “we want to go to the gym like. I don’t know, just, we just do go to the gym, like, I suppose in a way, just wanting to, wanting to look good for ourselves really”.

Some male interviewees identified certain behaviours within modern gym culture that enabled young men to exhibit traditional elements of masculinity. Matthew talked about exhibitions of vocal bravado for attention rather than physical exertion: “some lads now would be very loud ... trying to let everyone else know that they’re working out”. For Andrew, gym-users showed disdain for men who did not want to compete to be the strongest: “People would be looking around them, seeing who’s watching them and then picking up the heaviest weights they can ... kind of looking down at you if you have less weights”. Matthew believed that, for some young male gym-goers, the traditional goal of increased body strength has transferred

into an aesthetics-focused domain, remarking “Some lads’ body shapes in terms that their legs haven’t been worked out in about a year so they’re clearly just doing it for complete looks, you know, for the masculine bulky look”.

According to Glenn, hegemonic elements of masculinity, such as the desire for dominance, may also tap into the increase in gym-use for males. He said “I think concerns with looks and probably status is another big thing but that’s always something associated with masculinity as well. Alpha male status”. Bill endorsed a similar belief and how he believed this desire for dominance affected some more than others:

Men always feeling like physically they’re just not adequate enough ... there’s a big concern about that ... You know this kind of macho kind of gym culture ... still for particular people, not necessarily everybody ... would subscribe to that.

Some male interviewees recalled instances where young men risked their physical health in order to save face, maintain competitiveness, and retain a hegemonic masculine image. Males who subscribed to conventional masculine ideologies risked potential injury in maintaining masculine parity with fellow gym-goers. Indeed, it would seem that men who visibly do not perform feats of strength or show weakness would be exposed and emasculated. Tommy’s example revealed how masculine competitiveness favoured potential injury over inferiority:

Two lads ... they were just squatting away. Big, big set. One of them did it. Grand, happy out. The other one, he did the same weights but you could see him shaking but he still wouldn’t refuse to do it because of the fact he didn’t want to seem like inferior ... he looked like he was struggling so much.

Harry, a seasoned gym-goer, interpreted one gym-goer's incorrect technique as a weakness of character due to his desire to be viewed as strong regardless of both the potential damage and improper technique:

You'd see big lads with big weights and they'd be lifting them arseways ...
Doing no good for them ... More damage ... they're trying to show
themselves to be these big lads with the big weights, but like if they're not
doing them right, like what's the point? They're actually showing themselves
to be weaker anyway.

6.3.2 *Old-school*

Participants talked about the different avenues through which hegemonic forms of masculinity were perpetuated across the generations from an Irish perspective. Older role models exerted a traditional influence through their relationship to the younger male. A rural setting was also noted as providing a more fertile arena for transitioning a hegemonic sense of masculinity between generations. Alcohol was believed to be an extremely influential aspect for a lot of young Irish men in exhibiting hegemonic behaviour. 'Laddism-type' groups were viewed as both positive and negative. Camaraderie and bonding were welcomed but the practice of drinking excessive alcohol in male-only groups was seen as having the potential to ignite chauvinistic behaviours that may not occur without alcohol. The specific type of location, such as gyms, factories, and farms, also impacted the masculine behaviour of the young men according to the participants.

6.3.2.1 The older manly men

The men in the sample talked about how older men were a prominent authority on traditional masculine values, with these men suggesting that these role models were a central influence in whether the young man adopted hegemonic traits. Patriarchal figures, such as fathers, uncles, and coaches, appeared to instil more hegemonic notions of masculinity in young men. William talked about how his father embodied a prominent sense of masculinity that dictated how he interpreted what it is to be a man:

Your father, I, he's my main role model ... When it comes to being a man and so that's ... what I see as a male role model to me ... It has tweaked the main body of what I take to be a man. I still take from ... my father.

A few participants mentioned how context is also pertinent in transferring the tenets of hegemonic masculinity from one generation to the next. Traditionally masculine Irish environments, such as bogs, farms, and sports clubs, were viewed as conducive to older role models exerting a traditional body-as-process influence over young adult males. Andrew talks about where he learned from patriarchal figures in a masculine environment the agentic role of a man:

It was always fairly instilled in me that a man just kind of does the work, does whatever's necessary like and a lot of that was brought into me from being in the bog with my uncles and my dad ... the kind of chat around would be very kind of masculine.

Being a semi-professional athlete, William provided insight into how sport provided a platform for older men to pass on manly expectations to younger men. Similar to Andrew, William was subjected to a traditional ideal that moulded his identity:

Playing rugby ... There is a lot of male role models, the coaches and I've kind of been fortunate that ... they take me under their wing ... I suppose that's also subjected me to ... a single band of male role models ... Older rugby playing men ... big fellas and ... that's kind of what has moulded me.

Tommy stated that rural role models possessed more influence, as being masculine is more apparent in a country setting. Indeed, Tommy believed that the hegemonic facet of dominance was generated by a rural environment, to "have a dominant figure around the place and I think that the main people that would get that would be farmers because they're still kind of with the traditional role, still have that kind of dominant thing". Tommy also revealed how that the non-hegemonic man is more a product of an urban environment, saying "the city kind of lads, they're well-mannered and all this. They are the modern kind of version. They wouldn't be kind of like, they wouldn't get kind of dirty". The consequences of these experiences in traditional environments suggest dominance, size, and work are advertised as important factors for the young men, focused more on agency than on appearance.

6.3.2.2 *The booze*

Alcohol use, and abuse, was an aspect identified by many of the men as being a major practice among groups of young men that had hegemonic masculine underpinnings in an Irish context. William conveyed annoyance at the centrality of alcohol in young male social circles compared to normative female socializing routines:

It's hard to get a group of lads out unless you're going out drinking ... it's really annoying ... we'll meet up for a couple of drinks. But if you don't want to drink ... it's really hard to get people and I think that maybe an Irish culture

thing rather than masculinity ... lads would meet up in a pub and have a chat ... Women would go out for dinner and meet in a restaurant ... it's just two different things really ... it's kind of hard to get out and separate it from the drinking culture.

The popularity and ingrained nature of the Irish drinking culture may have negative consequences for individuals who choose to remain sober. Some participants experienced negativity or disbelief towards not engaging in joining the group on a night out, like Tommy who said “at my age now in college, whenever I say I wouldn't be going out, you get a look kind of like ‘What?’ so you're kind of expected to be just drinking constantly at this age. That would be the main expectations from us now”, or staying sober, like Andrew “going on a night out and not drinking ... I'd say they just get questioned all night ‘why aren't you? Why aren't you?’”

Some participants viewed drinking alcohol and not exhibiting any identifiable intoxication as a fundamental masculine behaviour among young Irish men. Drinking the most alcohol can be a form of machismo according to both Simon (“Being able to handle your drink. That would be a big thing”) and Dean (“drinking is still considered something that a fella should be good at ... should be a good solid drinker. That's definitely kind of a male stereotype. We're still considered hard working fellas, Irish fellas”). Philip debates if such male pride is still nurtured by excessive intake of alcohol when compared with previous generations: “there's less ‘I can drink more than you’, you know, ‘look how much I can gamble without worrying about it’ ... I'd say like there's, the pride factor is kind of reduced significantly from the past I suppose”.

6.3.2.3 *The lads*

The men in the study talked about how exclusively male social groups were perceived as being both positive and negative influences for the young men in terms of how this impacted their identity. Being a member of a bonded solid group, according to William, provided a sense of camaraderie that was a positive masculine experience. He remarked on the importance of “a tight unit of friends and that’s one thing I would see definitely as a masculinity thing”. There were positives to be drawn from closely formed groups, interpreted by Andrew as particularly pertinent in an Irish context. A tight social bond revolved around a certain type of humour unique to Ireland that generated confidence:

I love being with the lads and the type of humour that we all have ... there’s a certain kind of humour that boys my age in Ireland would have and you’d be able to talk to anyone you met basically ... I know not everyone’s like that but I find that extremely good.

Participants noted how performances of masculinity, such as loudness, bravado, and approaching females, were heightened when alcohol was intertwined with group interaction. Paul remarked how alcohol-fuelled group behaviour resulted in performances of hegemonic posturing:

When they’re drunk especially. When they’re out on the town, they’re in their packs and they’re in their groups and they’re shouting very loud. They’re puffing their chest out and they’re voice is a little bit deeper than usual, like.

You can tell they’re putting it all on ... trying to exert their masculinity.

This element of performing masculinity was also evident in Emily’s account where she witnessed how excessive drinking elicited hegemonic behaviour in large groups of males in a bar she was employed in:

Say there's a big match on or something and they're all jeering and shouting and like they're just so loud and it's all in your face and screaming at the TV and just seriously drunk. ... that's not macho behaviour though to me but I suppose that's them in their group thinking that they're kind of an alpha male.

Brian supplements this opinion with his experiences of how the trifecta of excessive alcohol, group dynamics, and macho behaviour can cause potentially negative interactions with females:

When lads are in a group and they're getting really drunk you do notice that ... they would approach a girl and they'd be very forceful. And I've seen it happen ... a guy would go up and grab a girl's hand. And then try shift [kiss] her and like she wouldn't want it but he'd keep trying ... I hate seeing that.

Rebecca believed that both alcohol and sexual conquests were still domains of manliness, describing "lots of drinking related things. There's kind of need to have sex ... that kind of thing with girls I guess would be the most masculine". Kate believed the male group ethos altered how young men acted in terms of subscribing to a group ideal rather than maintaining their individual personality:

I've quite a lot of male friends and sometimes you kind of like talk to them and they're one way, but then you kind of see them with big groups of males or with like girls they're trying to get off with and it's bit like "ah, come on, you're not really like that".

6.3.2.4 Location, location, location

Some of the men in this study mentioned the salience of environmental influence in determining how some men converse and act in order to exhibit the situational-appropriate levels of hegemonic masculinity. Gyms, factories, and farms

were perceived as hotspots for hyper-masculine behaviour. Ben alluded to the impact of specific environments on how a young man perceives what is masculine in saying “my friends would be like working on farms ... the way they go about talking about cattle and stuff ... I find it kind of funny but it’s definitely a man’s thing ... even in the gym lifting weights”. Glenn, reflecting on his own experiences, supported this assertion by comparing the masculinity barometer of different environments that he was privy to and how they determined appropriate male conversation:

I’d be a big soccer fan but this kind of culture of lads going to the pub and watching matches and that’s ... its own kind of thing at the minute. And people who don’t do that, that’s probably not as masculine behaviour. I worked in a factory for a while and, it also depends on the environment you’re in because when I was working in the factory, all we’d talk about would be soccer really, generally. Whereas in college, it’s not of a lot of people’s interests if you ask (laughs) so it’s relative really, masculinity.

6.3.3 Open-mindedness

Despite the continued appearance of certain aspects of a hegemonic male culture, the participants could also perceive a reduced hyper-masculine expectation in Irish culture. Not only this, but this change was also viewed as a positive development. Open-mindedness had different facets. Thus, the participants referred to an increase in emotional openness in the current generation. This was referenced mainly by female participants, and there was evidence of hesitation to embrace this development among some of the men. Openness was also reflected in discussion of increased acceptance of sexual minorities in the third-level environment. Appearance, a physical aspect of identity traditionally perceived as a feminine concern, was

viewed by participants as becoming a more gender convergent topic, with young men being seen as more fashion-conscious than previous generations. Some athletic role models were influential in this regard, both in how they publicly opposed hegemonic stances and how their appearances enabled the current young adult male generation to feel more at ease expressing themselves. The university environment was experienced by participants as more receptive to identity exploration as opposed to the uniform environment of secondary school.

6.3.3.1 Emotional openness

Male emotional openness was regarded by most male and female participants as a welcome development for positive mental health although a few of the men still perceived it as traditionally emasculating. Colin, conversing about mental health, displayed ambivalence in his comment that “My generation are complete wusses compared to like my oul lad’s [father’s] ... because we would actually say ... ‘I’m feeling awful low’”. Through generational comparison, he was bluntly aware that his generation were sacrificing elements of masculine identity by being emotionally open. Interestingly, some of the female participants had more to say about male mental health than the men. Jessica’s observation suggested that there were generational differences in masculine standards but only saw this as a positive: “they’d be able to ... let you help them ... or they wouldn’t be determined to take everything on their own shoulders. ... a lot less than they would have done, definitely, when my uncles were my age”. Ciara welcomed changes she perceived in young men in terms of emotional openness:

I do think guys ... are getting a lot more open ... And being like it’s okay to chat about things like ... say that they were embarrassed or they were, any of

those feelings ... just say they were a bit more, just open about their feelings in general which I think is really good.

Although Emily believed that traditional masculine values still influence male emotional support, there was progress being made “even the really strong ‘keep to myself, I’m not going to let you know what’s going on, women’, still feel easier, more comfortable to talk about their feelings”.

Not everyone viewed male emotional openness as a welcome facet of modern masculinity. Hegemonic masculine attitudes still prevailed among a small number of the male participants regarding manliness, mental toughness, and help-seeking. Dean possessed an agentic view of masculinity and emotions and that a man “goes and either works or gets on with whatever they’re doing and just does it. Doesn’t complain and just gets on with it”. Mark, displaying a more aggressive approach to male emotional strain and help-seeking, believed that mental toughness is cultivated by tackling the problem in isolation:

I’d say, “tough it out a bit”, like. I’d be a lot harsher. I probably wouldn’t be the best person to come to if you had a problem ... I think if you deal with a lot of stuff yourself you show a lot less remorse for someone else. It’s a bit weird. You know you’re probably being harsh but you still just don’t care ... You’re not naïve, you know your being harsh but it’s just like tough it out.

Not all the female participants agreed that young men were now inclined to open up. Sarah maintained that the traditional perspective of women being more emotionally open than men was still evident and telling in terms of how much men talk about mental health difficulty, saying “I don’t know how many lads that are kind of going through it and if they are they seem to stay a lot more quiet than women would be because like we’d chat a lot about it”. Anthony mentioned how he thought that

modern males still have to maintain a veneer of mental strength to identify as a real man (“If you’re a man you can’t talk about your feelings. You have to kind of pretend sometimes that you’re not, you have to cover up how you’re feeling about certain things because it’s not manly”).

A range of opinions was disclosed that exhibited that the topic of men being in touch with their emotions is a nuanced one. Hal’s attitude about male emotional openness fluctuated between acceptable and emasculating, depending on the context of the situation:

Not being able to control your emotions or something, like being, like obviously if someone you know died, it would be alright to cry but I’ve seen some people in the past who can’t deal with stress very well and they’ll get very tearful at that and frankly I wouldn’t expect that from a man... I’m not saying it’s a bad thing, I’m just saying it’s something I wouldn’t expect.

Anthony believed that men who possess traditional hegemonic perceptions towards emotionally open males are revealing an immaturity: “I suppose being in touch with your emotions and all that ... could be seen by people immaturely as not being masculine. Being a cissy or whatever, being weak”. Ben talked about how men are gradually availing of increasing opportunity to talk about feelings but hegemonic masculine ideals still impose a staunch negative influence. He said “it is being tackled, like, there’s more campaigns for people to come out and say things but... it’s definitely still there. A lot of men feel uncomfortable just talking about it”.

Participants believed that masculine expectations on young men were not as staunch as those experienced by previous generations. Philip disclosed that “there’s less focus on sort of hyper-masculine things ... there’s less concern about being seen as ... a manly man”. Jessica, speaking from a female perspective, agreed when she

said “I don’t think that they bow to such [masculine] pressures that they would have done in the past. Definitely not”. Philip and Jessica both believed there was a reduction in terms of traditional masculine pressures in the lives of modern young adult males.

Some participants also thought that resistance towards traditional masculine expectations has nurtured a physical openness among young men in terms of their behaviour towards each other. Kate described how “guys will like hug each other and stuff and like do their hair ... they’re a bit more like physically open and a little bit more ... emotionally open without being so worried about it now”. Jessica stated that some young men are not shackled by traditional conformity compared to previous generations “I think they are a bit more able to follow their own path if they feel like doing so. Not all of them but some of them”.

6.3.3.2 Attitudes towards homosexuality

A number of the men and women had no ambiguity when discussing what they thought was a rise in tolerance in Irish society towards LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex) groups. Anthony described how the stereotypical emasculation traditionally associated with homosexuality appeared to be gradually eroding:

Homosexuality is much more accepted now. A homosexual man can still be a man in manly way now whereas that wouldn’t have been I don’t think thirty years ago. You were basically a cissy if you were, that was it, like, there’s no, you’re either one or the other.

Kate discussed how public perceptions of homosexuality have changed “I feel like five years ago if someone called you gay it would have been like this big horrific

thing if you weren't gay". Gerry believed that the ratification of the Irish same-sex marriage referendum in 2015 was seen as a turning point in how modern Irish society perceives marginalised sexualities:

Last year we passed the thing for gay marriage and I think 90 or 95 or 97% voted yes to support it whereas in the past, around the 1980s, I don't think it would even have been socially acceptable at all to even call yourself gay let alone look for marriage.

Fears still remain for some members of the Irish LGBT community with regards to revealing their sexuality but participants were generally positive in such circumstances:

Two of my housemates are gay actually ... we didn't actually know that 'til a month ago, they kept it hidden for over a year. Because they were, obviously very nervous about telling us. But we were all very happy for them.

The third-level setting is viewed by Bill as socially progressive but there is an awareness of general urban / rural differences in terms of accepting non-heterosexuals:

I still think that homosexuality is still very frowned upon ... Not in a lot of friends I have but definitely where I'm from ... you definitely wouldn't be allowed to be gay really... Or people ... they wouldn't really get it ... they wouldn't really understand it.

Although they acknowledge that there is more acceptance and openness towards non-heterosexual communities, there are still boundaries to where such tolerance is practiced.

6.3.3.3 *Appearance*

Physical appearance was recognised by both sexes as steadily becoming an important lifestyle aspect for young Irish men. An interesting component of participant disclosures was the dissonance displayed by male participants regarding their identification with, yet distancing from, the increasing importance that young Irish men seemed to place on appearance. Mark, observing from a distance, explained in a neutral manner how modern young men were gradually becoming more open with opinions on male beauty: “if they thought a lad was good-looking, they’d say it. There’s nothing else made by it. Yeah, they’d be more conscious of their appearance”. Ciara believed that men talking about each other’s appearance may also generate openness among young men to talk more freely in general “They’re more open with their opinions on stupid things like on not important things ... just how someone looks, how someone acts”.

Young male interest in appearance is more apparent when viewed from a generational perspective. Glenn posited that men’s increasing appearance-consciousness was nurtured by societal expectations of men transitioning over time: “men are a lot more conscious of their appearance I think at the minute, more than anything else. I certainly don't think my dad or a lot of people older than me ... are as self-conscious of looks”. Harry disclosed a pertinent example of the generational difference in family attitudes regarding male appearance and a hostility that arose as a result:

My father now is like the pure old fashioned farmer ... The younger brother like, he has a piercing ... under his lip now ... he went three weeks before the old lad [father] saw it and he just went cracked at him ... He just literally cursed him and stuff like ‘take that effing thing out of you ... by the end of the

day” or something “or I’ll rip it out of you” ... Pure old fashioned ... He didn’t take it out like but it took him three weeks to notice he had something in his fucking lip, like. Like, they’re a lot more old-fashioned, like. That’s just one example of where, that, that age group compared to our age group now.

Female participants were aware of a rise in male grooming. Joanne suggested an international influence was underlying the change “I think it’s gotten more open. Lads now are all talking about their diets and how they’ve got this great face cream and they’re taking selfies and it’s definitely gotten a bit more European or something”. Some women were less receptive than others. Emma stated that such attention to detail was an aspect that would disturb her: “I’m all for men taking care of themselves but ... some men take the metrosexual to a whole new level ... Where they’re seriously taking good care of themselves and yeah, I just don’t like to see that in a man”.

6.3.3.4 Fashion

Both the men and women believed that fashion was gradually becoming an area of gender convergence. Ciara observed how materialistic trends had changed over periods of time: “certain guys are actually a lot more into fashion than they used to be. Into fashion and into crazes and into materialistic things a bit more than they probably were”. Internal and external pressures on young men in terms of fashion were discussed. Ben explained how societal changes facilitated modern young men becoming increasingly more fashion-conscious “with society now, it’s men that dress better. Put more effort into the way they look than they used to”. Glenn believed that young men are experiencing increasing consumerist pressures from the fashion industry in a similar manner to what females experience:

Dudes getting man-bobs and I'm kind of like (laughs) see, it's such a bizarre trend for guys to have. It seems like it would never get to that stage where men became a victim of appearance or into the stuff as females were, with stuff marketed at them.

Interestingly, Glenn disclosed a comedic view on particularly untraditional male fashion trends but was aware that appearance was becoming an increasingly important aspect in some young male's lifestyle. Glenn's perspective was one that reflected a sense of bewilderment when looking at how some young men were dressing and also showed how nuanced the general topic of fashion was among different pockets of young men. Some of the female participants, such as Sarah, displayed some ridicule, similar to Glenn, at the effort that some young men go to for their appearance: "it's good to have a good eye and look after your appearance and things like that but some of them kind of go over the top". Bill identified external pressures on men to dress well that were associated with which masculine social group that the male is aspiring to subscribe to:

There's more pressure on a lot of guys to kind of groom ... or wear makeup or ... just be much more concerned about that ... than there may have been in the past ... and then ... if you're into that kind of world as well as a young professional ... there would still be, I think a lot of pressure to, have flashy suits ... but I think it just depends on ... the different social circles.

William, when talking about increased interest in male appearance, exercised some bewilderment in estimating how modern male fashion trends, promoted on popular media, will impact the physical appearance of future male generations "being a man has definitely changed ... men are tending to take care of themselves more ... it's

definitely a thing and how far that will go? I don't know. Will we all end up like Geordie Shore?"

6.3.3.5 Athletic role models

Contemporary celebrity modern-day athletes were thought to be more appearance-conscious and possess less hegemonic traits when compared with athletes of previous generations who were symbolised by, and admired for, their toughness. Andrew explained how individual appearance and talent have become a source of admiration in a competitive sports setting as opposed to the traditional notion of the hard man "You can see it a lot in sports teams ... the kind of flash footballer that's celebrated than the hard footballer that would have been kind of celebrated say twenty, thirty years ago". Dean observed how influential the groomed appearance of popular athletes is for some young Irish males. Athletes who concentrate more on their hairstyles and grooming techniques can have a noticeable impact on a male's aesthetic behaviours: "You still have lads in their twenties copying hairstyles of football and rugby players, and footballers in particular are big on the old male grooming so that's had an effect and, yeah, it is more accepted". The ability to imitate hairstyles and wear similar sporting equipment may provide the individual with a benign belief that they can replicate some of the unattainable sporting standards set out by prominent athletes.

Simon noted how prominent athletes can adhere to hegemonic masculine standards of toughness and also be involved in non-masculine spheres. Simon provided Paul Galvin, a prominent GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) player from a rural part of Ireland known for his sporting toughness who is also very fashion-oriented, as an example:

There's a GAA player [Paul Galvin] from Kerry ... when he's playing GAA he's very manly. He's a rough, tough man on the field. Gets the job done. But in his personal life, he's very involved in fashion ... I think he's a good example of masculinity has changed and how we can be ourselves.

Anthony noted that celebrity athletes who were perceived as traditionally masculine but also promoted equality resonated with, and possibly influenced, a young male audience:

The likes of sports people, male sports stars standing up for equality say in the gay marriage debate ... not afraid, having courage to say what you think while also being a man and having the traditional man qualities. Not being afraid to have an interest in things that are seen as female as well and having a mix between the two.

6.3.3.6 The university bubble

Men and women interviewees perceived the university setting as being a more accepting backdrop with regards to freedom of expression and openness towards identities that deviated from traditional norms. Emily explained how she thought that males in secondary school are pressurised to behave in a manner that exhibits disdain towards academic achievement and exhibits hegemonic masculinity:

You have to be one of the boys. You have to be able to rough and tumble. You have to be able to make stupid jokes. You almost can't be seen to be working hard. You can't be seen to be putting your education first ... it's four or five years since I've been in secondary school, a lot can change in that era so maybe it's not the same. But seeing my brother and sister at the moment I feel like that's very much so a stereotype that kids in their desperate need to try

and belong because it's so scary to not belong at that age are setting themselves back a lot. I mean they're one of the boys then but I mean four years later they're still cruising by the school in their sports car and everyone else has fucked off kind of thing because they're secretly studying but not letting you know. So I feel like that's a stereotype that the younger generation are definitely, males anyway are, are, feel the need to kind of fit in too.

Emily's account relayed the pressure she believed that young men were subjected to in secondary school to engage in negative behaviours. That failing to subscribe to these behaviours could entail negative consequences. Gerry's experience of acclimatising to a university environment was initially one of conforming to the ethos of the desired group in order to be socially accepted. However, the duration and openness of the university experience resulted in him embracing his individuality:

When you first come in to university, you ... just go with the crowd to fit in ... once you get to ... fourth year, you start to realise being individual is a good thing and it makes you stick out and especially like ... for job applications ... you don't want to blend in ... So if you're able to stand out a bit and ... be your own person.

Colin's interpretation of modern masculine identity ignored traditional expectations but he was aware that the third-level experience, which shaped this perspective, was not necessarily representative of society as a whole:

It's become much less of ... this thing that's expected and it's ... well actually no, "whatever I do is manly because I'm a man" and you forget all the bullshit of like lumberjack crap ... technically if that guy wants to put on a pink tutu and dance around on stage he's still a man ... it doesn't matter ... but again

also ... that's from spending five years in university. So that's obviously a very buffered, androgynous kind of ... progressive ... mind set.

The change of environment for some respondents from secondary school to university was initially similar in terms of conforming to a group but changed over time.

6.3.4 *Distancing*

The men were eager to repeatedly distance themselves from certain traditionally masculine behaviours and body objectifying behaviours that they had perceived. None of the men identified with specific male objectification practices that occurred within the gym and or on social media, or were not members of social groups that found such issues important to their identity. They chose language that conveyed awareness of having observed other men embracing an appearance culture without giving their personal endorsement or identifying with it themselves. This conveyed an ambivalence, suggesting that objectifying appearance consciousness is a feature of contemporary masculinity while not being a personal identification for the men who took part in the study.

6.3.4.1 *Gym-going*

The men were eager to distance themselves from a specific gym-user type when talking about their experiences in the gym. The identification of a specific breed of gym-goers as 'him' or 'they' was mentioned by a gamut of interviewees. This ranged from males who looked disdainfully at the rising gym culture, to moderate gym-users, and then frequent gym-goers. At each level, there was identification of other gym-users that the participants did not associate with that primarily focused on

individuals who wanted to be seen lifting heavy weights, having the biggest muscles, and being the largest man.

Some of the men, such as Glenn, found the idea of dedicating large amounts of their free time to bodybuilding and being identified as a gym-goer as ridiculous: “There’s bodybuilding and stuff. Dudes spending a load of time in the gym which is kind of hilarious”. Hal believed that young men who regularly use the gym for bodybuilding were doing so because they thought this was important to be perceived as masculine. He said “There are some lads who are very into weightlifting for what it does to their appearance, like, because they expect that’s what a man should look like”. Again, this is a belief that Hal did not seem to subscribe to and he relayed a lack of identification with such young men who do.

Some of the men used the gym periodically and noted the desire of the stereotypical young male gym-user to be viewed as an alpha male. Tommy discussed how frequently he saw other people go to the gym to improve their physical appearance rather than their health:

The only thing they’re pushed about is being the big man in there. That is it. I’ve seen it so many times and regardless whether they want it or not. Say even one of the lads I live with, he goes to the gym. He’s looking to get bigger and everything like that. I wouldn’t be as pushed, I’m more into cardio and I never see people into that. It’s so weird not seeing anyone into cardio.

Obviously there’d be a great array of fitness people, when you go to the gym it’s so small to come across. The only people you’d come across doing cardio would be girls. The rest would be the lads pumping the guns.

Using gym machines perceived as feminine did not bother Tommy, as he was not overly concerned with how he appeared to others.

Mark and Harry identified as frequent gym-users but also distanced themselves from male gym-users who incorrectly performed weight-lifting techniques or focused on the amount of weight they lift. For Mark, it was comedic that some men placed more importance on how they appeared rather than improving their health: “Lads lifting big weights. That’s funny (laughs). You have the lads who are lifting big weights and think they are God’s gift”. Harry, in recalling a conversation with his father, a farmer, who was baffled by his gym-use, provides an interesting account of why some young men use the gym so often:

He [father] says it to both of us at the weekend when we come home and go the gym ... he just likes questions why are we going to the gym ... we’d play a hurling match and we go to the gym then and he’d be like would you not be tired like? Why are you going to the gym? ... we’re not tired ... we want to go to the gym ... we just do go to the gym ... wanting to look good for ourselves really.

Harry was the only participant who openly identified as a young man who used to gym to focus on how he looked. Mark theorised about a sense of control as being integral in the boom in gym-use “that is a good thing about the gym, it’s a sense of control. It’s completely down to you ... I think that’s why a lot of people subconsciously kind of like about it”. Both Mark and Harry identified the benefits of regular gym-use, whether it was positive self-image or a sense of control, during a period where there is a lack of permanency.

6.3.4.2 Social media

Distancing also emerged when a few of the men talked about social media and the motives behind young men using it for body-objectification reasons. Again, a

range of distancing types were disclosed from those who did not associate with regular social media users, to those who used social media but watched other male practices from a distance. Brian distanced himself from social media by comparing his use of it to the level of usage he encountered in his housemates:

I wouldn't let myself be changed. I don't go on Facebook ... I maybe look at it once or twice a day. Or I see other people who go on it and spend an hour on it, just flicking through whatever. And I don't know what they're looking at ... They'd go on Facebook and they'd be looking at loads of different people's profiles. And looking through their pictures and kind of looking through what they're doing. Whereas, I'm like "what are you doing? Go outside read a book do something."

Colin distanced himself by ridiculing the social media habits in his social circle "friends of mine who god bless them would put pictures of themselves shirtless on Instagram".

6.3.4.3 That Other Group

Social groups were interpreted by participants as being fundamental in determining where a young male situated his identity in relation to other young men. Sarah pointed out that, from her experience, male cliques possessed different approaches to appearance pressures. Some groups possess a nonchalant attitude whilst others overly-subscribe in near-comedic manner:

I'm just talking about lads that where you can just see, consistently that always like six packs and the lot ... The lads I know in the [aquatics] club ... they kind of have the same mind-set as me where they don't really give a shit about their appearance at all. So that's kind of good but then ... I've other lads

that are just like, just take the piss (laughs) ... With their looks and things so I ... have a different sort of, it's like metrosexuals and then there's these guys, but overall I don't know.

Roger observed how young men who frequented the gym adapted a certain type of standardised look. Similar to Sarah, he also found such emphasis on adhering to a uniform look and behaviour as comedic:

Going to the gym is a big thing. Protein powder and shakes ... Adidas tracksuit bottoms, the same haircut. It's funny to watch but they're all kind of the same, they're so afraid to step outside the box in comparison to women that it's, they're just that basically.

6.4 Discussion

The main aim of this study was to explore the current status of Irish masculine identity among young Irish men. A cross-sectional thematic analysis design was used to investigate the experiences of 30 Irish undergraduates at a third-level institution in the west of Ireland. The interviews were analysed to identify themes that offered an understanding of how masculinity is perceived by the participants at a developmental stage where identity is in a state of transition.

6.4.1 Summary of findings

Contemporary masculine identities possessed both positive and negative aspects according to the participants. Young Irish males were perceived to be objectifying their physical appearance through increased attention to muscularity, fashion, and social media trends. An underlying drive behind this transition was the intertwining of a hegemonic dominant / competitive attitude with body

objectification, a conventionally feminine pursuit. Competition, in the form of body comparison, was enacted between peers and between the self and media-portrayed ideals of an aesthetic masculine physique. Objectification occurred through young men focusing on the body as a sum of aesthetic parts rather than as a vehicle for athletic optimization. This mixture of self-objectification and hegemonic masculinity further occurred through young men exhibiting their physique on social media in order to be externally evaluated with the goal of being identified as a dominant / alpha male.

Hegemonic masculinity processes was still being maintained through numerous channels. Older male role models instilled hegemonic notions of masculinity in some participants during their development in masculine contexts such as farms and sporting environments. Traditional Irish masculine expectations involving young men and alcohol were also identified as a constant source of pressure and potentially exacerbated hegemonic behaviour.

Differences were noted between contemporary outlooks and traditional hegemonic behaviours among young Irish men. A potential increase in tolerance and open-mindedness among many young men in terms of their attitude towards non-heterosexual groups, individual expression of appearance, and increasing emotional openness, seemingly oppose the hegemonic traits of domination, subordination, and complicity. Athletic role models that championed a stance of tolerance towards marginalized groups, an anti-hegemonic perspective, were highly influential for some young males becoming more open-minded. Experiencing a university environment where individual expression is welcomed was also a molding factor in young men adopting a less hegemonic outlook. Modern masculine ideals have transitioned from hegemonic avenues towards the conventionally non-masculine concerns of

appearance and fashion. Emotional openness was becoming a more pronounced occurrence among young men but some reticence did remain among young men who held hegemonic masculinity beliefs.

An interesting emergence was the apparent reluctance of male interviewees to associate with modern male practices, such as going to the gym and social media use, which were largely discussed as behaviours engaged in by other men, and sometimes framed as silly or ridiculous. There appeared to be different levels of distancing. Some participants found certain modern male practices comedic whilst other participants partook in some of these modern male practices. However, these participants distanced themselves from young men who attempted to exhibit dominance, whether it was through behaviour in the gym or their social media activity.

6.4.2 Comparing findings to Connell's hegemonic masculinity

One of the aims of this research was to investigate if participants believed that hegemonic concepts of masculinity were still prominent among young Irish men. The findings are mixed as the results were somewhat in accordance with elements of hegemonic masculinity but participants also identified modern masculine practices that deny particular aspects of the hegemonic model. Behaviours that align with Connell's (2005) concept (described in Chapter 3) were cultivated through young male social groups, particularly when drinking alcohol, and the influence of older role models such as fathers, uncles, and coaches, during adolescence. It was also evidenced by the traditional beliefs of some of the men.

Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity has been fundamental in framing much contemporary research on masculinity. Its focus is not on individual

character types but on the formations of practice created in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships. Hegemony is maintained through three practices: subordination, complicity, and marginalization of non-dominant masculine groups and women. Viewing the results through this perspective, the participants seemed to suggest that some current male practices did not subscribe to the concept. The findings both agree and disagree and in some parts mix Connell's conceptual framework. This provides some credence to Moller's (2008) argument that the complexity and diversity of masculinity may require the concept to integrate new socio-cultural behaviours, meanings, groupings, and behaviours.

The conventional pressures on young Irish men to subscribe to a hegemonic masculine ideology appeared to be less influential amongst the current Irish male undergraduate population. Fewer adherences to conventional gender roles were seemingly nurtured by a diminishing recognition of hegemonic influences. Female participants and the majority of male participants interpreted this potential transition, from traditional to tolerant, as a positive development. Nevertheless, the potential for such a shift in masculine ideology is obfuscating as participants talked about elements of hegemonic masculinity that were markedly clear in young Irish male social circles and specific 'manly' contexts. Negative hyper-masculine behaviours were still being maintained among social groups especially in circumstances when drinking alcohol was involved.

Alcohol-use was recognised as a core aspect for some young Irish men in exhibiting their masculine identity. Participant accounts suggested that alcohol facilitates potentially damaging masculine behaviours with alcohol use and manliness being seemingly interlinked in an Irish context. Some male participants expressed frustration at the constant questioning during social events where they opted not to

drink alcohol, supporting Conroy and de Visser's (2012) findings where non-drinking required explanation. There was also annoyance at the difficulty in organising non-alcohol focused social events. These findings align with previous research that found that males who chose to abstain from alcohol potentially threaten male social and emotional ties, and may suffer negative social consequences as a result (Conroy & de Visser, 2012; Conroy & de Visser, 2013).

A young man's core male group was viewed positively by the participants, in terms of the humour and camaraderie it brought to their lives. This positive view was tempered somewhat when alcohol consumption was the central activity for a group of young men. Males who were drinking in groups at night could be prone to hegemonic attitudes in terms of gender relations, machismo, and who could drink the most alcohol. Similarly to de Visser and Smith's (2007) findings, the ability to handle a large volume of alcohol (i.e., 'hold your drink') and not vomit was still recognised by participants as an particularly important aspect of traditional Irish masculinity regardless of whether they identified with it or not. Some participants suggested a type of deindividuation effect where the level of alcohol-fuelled masculine displays in group contexts were a result of individual striving for group dominance. This finding subscribes to previous research that alcohol consumption enables men to act in a manner that personifies hegemonic masculinity and reinforces gender dominance (Peralta, 2007).

Both older males and 'manly' contexts were consistently identified in the results as being important in instilling hegemonic notions of masculinity in young Irish men. Participants identified some older role models such as fathers, uncles, and sports coaches, that outlined to young men how physical and emotional toughness, and being a breadwinner, were important aspects of manliness. Such instructions are

consistent with Connell's (2005) notion of hegemonic masculinity, with complicity being integral if younger male generations are going to subscribe to hegemonic beliefs. This finding agrees with Anderson and McGuire's (2010) research that found that coaches tended to promote traditional versions of masculinity to their players.

The ecological context of a young man seems crucial to the masculine ideology he adheres to. Some of the participants' reasoning of how hegemonic masculinity is nurtured or enacted was dependent on context. Specific locations were identified (i.e., construction sites, sports events, farms, factories) where men experienced pressure to exhibit hegemonic masculine norms through conversation or through action. This aligned with previous research that found that competitive masculine events tended to expect men to display certain hegemonic traits (Robertson, 2003; Adams et al., 2010; White et al., 1995). However, there was also awareness among some male participants that they were performing certain forms of masculinity in these environments that they did not necessarily subscribe to.

The university campus was recognised as being an accepting environment, which was a possible reason behind most participants' generally negative opinion of hegemonic masculine norms. It provided freedom for young men to behave in a manner that appeased their sense of self and disregarded hegemonic expectations. This supports previous research that found university environments to be more inclusive of behaviours that were off-limits to men from previous generations (Anderson, 2014; Scoats, 2017). This perspective may also not be applicable to American colleges as a result of fraternities (exclusively male student organisations), a phenomenon not present in Irish third-level. Seabrook et al. (2016) found that male students are required to adhere to masculine norms and objectify females in order to gain membership to a fraternity.

Participants talked about how both social media and behaviour in the gym are being utilised by some young men to enact a competitive masculine identity. The gym differs to other traditional areas since a primary reason behind dominant behaviours in this context is a desire to both possess and advertise the best physique, a practice traditionally associated with females (Franzoi, 1995). Desire for increased muscularity is increasingly common among young men (Tiggeman et al., 2007). Participants talked about how they observed the behaviours of males who seek to both possess the most aesthetic appearance and also be identified as the dominant male in the gym. Similar to previous research (Morrison et al., 2003; Ciccolo et al., 2016), the few participants who did frequently use the gym and did not identify as hegemonic, cited self-control and self-esteem as their motivators and experienced beneficial outcomes as a result.

Certain male gym-users were also identified as exhibitors of hegemonic displays of dominance and subordination. For some young men, the gym elicited hyper-masculine behaviour (i.e., shows of strength, shouting, ignoring pain) that appeared to be developing into an area of comparative performance where masculine machismo is secondary behaviour to possessing the most aesthetic physique. These hegemonic displays are similar to hegemonic masculinity scripts practiced in team sports with regards to fostering aggression and ignoring pain (White et al., 1995; Adams et al., 2010).

The impact of the relatively recent arrival of social media on male image supports previous research on the general media's negative influence on male body image (Barlett et al., 2008; Blond, 2008; Fawkner & McMurray, 2002). Participants suggested that constant social media presence could nurture hegemonic competition in the physical performance of body objectification. This assertion supports Ward et

al. (2016) suggestion that the constant presence of sexually objectifying media in the modern world is a source of great difficulty for men or women who do not wish to view it.

From a gender point of view, the female participants generally believed that young men appeared to be increasingly emotionally open and unafraid to seek help from their peers. Opinion was more divided among the male students. Young men appear to be becoming increasingly open to talking about emotions but still maintained an ingrained hesitation to wholly embrace this practice. Ambiguity about male openness remained among male participants who subscribed to hegemonic masculine norms, supporting previous research that adherence to a traditional masculine identity was related to negative perception of seeking both psychological and physical help (Brownhill et al., 2005; McCusker & Galupo, 2011; Vogel et al., 2011; Berger et al., 2013). Female participants also attributed characteristics of caring and appearance-consciousness to young men in their social circles although some of the male participants appeared to distance themselves from these characteristics. This is possibly a result of young men being unwilling or uncomfortable in identifying with unorthodox characteristics in their own masculine identity.

Participants repeatedly reported increasing levels of tolerance among themselves and other young Irish men in terms of their attitudes toward homosexuality. Indeed, none of the male participants exhibited any annoyance with this development. Although there was ambivalence in how appearance consciousness was described, increased acceptance of LGBT sexual orientations and of an active emotional life were openly supported by the participants. Connell (1995) states that subordination of non-heterosexual males is a key tenet of hegemonic masculinity and, although status is far from equal, there is increasing recognition and acceptance of

sexual minorities rather than concentrated subordination. It is important to note that participants identified different locations where conversation can vary in terms of hegemonic opinion. Since the manner that a male's masculine identity appears to be enacted depends on the context, opinions about non-heterosexual groups may differ when comparing undergraduate students to more masculine contexts such as factories, construction sites, and rural locations. Indeed, fraternity membership in the US universities has been found to endorse conformity to, and upholding of, masculine norms (Seabrook et al., 2016).

Research has explored the impact of a hegemonic masculinity script on competitive male team sports in terms of fostering violent attitudes and playing through pain (White et al., 1995; Adams et al., 2010). An interesting finding was the impact of some modern sports stars on young male attitudes. The warrior narrative traditionally associated with sporting heroes seems to be experiencing a transformation as modern sporting role models exhibit a more inclusive attitude that defies the hegemonic archetype as suggested by Anderson and Kian (2012). Some participants talked about how famous athletes who exhibited individuality instead of subscribing to hegemonic masculine norms provided inspiration. The athletes possessed considerable influence in terms of how some of the male participants approached LGBTQI issues, fashion, physical size, and male grooming.

6.4.3 Applying theories of objectification to interpret findings

This section of the discussion argues that the traditionally female concern of body objectification is possibly becoming a gender convergent issue that is being facilitated by hegemonic competitiveness in young men. The results were interpreted

by applying Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory and Franzoi's (1995) research on body experience between genders.

According to the participants, competition between peers is a crucial process in generating male body objectification. This suggests that hegemonically masculine traits are intertwining with objectification practices in some young men who aspire to be perceived as either the strongest, most muscular, or have the most impressive physique. Previous research has investigated the impact of body comparison between males and idealised male physique in the media (Fawkner & McMurray, 2002; Ryan & Morrison, 2009). Participants talked about how body comparison practices, through social media and in the gym, have provided a novel environment where young men compete, through comparison, to be seen as the dominant force. The modern-day gymnasium is identified as a physical location of body construction where male and female goals are steadily converging in terms of body goals and motivations behind going to the gym.

Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) theory posited that females are habitually acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a principal assessment of their physical selves. Traditionally, females are recognized as being the primary focus of objectifying media advertising that portrays what is interpreted as physical perfection. Results suggested that objectifying advertising aimed at young men was exerting external pressures on some male participants to view themselves objectively.

Connell's (1995) concept stated that dominant masculine styles subordinate alternative forms of masculinity that are perceived as effeminate. According to the results, modern forms of hegemonic masculinity are perceived as being steadily altered as an increase in self-objectifying concerns, such as grooming practices and fashion, are becoming increasingly common and accepted, and not perceived as

unmanly. Participants believed that appearance (i.e., fashion, hairstyle, etc.), traditionally perceived as an area of feminine interest (Franzoi, 1995), appears to be becoming increasingly gender convergent. Some male and female participants were reticent to embrace this particular development and preferred males to have a more orthodox approach to appearance. Young men were also perceived as becoming increasingly comfortable in commenting on other men's appearances, an antithesis to previous male generations.

Some participants noted a shift in masculine norms as being partly promulgated by athletic celebrities whose appearance is more celebrated than their hardiness. Such role model's concern for physical appearance and style was perceived as promoting non-hegemonic standards when compared with the traditional Irish notion of sports men. Indeed, similar to Mulgrew et al. (2013), a sporting athlete's image can nurture appearance dissatisfaction in men. Participants mentioned how the increasing idolisation of the 'flash' athlete among male fans has the potential to impact their self-image. Concerns with achieving a similar appearance to flashy athletes was seemingly far less common in previous generations of young Irish men according to some participants.

Emerging adults are accessing media content for up to 12 hours per day through both traditional (e.g., TV, films, music) and contemporary (e.g., social media, mobile phones) means, more so than any other activity (Coyne et al., 2013). Participants talked about how this constant social media presence provided a breeding ground for novel forms of hegemonic masculine competitiveness but with a focus on the traditionally non-masculine area of body objectification. Participants reported experiencing external pressure through media interaction in terms of how they should behave and what they should look like. Some felt that the promotion, through social

media, of individuals who have achieved near-unattainable physiques and lifestyles could cultivate unrealistic internal standards and breed external pressures. The results support Ward et al.'s (2016) findings that an ever-increasing, constant barrage of sexually objectifying media content aimed at young people can impact how they view their bodies and consequently affect their levels of self-value. In terms of other media, participants talked about how programs like *Geordie Shore*, a reality TV program featuring young metrosexuals, was affecting how some young men viewed themselves. This finding supported Ward et al.'s (2016) study where reality TV programs predicted the objectification characteristic of self-sexualisation among undergraduate students.

In line with Botta (2003), some participants were aware that comparison with peers did negatively affect them while others had a comedic view of peers who exhibited their physiques. Such mixture of opinion about comparing body image is evident in previous research. Michaels et al.'s (2013) found that men who view muscular-idealizing media images did not experience negative body image issues, such as body shame, body dissatisfaction, and body surveillance. In contrast to this, Olivardia et al. (2004) found that males do display considerable levels of body dissatisfaction associated with depression and low self-esteem.

Traditionally, young men perceived their bodies as a mechanism for physical optimisation through competitive training in order to become a skilled or strong athlete, whilst females view their body as an object comprised of several parts (Franzoi, 1995). The findings in this study would suggest that such gender attitudes are beginning to diminish as participants talked about the types of young men who increasingly use the gym to physically hone their body (object-oriented) rather than athletically optimize (process-oriented) it. Performing males were either increasing

the size of body parts that are visible every day or exhibiting strength through their behaviours within the gym.

6.4.4 Implications

In order to challenge traditional Irish stereotypes, there is a need to focus more on the specific traditional expectations of the Irish ‘manly’ man. Alcohol in Ireland is a pertinent issue and the findings revealed how alcohol abuse is an area where damaging masculine behaviours can occur. In developing future policy on alcohol abuse, the annual Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) national service plan should focus on both group dynamics around alcohol use and masculine expectations about how much a young man should drink without displaying intoxication. Although there is more openness for young men to talk about their emotions, there appears to be a reticence for some men to avail of this. Hegemonic masculine expectations were identified by participants as being a primary cause for this. There is need for attempts at alleviating such masculine pressures on young men to focus on the areas that participants highlighted. Men who were brought up in rural areas were noted as being more likely to possess hegemonic masculinity traits. Specific locations were identified where damaging brands of masculinity may be cultivated, such as farms, construction sites, factories, and gyms, and such areas should be specifically targeted. The influence of older role models is also an important aspect of hegemonic masculinity pressures. Workshops and group meetings could be targeted to bring awareness of the hazards of passing on hegemonic masculine expectations to young men. A prime example of this is the Irish Men’s Shed Association (IMSA), which is an organisation that aims to help adult men maintain and improve their well-being in a context that is most suited to them within their local community.

Participant discourse revealed that body image is steadily becoming a susceptible issue among some young Irish men. According to the participants, the ubiquitous presence and constant use of smart phones in everyday life is having a potentially detrimental impact on young men. Ward et al. (2016) argue that the sheer volume of sexually objectifying media content causes great difficulty for any individual who opt not to view it. Mental health policy that focuses on young men should incorporate the issue of body pressure and social media and how this may intertwine with negative mental health issues. Although concern with physical fitness is very important, awareness is required that increasing male gym-use may, for some young males, be motivated by body comparison and body image rather than health-related reasons.

6.4.5 Limitations

Firstly, the research sample was drawn from one university. Secondly, the non-inclusion of focus groups may limit the study in terms of generating consensus or disagreement on relevant topics. Focus groups would serve to further highlight areas that young men feel strongly about in terms of identifying evolving characteristics of modern masculine ideologies. Thirdly, the interview style and location in the university may have meant participants were not as forthcoming as they may have been in a more informal setting. Fourthly, the interviewer was male and this could affect how male participants talked about topics relating to masculinity. Given recent evidence of how male emotional help-seeking does not align with how men believe they should think and act (Yousaf et al., 2015), there is a likelihood that some male participants may want to uphold their masculinity, or save face, when talking to another male. Finally, the data for this study was gathered as part of a larger research

interview schedule that was advertised as, and focussed on, the impact of the recession on young Irish male mental health. The possibility that the recession may have hindered positive mental health for some of the participants during their adult development may overly emphasise any negative perceptions of masculine gender experience.

6.4.6 Future Recommendations

There is need to investigate the influence of hegemonic and contemporary masculine ideologies among other non-university emerging adult groups in terms of generalizability among Irish men. The findings advocate incorporating this novel approach of conjoining hegemonic masculinity with objectification theory when exploring the complexity of objectifying male behaviours. In order to further look at self-objectification and hegemonic masculinity within a gymnasium context, it would be useful to gather a participant base that contains regular gym-users who identify as prioritising body aesthetics over athletic optimisation. The impact of social media on competitive characteristics of modern masculinity is also a burgeoning area of interest that warrants further exploration. Also, to evaluate how men from traditionally marginalised groups (i.e. LGBTQI), perceive current notions of masculinity.

6.4.7 Conclusion

The study enabled the participants to explore and detail the different types of pressure that young Irish men experience in relation to hegemonic and contemporary masculine expectations. The themes identified in this research suggested that the undergraduate participants were aware of constantly changing masculine identities among young men. Current masculine identities shared both similarities and

differences with hegemonic masculinity. Certain hegemonic masculinity traits appeared to be either waning or intertwining with conventionally non-masculine behaviours. There was also a perceived growth in objective behaviours, such as body aesthetics and male fashion, among some young Irish males suggesting a gender convergence was occurring in traditionally feminine areas of self-objectification and body appearance. Interviews alluded to how the constant presence of social media has nurtured and accelerated masculine competition in the male body objectification domain. Other traditional masculine areas relevant to Ireland, such as alcohol and the practices that surround it, tended to nurture hegemonic masculine norms.

Chapter 7: Study Two – Investigating the Impact of an Economic Recession on the Well-Being, Young Adult Development, and Masculine Identity of Emerging Adult Irish Men

7.1 Aim of chapter

Chapter 7 presents the second empirical study that was undertaken in this thesis. The study investigated how economic adversity generated by the Great Recession impacted the young adult development and masculine identity of emerging adult male undergraduates. Study Two adopted three primary theoretical areas to provide a framework in which to explore the findings of the research. Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood (2000) provided a suitable framework for the participants as they were individual's, living in an industrialised country, inhabiting the developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity was used to understand how masculinity identity could be affected by an economic downturn and whether this impacted the mental health of young Irish men. Finally, developmental assets theory (Benson et al., 2006) offered a framework to investigate how young people's internal and external assets can potentially buffer against an adverse environment. In order to achieve this, the research addresses three of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1:

- Did the economic collapse impact the transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood in terms of financial independence, agentic striving, and independent living?
- How do young men cope with prolonged economic adversity?
- Have hegemonic masculine roles been affected by restricted economic opportunity?

7.2 Method

Study Two used a cross-sectional thematic analysis approach with all 22 men that participated in Study One. The 8 women from Study One were not included. The methodology was explained in detail in Chapter 5.

7.2.1 Participants, procedure, & interviews

Details about participants that participated in Study Two (see Table 5.1), the research procedure, and interview details, are presented in Chapter 5.

7.3 Results

This section explicates four themes that were identified as being important in understanding how the recession impacted the lives of Irish male undergraduates in the emerging adulthood stage. From a chronological perspective, the first theme investigated how the long-term impact of a negative economy impacted the men's adult development. Home life appeared to be in a state of flux for those whose families were negatively impacted. Following this, the participant's talked about the transition from adolescence to adulthood as they left secondary school for university. Some students experienced frustration at not being able to leave the family home due to financial issues. Irritation was apparent when discussing the shortage of employment opportunities and the consequent lack of financial independence. Participants who did gain employment were working in capacities that appeared to be unconventional employment for students. When estimating the difference more money would have, students imagined an alleviation of stress and an enhanced social life but there was also fear among some that work ethic and motivation would suffer.

The second theme explored how a context where opportunity is limited nurtured an increased motivation to succeed. Long-term economic adversity was both positive and negative in terms of how students coped with it. Financial responsibility and resilience was honed by economic hardship with an emphasis on valuing non-material aspects of life to counterbalance adversity. In discussing their future outlook, the third theme presented was the concept of emigration and what it meant for those who were likely to emigrate. Many of the participants' attachment to Ireland, family, and friends was too entrenched for them to entertain the notion of emigrating or to view this avenue as a positive option. For others, leaving Ireland for another country was an optimistic and exciting prospect that prompted talk of adventure and the experience of new cultures.

Following this chronological exploration of the men's adult development, the fourth theme examined how the contexts of the Great Recession and contemporary societal change altered the traditional route for young Irish men to achieve a young adult status. They described a norm whereby pressure to start a family was delayed until the 30s, which was consistent with their own beliefs and expectations for life exploration and responsibility. From a domestic point of view, traditional gender roles were perceived as changing in favour of enabling increased collaboration between partners. The potential of a female partner being the primary breadwinner was positively accepted but potentially damaging for men who subscribed to a hegemonic masculine identity. The recession and progressive societal views made the role of 'househusband' more tenable, although it was a role viewed ambiguously by the male students.

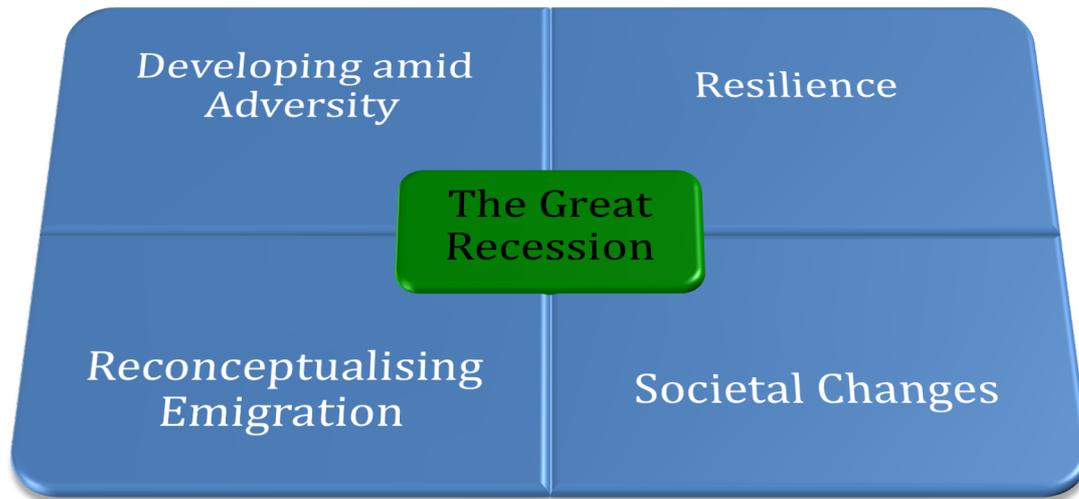


Figure 7.1. Diagram of Study Two findings.

7.3.1 *Developing amid adversity*

This theme ‘Developing amid adversity’ explores the impact of the Great Recession on the participants. It affected the majority of the participants’ development in a myriad of ways. For some, the recession generated a state of flux and uncertainty in their home lives. It also impacted the students’ university experience as economic hardship resulted in some students not being able to avail of social opportunities at third-level. A few local participants attended university whilst living at home, which defused any independence traditionally associated with third-level. Lack of employment was a hindering factor for many but those who had jobs tended to be employed in diverse areas. Students also talked about how they thought their university experience would be different had the collapse not happened.

7.3.1.1 Home lives in flux

This period of economic recession was experienced in the family homes of most of the participants as being one of tentativeness, flux, and unrest. Over half of the participants reported that their parents' employment status was impacted to varying degrees. Paul explained how a barrage of media opinions provoked a general air of uncertainty and confusion:

They didn't have a clue what was going on as much as I did because there was so much going on. There was so much in the media and they were constantly talking about this, that, and the other, and "the country's gone to hell".

Normal financial habits that were standard during the Celtic Tiger began to change noticeably. The impact varied for participants in terms of how it affected their home life. Brian noticed how changes slowly developed as a result of less money: "even like the shopping every week, we were a bit smaller ... Getting clothes if you asked, if you needed new shoes you'd have to wait a week or two. Until they had the money to get them". Mark's family had experienced a severe financial impact as a result during the recession and, for him, family life become increasingly difficult:

My dad was always grumpy but... he was lot more grumpy ... he'd take it out on us a bit. Just verbally kind of take it out on us. That put stress on my Mum ... he used to always go to the pub, em, he stopped going to the pub now.

Glenn gained some positives as international holidays ceased in favour of domestic ones, allowing him to the change to reconnect with relatives that may not have occurred during times of prosperity ("We just went back to going to my grandparents in the summer and back to [rural area]"). Alan noted how the recession impacted the physical and social environment: "people get more stingy, more theft going on, more

kind of crime even. Yeah, you can see it, like. ... not that much anymore but when it just hit”.

7.3.1.2 Still at home

The majority of the local students were still living at home mainly due to financial reasons. Paul felt this lack of independent living diminished his college experience by depriving him of the social freedoms he expected with student life: “I always felt like ... because I go home to my parents and I can’t really stay out as long as I want or I can’t really do the full thing”. Paul also talked about his living situation in a more positive light. Although he sacrificed a certain amount of independence, he was able to be more independent in other ways:

They’re [students who are renting] on their budget and they know themselves what they can and can’t afford. I’m lucky in that I’ve never had to do that because I’m at home so the cost of rent is minimal and I’m able to go off and do my own thing.

Glenn was commuting to college for two years in order to save money (“it’s frustrating being a young man living at home a lot. Spending a lot of time at home and not having been abroad”). He viewed not living independently as disempowering and an aspect of his life he associated with lack of adventure.

7.3.1.3 Finding work

The recession continued to have an influence when the students talked about job availability and finding work. For Julian, gaining employment during university was an extremely common theme: “I don’t know a single student who isn’t looking for a job ... I think that’s definitely something the recession’s done”. Having a job

became a pertinent topic in the day-to-day lives of young men during the recession years. This was reflected in Simon thinking about how his day-to-day life would be affected financially (“I would have been probably working up until I went to college and I would definitely have a part-time job”), and in Philip who was aware of how financial issues had impacted the scope for exploration for his generation compared to previous ones (“in 2007 everyone would be talking about ‘oh where are you going for the summer?’ Now the discussion is more like ‘do you think you’ll get a part time job for the summer?’ you know. It’s very different attitudes”). Being able to generate financial independence seemed to be a crucial factor for many of the participants’ increasing motivation to look for work.

7.3.1.4 Employment during college

Working during college was a theme that some of the men discussed. Some participants reported gaining employment in areas that were suited to their skill set or not associated with traditional areas of student employment (i.e. hospitality). Glenn, a semi-professional musician, experienced more opportunity as a result of the recession:

I currently play in a two-piece band, so bars are inclined to pay you for that as opposed to where they would have paid for a four-piece. So I’ve actually benefitted from that in some ways. Being left behind, other musicians who have gone abroad because they were in big set-ups, they couldn’t afford to be paid anymore.

Indeed, if more jobs were available it could also have had a different, negative outcome for Glenn “I might have just gone and got a job in a shop instead. ... which I mightn’t have enjoyed as much actually”. Ben, a sailing instructor, purposely qualified in the highest level, as “it would be easier to get a job mainly”. William

supplemented himself financially through being a semi-professional rugby player. Brian was a store surveyor, partly due to an acquaintance starting up a new business as a result of the old one collapsing due to the recession (“I got the surveying job actually through my mum’s old boss. The one she was let go from ... after that business crashed. Two of the partners from that started a new business”). A wide variety of types of employment were quite common throughout the participant base (“last summer I went to Italy and I worked at a kayaking instructor for three campsites” Julian; “I’ve been on the bog, like, nearly every summer and then I’m working in a flower shop now”, Andrew; “freelance writing most of it would be writing technical manuals for cars for example”, Philip; “I went abroad as an au pair for a year and then now I’m working in a call centre”, Larry).

7.3.1.5 More money, less problems

The significance of the recession was underlined for many of the participants when discussing how their lives would be different if they had access to more money. For Brian, the benefits would have been obvious: “a lot less stress and I ... wouldn’t have to work at all. Which would’ve been nice, yeah, I’d say it ... would’ve been easier and more enjoyable”. Glenn outlined how he did not pursue the opportunity to study abroad as he felt that would have financial repercussions for his parents:

I might have gone on Erasmus instead of staying here ... part of it was feeling little bit guilty because I know how much that would cost because I know my brother’s going to be in college in two years time ... I didn’t really want to, kind of, incur any more costs on my parents. I kind of wanted to take responsibility and get out as soon as possible.

His notion of acting responsibly was to sacrifice his travel ambitions to help his parents and brother. With Glenn saying “I might have done a lot more partying” and Dean stating “It wouldn’t have a huge effect on my work ethic in college or just the day-to-day college thing ... It would certainly change my lifestyle”, several of the students imagined their student experience being more social if they had more money to spend. Julian was aware of the social enticements of having more money, and was mindful that this could be detrimental to his academic goals (“I probably wouldn’t be as willing to do twelve-hour days. I, but I probably would be much more willing to go out on a Thursday night”). For Simon, it was a simply a desire for the small things that would make the difference if there was no recession, to be “hanging out in the pub or being able to treat myself to a Chinese when exams are on top of me ... that would make it a little bit easier”.

7.3.2 Resilience

Some participants repeatedly evoked a sense of resilience as they talked about the different strategies they developed to navigate difficulties in a third-level environment. Some drew strength from the time-limited nature of the recession whilst others maintained positivity by comparing their situation to others who were more severely impacted. Participants ascribed different meanings to the recession in terms of motivation, with some becoming more focused and determined whilst others experienced no positives. From a financial perspective, a repercussion of the economy for the men was the importance of taking care of their finances and becoming more responsible than the previous generation. Values also shifted from monetary aspirations to being people-focused. There was also a palpable sense that the

development of adaptive traits such as resilience, resourcefulness, and improvisation were accelerated and honed by persevering through a long-term adverse climate.

7.3.2.1 Coping levels

The men talked about how they viewed the future, if this was affected by the recession, and how they coped with this. For some, there was a prevailing sense that experiencing such wide-scale adversity in the formative years could shape a young person's outlook. Matthew described his experience as burdensome, but more positive than detrimental in the long-term: "I kind of know what it's like to not have money or to have very little as opposed to having a lot and then having very little so I think in the long run, I'm better off really". This was supported by Brian who had become acutely aware of how fickle finances could be "we know that at any stage the whole thing could crash ... So you need to have a plan ... for the young people I think it is good. Coming in through recession ... was pretty good actually".

Some participants drew comparison with other people worse off than themselves to re-evaluate the difficulty they were encountering and motivate them to overcome barriers. Tommy felt that only extreme circumstances merited an individual the right to be permanently affected by the economic collapse:

Unless they had some really bad experience, say for example you were literally on the verge of everything gone like that. That would probably stay with you. Say if it was kind of a so-so kind of thing, it was bad but it wasn't that bad, you'd eventually kind of just get over it.

Paul viewed it more simply in that his awareness of others suffering meant his complaints were trivial in comparison: "I really can't complain in comparison to what a lot of other people have had to do".

For a few participants, the recession was an extremely difficult period to navigate. Mark particularly suffered as a result of his father's employment background in construction, since the recession was linked to a property bubble: "one thing that use to drive me nuts is when people say 'your Dad's the cause of the problem' cause they'd read in the paper, the construction". Simon, although not hugely perturbed by the recession in general, did find big difficulty with certain areas such as the social welfare services: "It was very difficult to deal with, going into the social welfare office. It's not a pleasant experience at all ... there is a certain look down upon and they don't want to make it easy for you".

7.3.2.2 Motivation

Different motivational outlooks were garnered from a harsh, competitive environment where career opportunity and success was perceived as exceptionally scarce. Some participants believed the only positive from such high levels of competition was the increasing motivation to hone their focus on a specific occupation and specialise in that career choice in order to enhance their chances of finding employment in it. According to Julian "you need to know what you like and you need to focus on that and make sure you're the best at it because if you're the best at it then you've a better chance of getting a job for it".

Glenn drew optimism by envisaging how his current motivational outlook, forged by the recession, may have been weakened had he grown up during the Celtic Tiger period where challenge was lacking and opportunity was abundant:

I'd probably be more inclined to rest on my laurels a bit and not work as hard because if there was a kind of guaranteed opportunity ... there would be the

temptation to just set up shop somewhere and ... not challenge yourself at all for a while.

Ben interpreted the recession as having a very positive effect on his motivation. Had there been no adversity, his scope for future academic opportunity may have been reduced: "if I definitely knew there was a job there, I probably wouldn't be doing a masters. I definitely wouldn't have looked into some of the opportunities I have looked at. Like, going overseas is becoming a real possibility". Mark, for whom the recession was a particularly trying experience, reflected on this period as instilling his generation with the knowledge that any reward is hard earned. He interpreted this development as positive as employing any other outlook could lead to failure:

It toughened us up and it probably gave us a good understanding of value for money... you're not going to be given much in life... you kind of have to almost look at it as a positive because it's inevitable at this stage (laughs). There's no point looking at it as a negative.

Philip disagreed on this topic both personally and generally. He experienced doubt and disempowerment in terms of getting that job and believed this outlook also applied to his generation:

Confidence for most younger people, myself included, has been definitely knocked. ... some of the students just in college, their constant concern is about what jobs they will get with the subjects they're doing. Rather than actually having a specific goal because they're more aware that that goal isn't probably going to be attained. So I think there's less confidence in the ability to actually get what they want.

For Harry, it was hard to take much motivation from the economic climate. He felt that his particular academic course offered low levels of employability: "I can't see

any positives really, well especially doing something like, doing Arts now like, I can't see much job opportunities out of it". Colin embraced certain aspects of being less motivated or not having to experience as much pressure ("there's actually very little pressure on you to get a job straight out of college. Like everyone is like 'yeah, you can sign on, it will be great'").

7.3.2.3 Don't spend it all in one go

Most of the participants talked about a honed awareness of money being an entity that, as a consequence of the recession, is viewed with more respect and consideration for how it is spent rather than spending impulsively. Hal believed the recession reduced any chance of excessive spending in his generation: "People my age are very conscious about how they spend their money ... they consider their finances more than I think they would have if we didn't go through the recession". According to William, financial discipline was also instilled in people who were not directly affected by the recession. The harsh economic environment instilled a collective awareness of the repercussions ("Even if people weren't directly affected by it, or heavily affected by it, they became more consciously aware of money and the effects it has on people around them. I think that's a good lasting one").

Both Dean and Paul viewed financial responsibility differently in light of the cyclical nature of recessions. Dean hoped that future prosperous times will be approached in a more careful manner, saying "the biggest lesson we've learned is that if things do get good again to be smarter with how you carry on with your money". Paul was more aware of how easy lessons can be unlearned from generation to generation and what was learned by the current generation will be forgotten by the

next, stating that “these things come in fluctuations and they go up and down and up and down so maybe the generation after us will screw it up”.

7.3.2.4 Changing values

For many of the participants, the frustration at being unable to afford material desires was counterbalanced by placing more value on their friends or social habits that were previously taken for granted during the recession. Glenn recounted how family holiday choices were less exotic and became more family-oriented and, in terms of reconnecting with what is important, this development was positive:

We go on holidays and went to [rural area] rather than going abroad, that was actually nice in some ways because you spent more time with my extended family which is quite good so I think that kind of became more important for people as well.

Similarly for Larry, a consequence of the recession was valuing other aspects of life that may have been submerged in the Celtic Tiger: “I think it’s made us better in some ways because we, we know that it’s not all about money, it’s about the people and how you spend your time and not how you spend your money”. Gerry echoed this sentiment in his belief that drastic economic upheaval causes people to rethink what their priorities were:

You appreciate the little things in life more. ... it just kind of opens your eyes to, you don’t need to go out and be extravagant and whatever and wear like designer clothes and have a flash car and, to like enjoy life, and it really is like the little things, just like going for a walk to [seaside location] with your friends or having a coffee.

The re-evaluation of financial decisions also instigated a revision of what mattered most to Glenn (“It definitely has to have an effect on your outlook in general. How you spend money ... even your priorities of what’s important to yourself”). Larry held a belief, which was negative one for him, that a sense of solidarity seems to be garnered only in hard times and was unsure if this would be permanent: “It’s just kind of sad that it takes like something like a recession to, for everybody to be, feel equal among themselves ... because, like, if you’re poor everyone is poor”.

7.3.2.5 Perseverance

Some students viewed the Irish recession as an experience that initially caused difficulty but ultimately generated reward if persevered with and navigated successfully. The adversity that Anthony encountered during the recession was interpreted by him as being a necessary experience in order to learn how to be mentally tough and to persevere in pursuit of a goal: “Any successful person has failed first or gone through something hard because you kind of need to go through the hardship to get reward at the end”. Ben, who valued the tough-mindedness he nurtured, felt positive about the softness of character he possessed pre-recession being eroded as a result of living through a period of economic hardship: “I’m better in the face of adversity just because it really kind of toughened me up”. For Dean, perseverance was honed through belief, resilience and ambition (“Things are going to get better ... it does depend on how ambitious you are and how resilient you are”). For Mark, whose family background was steeped in the construction industry, the recession’s devastating impact on that sector resulted in him being able to chase a more fulfilling career:

I think I'd be more inclined to fulfil my potential now, because of the recession ... construction, it would have paid nice ... whatever job I get out of psychology, construction would have been paying very well ... but I wouldn't have been fulfilling my potential.

If the recession had not occurred, Mark may well have been unfulfilled in employment that was inclined more towards family rather than his individual goals.

As well as being tough-minded, resourcefulness and improvisation were two traits that participants associated with achieving adulthood status during hard times. Glenn felt that his generation had a resourcefulness that replaced the helplessness he associated with older peers during the recession: "people who are older than us... cope with it a lot differently ... There was more 'where do we go from here?' whereas I think people of my age adapt quicker and get resourceful". Roger echoed this recession-forged sense of resourcefulness in with his thoughts on how his generation viewed food "They make do with what they have instead of just throwing something out, they're like actually 'use all our food if we can' ... I suppose just adapting to the situation is what they've learnt from the situation". Larry believed that being resilient and being able to adapt was crucial when facing any future difficulty, a mind-set honed by his experience of the recession:

You just live life, like, day-by-day and not planning ... I don't think to myself all the time going "if that happens then I'm not going to be able to do this". I'm more like "well if it doesn't happen then so what, then just move on" ... I don't get disappointed by things anymore that much, so like if something happens great, and if it doesn't then so what, just move on.

7.3.3 Contemporary emigration

The men's concept of emigration was episodic rather than permanent in that they had more flexibility when planning the length of their stay, and intended to return to Ireland. Many participants were seriously thinking about emigration whilst others were noncommittal or did not discuss the issue. The most daunting factor was the likelihood of the stay becoming a longer-term experience than initially planned when integrating into a new country. Some were excited about the ability to combine migration with the desire to travel and work in foreign countries. The possibility of homesickness was mitigated by both the ability to communicate with home through social media, smartphone technology, and budget airline travel. The erosion of social circles due to emigration could influence the decision to leave but parental distress could also hinder emigration plans.

7.3.3.1 Stay or go?

Participants who did not want to migrate were largely motivated by their love of living in Ireland. Quality of life in Ireland was a sanctuary that provided solace against the recession, with proximity to family and friends being of paramount importance. Roger's external world was wrapped firmly in Ireland and the prospect of leaving would be distressing: "Moving away is something I don't want to do. I love Ireland, it's where I grew up, it's what I'm used to". For Bill, leaving Ireland might simply not be a matter of personal choice "I don't necessarily want to leave Ireland but I think I might have to". Philip, who had the option to gain employment in Ireland, preferred to stay as any economic difficulty was buffered by proximity to family and friends:

I'll stay in Ireland. I like Ireland, I like where I am, it's a nice spot ... It's not great but at the same time I can do my job from anywhere and I'd prefer to do it where I'm close to family and friends.

Matthew still wanted to travel but not merge it with emigrating ("I'll probably go travelling for a few months afterwards but overall I'll probably stay in Ireland").

Those who did not want to leave varied in their opinion of emigration but all were adamant in their desire to stay despite the country's economic woes.

The view of emigration as being wrenched away was not shared by those who were contemplating leaving. Some students integrated their desire to gain new experience with emigration. For Glenn, the recession itself was a constant presence to be avoided by any means even if it meant leaving Ireland to get away from it: "That compulsion to move away. That's what I get from it, more than anything else". A sense of adventure and exploration was a primary option for some participants diminishing the traditional negative notions associated with emigration. William was aware that any difficulty leaving could be counterbalanced by the desire to experience other cultures:

I love Ireland. I am a bit of a home bird so it depends ... where would you want your kids to grow up or where you want to be and I suppose in Ireland you're more aware of everything that goes on ... the culture. You know more people ... it definitely has its positives. But a chance to explore would be nice so it's, while I wouldn't tend to travel it's subject to change.

Andrew summed up the modern perception of emigration as being episodic rather than permanent. It is a route he must take but he will merge it with his desire to travel and the knowledge that it is not a permanent choice:

I will have to emigrate to get work initially like probably to England, Scotland, somewhere like that and I'd say I will want to travel to see the world but I can see myself come in ten years, fifteen years, settling down in Ireland.

Some of the students still preferred to emigrate even if there was possibility of employment as a result of negative connotations with Ireland. Ben was eager to seek new experiences but his desire to actually leave Ireland seemed more personal rather than functional:

If I have a job in Ireland I'd probably work for a bit, save up money and emigrate. I don't know if that's just I want to try new things or, yeah, I don't really want to stay in Ireland anyway.

Larry was more vehement in his desire to leave Ireland ("I think if, if everybody was on millions of euro I would still leave"). Gerry's aim to emigrate was fuelled by his discouraging experiences in day-to-day transactions in Ireland: "I can't deal with the, the infrastructure here. I just think like I'm sick of buses being late and things being like too expensive in relation to other, other countries that I've lived in".

7.3.3.2 Episodic vs permanent

The possibility of coming home after emigrating was perceived as increasingly attainable, thereby altering the concept of emigration by introducing choice and flexibility instead of an enforced permanence. Glenn was aware that if he chose to, he could return but also availing of a new culture could sway future decisions: "I don't see it as something that's permanent. It can be though, it totally depends on what happens when you do emigrate". Numerous participants were more fearful of this change in duration occurring once they had acclimatised to the new

environment. Brian evidenced this when describing how common it was for his peers to migrate permanently:

If I was to go over, I'd probably only do a year or two. But in saying that I know lots of people that go over, do six months and then say they're not coming back ... so I'd be a bit nervous because ... I love living at home.

As for Philip, he viewed emigration as a permanent choice ("realistically if you move, you're not coming back"). The knowledge that emigration is not permanent is comforting but awareness remained that acclimatising to a new culture with more opportunity could change this.

The emergence of social media, smartphone technology, and cheaper air travel also buffered the students against difficulties faced by previous generations. Colin espoused the benefits of such global developments as fear-reducing in terms of thinking about emigration: "Skype's a thing, mobile phones are a thing, Ryanair is a thing. ... the world is a lot smaller than it used to be so emigration is not ... as awful as it once was". Simon supported this in describing how traditional negative notions of emigration were extinguished:

Flights are a lot cheaper now than they were twenty or thirty years ago so it's maybe easier to come home. So the "see you in five or ten years" thing is gone. And with Skype and Internet communications ... the world is a little bit smaller so you're not so far away.

The sheer physical distance between the emigrant and home was not as daunting a prospect as a result of modern advances and, for some, seemed to reduce apprehension.

For participants who had already travelled, positive experiences broadened horizons when thinking about emigration and reduced any worries. Paul's Erasmus

experience in Asia fuelled his desire to travel and the option to possibly merge this aspiration with emigration provided a positive spin: “I got to travel around Asia. I was there so, I’d love to, after a bit, maybe live somewhere else for a few years or even for life”. Larry’s previous travel history diminished any hesitation in potentially living abroad in the future:

I’ve already lived abroad so I think I’d like to go abroad again ... I don’t think it’s because it’s Ireland, I think if I lived in France then I’d probably want to come to Ireland and things like that, it’s that I’d want to get out and see the world while I still can.

7.3.3.3 Friends & family

Some participants stated that dwindling social circles and at home and family factors was also a motivating factor in making a decision to emigrate. Both Glenn and Colin believed that if their friends had not left, they might not feel the desire to emigrate at all. Glenn felt that his need to emigrate was more orientated around his friends leaving rather than employment reasons: “It could be the case that if I had all the people around me that I was just used to seeing all the time, that I wouldn’t even feel the need to move”. Colin was eager to travel regardless but seeing his social circle leave had heightened his desire: “I’d be very eager to travel. Now that, part of that is because over the last several years, people I know at home ... everyone is leaving and travelling which makes me want to do it more”. Philip’s social circle was still numerous but he was aware that if the group disintegrated, staying in Ireland would be meaningless to him:

If more people I know left, then I would probably emigrate but at the moment I still have a decent ... network of people I talk to. But if that was gone ... if

that started getting weaker like it did in ... the early recession then I would emigrate because there'd be no point.

Parental concern generated difficulty for a few of the young men who planned on emigrating due to an awareness of the despair this may generate in loved ones. For Brian, it was not as simple an attitude of leaving when he wanted as he was aware of the impact of this decision:

I would be a bit worried that if I go over, I'll end up staying over there.

Because I know it would hugely affect my mother especially. She would hate if I lived over there for the rest of my life.

In light of the identified advantages that modern emigrants can avail of, negative effects on parents was still a major concern.

7.3.4 Societal changes

The recession was one part of societal change that was linked to significant changes in expectations for masculinity and traditional roles. The recession partly-initiated a change in expectations for gender roles, economic activity, and family structure. It was set against a context of slower, long-standing changes in expectations that implicated female as well as male roles in society. Participants believed that young people, through either individual choice or generational differences, were not adhering to traditional archetypes. There was an awareness that the expectations of starting a family had been delayed compared to previous generations with the immediate onus now being on beginning a career and exploration through travel or emigration. An increase in collaboration with respect to family roles and income suggested increasing gender convergence in society. These changes were attributable to both the rapid impact of an adverse economy and wider societal developments.

They had the impact of altering the traditional notion of the man in the family unit being the primary financial earner. The relatively recent development of men occupying the primary domestic role was also emerging, and was reflective of a gradual diminishing of traditional male and female gender roles within the family setting.

7.3.4.1 Delayed family

The notion of starting a family and a long-term career upon leaving university was virtually non-existent. Starting a family was viewed as an option to be delayed until other life goals had been achieved. Matthew described how the vast increase in post-education avenues diminished any attraction for him to engage the traditional masculine route:

My father would have been just a ... leave school or that and go working, rear your family whereas now I have a lot more plans then just that. I want to go travelling and that kind of thing so I think there's a lot more options or people just aren't ready to just settle down straight away or men anyway for that.

On a more general level, Colin embraced being a member of the emerging adulthood generation where responsibilities and expectations were not as stringent or fixed as experienced by previous generations: "we're trained to be a lot less grown up, a whole generation can stay teenagers until our early thirties. Class."

There was a consensus that any pressure to have children was a future concern. Millennial pressures were perceived as obstacles that hinder any aspirations of starting a family. Philip, using a comparison between his father and his circle of friends, clearly outlined a significant difference in adult development between modern young men and previous generations:

My father would have been starting his family and had a stable career by the time he was my age which allowed him to start a family and get a house and settle somewhere. Whereas of the people my age and older, I only know one person who has managed to get a career, settle down and start a family.

7.3.4.2 Gender role convergence

Participants believed that gender roles in domestic settings were changing from hegemonic to a more convergent configuration. Simon described traditional gender roles within the household as “the traditional stereotypes of the man goes out and works and the woman stays at home”. For some of the men, traditional models of parental roles were cultivated from childhood experience (“my dad had much more of a man works and provides for his family”, Ben; “My mum stopped working once she had us, she didn’t work at all. So it was my dad who brought in all the money”, Brian). For Dean, certain hegemonic masculine features such as dominance and breadwinning were still currently ingrained in young Irish men despite the changes that were happening: “I think we still have that, and it’s never going to leave us, that old Irish tradition that the man goes out and works and it’s as simple as that and you make money for your wife”. Mark believed that his internal hegemonic pressure to be dominant had become redundant “I think it’ll always be in our nature to try and be dominant, but ... it’s not true anymore really”.

Interviewees revealed a distinct awareness that traditional gender role stereotypes were steadily converging towards a more equality-based landscape. All participants viewed this development as positive and nobody alluded to a desire for gender roles to return to traditional stereotypes. Simon, in illustrating his opinion on gender role convergence, used the example of an Irish social and cultural scene in a

bar to highlight how as increasing array of choice reduces polarity and encourages convergence:

In terms of gender equality, if you could say men are on the left of a bar and women are on the right of a bar. We're both coming closer to the centre of what it means to be a person, I think, and having free choices in your life.

Larry suggested that role convergence in a relationship context nurtured a collaborative approach towards parenting that he believed revealed a more mature generation of parents:

We're both people so we can both work, we can both look after the kids, it doesn't matter what gender you are, you just do your role, if you're a parent it's not, I think nowadays it's more about being a parent than being a father or mother... So I think it's just, I think it's become more gender neutral now, yeah, because people have copped on a bit.

7.3.4.3 Who's the breadwinner?

Current notions of a breadwinner seemed to be in flux in terms of stereotypical gender roles. Brian outlined the positives of increasing female employment rates in terms of family time and relieving single-income pressure: "It could be less pressure on men ... money-wise. But I think it's, it's good that men and women are working the same now. Because, like, men will have more chance to spend [time] with their children". Tommy believed that hegemonic male breadwinning roles were becoming irrelevant, as a consequence of increasing gender role convergence alleviating pressures that men may experience, to the detriment of hegemonic masculine ideals:

There's not as much pressure on men now because of the fact with women working just as much and getting an equal education, kind of a thing. It kind

of balances out compared to what it was before so if anything it's gone.

Masculinity would be kind of just fading away a little bit like.

According to Philip, masculine identity was possibly in a state of confusion as a result of increasing employment equality and diminishing role responsibility:

There would be less, less notion of ... how good a provider that you are as a man because I mean more women are working at the moment so that's not really a concern. I suppose it's more of a concept of, I don't think most men at the moment really know what it is to be a man because it doesn't really factor in.

A few participants thought that female partners earning an equal or higher financial income could have an internal impact on masculine identity. Underneath the surface some men would experience distress between role reversal and traditional expectations. Hal was aware that this had occurred for others forming his perception: "I think some men would feel emasculated if their girlfriend or wife, whatever, was earning more than them. That's what, I've got the idea from a couple of people in the past". This scenario was also seen as threatening to masculine identity by Roger who believed that regardless of how forward thinking some men were becoming, there would be an internal conflict:

Even if they say they are progressive, old standards and old moulds are still ingrained so I think if they're not the breadwinner and they're just sitting and there watching another person basically bringing in the [income], they are going to be affected by that.

Mark viewed emasculation as an inevitable consequence of earning less or equal pay ("I'd say they'd find, they'd take it a bit more personal. They'd find it a bit emasculating. Cause times have changed. It's not a man's world as such anymore").

Dean, who had previously maintained that hegemonic elements of masculinity would always be ingrained in family role settings, revealed that it would not be a negative issue for him: “I don’t see massive difference between men and women in that respect. I wouldn't have any issue if my girlfriend’s making more money than me”.

7.3.4.4 Domesticity

The men believed that there had been a generational shift in recent years, partly due to economic necessity and partly due to increasing gender equality, in terms of how traditional gender roles were perceived within the family household. Both Ben and Hal acknowledged that the notion of the father as the homemaker is becoming increasingly tolerated particularly when compared to the traditional role of the Irish father (“I’d be ‘a man just has to do what he has to’ if that means like letting your significant other work and you stay home with kids, but my dad’s [generation] would be more old-fashioned”, Ben; “It was okay for the man to be considered doing that [stay-at-home dad]. About 20 years ago, that would have seemed to be an odd thing but it’s now acceptable”, Hal). Both men tolerated the ideas of being a house-husband but it was not wholly acceptable in their concept of gender roles.

Gender convergence in terms of employment, family responsibilities, and domestic ability had resulted in some men accepting the opportunity to be a homemaker. Colin, who was tolerant of this concept was less accepting than Hal and Ben, viewed the house-husband as peculiar even when forced in light of financial difficulty:

I know ... a couple, the man would have lost his job... and his wife or girlfriend didn't. So he'd continue ... be taking care of the kids, cooking dinner, cleaning the house ... and his girlfriend, well, it is still a bit weird ...

but nowhere near what I can imagine, if you've someone who heard the story thirty years ago it's like "what the fuck's the matter with you?" ... That's probably a combination of what it means to be a man changing and what it means to be a woman changing.

Although not wholly embraced by Colin, his comparison of these scenarios with traditional Irish gender norms highlighted how gender roles are changing. Indeed, it was a domestic role that some male respondents did not find disagreeable. Compared to the borderline tolerance towards the role of house-husband espoused by other participants, Simon was wholly receptive towards the idea. He explained how being a stay-at-home father was a role that was consistent with one of his life ambitions:

My personal dream is that I'd have a partner that would be out in the working world and I would get to stay at home and raise the family. That's my personal dream. And one of my friends is actually just about to have a child and he's going to be doing that. He's going to be a stay-at-home dad. And, you know, some people don't like that idea. Some people feel that you should be, it's manly to be the breadwinner.

An interesting emergence was the impact that the current gender-role convergence was having on older generations. Hal talked about how the recession instigated change in the familial practices of the traditional Irish family hierarchy: "My mother was in work, my father then picked up doing all the household chores that my mother would have done when she was at home ... a lot of men do a lot more household work now". Simon's father, as a result of losing his employment due to the recession, realised that he was missing out on family life. As a result, he changed his work habits on returning to employment:

My dad was the breadwinner. My mam was staying at home raising the children. In the time where he was staying at home for the year, em, he certainly acted very differently ... he realised that “oh, I’m part of this family. I’m not someone who’s out of the house for ten hours a day”. I think it’s given opportunity to change how we think about it ... He stopped going to the pub as much. He decided to cut down smoking cigarettes. And then when he eventually went back to work, he changed his shifts so he finished a lot earlier and he involved himself in the family a lot more, which was nice.

This change in Simon’s father’s concept of gender roles was consistent with the notion of the recession being an accelerator of societal change that was occurring anyway. The repercussions of the recession forced some families to reflect and reinterpret what their priorities and roles were. For Larry, it seemed that current gender role convergence practices had permeated into older generations of parents also:

Twenty years ago with my Dad, he would have been like “I’m the provider, she looks after the kids”, whereas I think now they’re more like “no, we’re both people so we can both work, we can both look after the kids”, it doesn’t matter what gender you are, you just do your role, if you’re a parent it’s not, I think nowadays it’s more about being a parent than being a father or mother... So I think it’s just, I think it’s become more gender neutral now, yeah, because people have copped on a bit.

7.4 Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to investigate how a long-term adverse economic climate impacted the adult development of emerging adult undergraduate males. The

research applied a cross-sectional thematic analysis design to explore the experiences of 22 male Irish undergraduates attending a university in the west of Ireland during an economic recession. Four themes were identified from analysis of the interviews that coherently represent how different avenues in young Irish men's development were impacted by negative economy. The results suggested that the men's young adult development was affected by the duration and adversity of the recession. However, the men utilised internal assets to cope with, and navigate, any difficulty this caused in their lives. Adolescent development in an adverse climate resulted in many of the participants having a higher threshold of resilience when trying to progress in an unfavourable environment. The likelihood of emigration was pertinent as participants, aware of an impending job search, were both troubled and excited when entertaining the thought of leaving Ireland. The juxtaposition of the recession and societal progress was perceived as easing pressure to adhere to traditional masculine roles, which was perceived ambivalently by the participants.

7.4.1 Summary of findings

The Irish recession affected the lives of many of the participants. Both disruption to parental occupation and stringent family environments meant many of the young men experienced instability in their home lives. Consequently, some local students were still living at the family home due to financial reasons that they perceived as limiting their college experience. Gaining employment was an issue that also weighed heavily as lack of a personal income caused restrictions on traditional student opportunities. For those who did find work, it tended to be in sectors not conventionally associated with student employment. Such money issues caused

students to reflect on their college experience and the social and travel options they could not avail of.

Maturing in an adverse economic climate generated a sense of resilience that the men believed was far superior to the resilience of the Celtic Tiger generation. The ability to cope was determined by the heightened awareness of the affluence of the previous generation, or making comparisons with people who were experiencing higher rates of financial turmoil. Although, for some of the students, there were experiences that were difficult to successfully navigate. Motivational outlooks differed from those who drew inspiration to succeed as a result of their situations while some could not identify many positives. Financial responsibility was a trait that was pervasive as a consequence of their experiences growing up. The money-oriented values associated with previous generations were seemingly replaced by an appreciation of core-values that helped students take a different perspective on their situation. Perseverance was also honed for many in navigating the numerous barriers and lack of opportunity by making do with available resources and maintaining progression towards goals.

The topic of emigration was prevalent with just under half of the participants seriously entertaining this option while the rest did not want to think or talk about leaving Ireland. Becoming an emigrant in the current climate was perceived as markedly different from the traditional notion of the emigration experienced in previous recessions. Indeed, emigration is now seen as both episodic and flexible rather than permanent with increasingly accessible social media communications, budget travel, and desire for travel mitigating any inherent fears. Participants were apprehensive about short-term plans becoming permanent upon integration into the

new culture. Both family and social circles were viewed as pertinent in making any decisions about migrating.

The reduction of hegemonic masculine expectations and increased gender convergence as a result of societal change was welcomed although some dissonance was evident. Beginning a family is not a primary concern for young men in the emerging adulthood bracket. In a partnership, both the female and the male being employed had positive effects in terms of gender equality, parenting, and changing stereotypes. There was some ambiguity towards the idea of the female partner being the chief breadwinner among the men with some accepting it and others being tolerant of it. The evolvement of the househusband was also debated with many of the men believing that this could cause negative identity affects whilst others welcomed this trend.

7.4.2 Comparing findings to Arnett's emerging adulthood

A central aspect of the research was to evaluate if a global economic recession impacted the development of young Irish men in Arnett's (2000) emerging adult stage (described in Chapter 2). The findings suggest that, in terms of gaining future employment, elements of emerging adulthood are disregarded in favour of achieving young adulthood at an earlier stage. Characteristics associated with this period, such as lack of role responsibility and delayed normative expectations, were affected by the harsh economic environment. Delay in role responsibility was also evident but this seemed to be a consequence of lack of opportunity as well as choice. The majority of the men revealed intent to seek immediate full-time employment upon completing third-level studies as a result of their current financial status. Entertaining the notion of emigrating, a major life transition, to find work suggested evidence of role

responsibility and agency. Delayed normative expectations were an evident characteristic among the men but this was partly a result of outlook, societal changes, as well as a lack of economic opportunity. Interestingly, the possibility for travel and exploration was a characteristic of emerging adulthood that was merged into many of the men's plans to emigrate. When combined with societal change and converging gender roles, male identity is also potentially at risk of being negatively affected.

This developmental period seems to be negatively affected during culturally adverse periods. Although times of economic prosperity in Ireland enabled young people to postpone adult roles in favour of identity exploration, Ireland was now a country where young people availed of less opportunity. The majority of the participants recognised that their experience of this stage was acutely different to those who experienced emerging adulthood before the economic collapse. Gaining stable employment and becoming financially secure was of the utmost importance for many of the participants. They were aware that their situation differed fundamentally to previous generations that had experienced the opportunities associated with an economic boom. Facets of emerging adulthood were still evident but the Western culture in which Arnett (2000) bases the theory is threatened during times of restricted opportunity. This finding supports Côté and Bynner's (2008) argument that emerging adulthood is better understood from the perspective of changing economic conditions and how this may contribute to increasingly precarious trajectories and the decline of the social signifiers of young adulthood. For half of the participants who were considering leaving Ireland for work, the concept of emigration had been somewhat merged with emerging adulthood in terms of marrying travel and adventure with seeking long-term employment. The men who were potentially emigrating upon finishing their university education seemed to display higher levels of agency in terms

of knowing what they needed to do by emigrating to look for work. This subscribes to Schwartz et al.'s (2005) finding that found that high levels of agency were associated with exploration and commitment and negatively related to avoidance.

7.4.2.1 Criteria for transition to young adulthood

Findings suggest, similar to Côté and Bynner's (2008) research, that emerging adulthood is potentially a period that may differ dramatically in Western countries that are experiencing negative economic conditions. Not being financially secure or independent was an important factor for some of young people this study in not developing an adult identity, a finding support by Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood. This study's findings support Galambos and Martinez's (2007) research, which suggests that for youth experiencing poverty and inadequate occupational opportunities, the stage of emerging adulthood will possibly develop in a different fashion, if at all, even if they are exposed to the expectations about exploration and identity development in their journey to adulthood. Certain aspects of emerging adulthood are becoming intertwined with prominent factors in young people's lives. For those who wish to emigrate, a sense of adventure and desire to travel is incorporated into the concept of emigration somewhat reducing the view of this development as an imposition that limits control and freedom. It is important to note that, historically, mass emigration is not a new aspect of Irish culture. In the later part of the 19th century, Ireland experienced an exodus of its people as a result of the Great Famine. Similar to some of the participants, emigration was an expected occurrence in the lives of Irish people at the time (Fitzpatrick, 1980).

Independent living is a key element of successful transition to young adulthood. The findings suggest that, during a period of global economic instability,

some emerging adults are unable to afford independent living when attending third-level institutions. The recession's financial impact forced a few of the men to purposely opt for universities within commuting distance from the family home in order to reduce financial responsibilities such as rent or household bills. According to Kins and Beyers (2010) and Seiffge-Krenke (2013), independent living is crucial in order to achieve young adulthood. The results suggest that, for participants who had to remain at the family home, living situations were revealed as stifling or frustrating in terms of not experiencing college life properly or the lifestyle of a young person living independently.

Another quality that enables the emerging adult to achieve young adulthood is financial independence. The findings revealed that many of the students had experienced extremely limited access to finances. The lack of part-time employment meant that many were wholly reliant on their parents. According to Arnett (1998, 2000), gaining active employment is crucial for an emerging adult to transition into young adulthood. The findings suggest that an adverse economic context make the likelihood of achieving young adulthood even harder to obtain.

The decision to emigrate is one that was affecting the majority of the participants. Over half of the participants did show openness to emigration with the majority integrating an attitude of exploration into the concept. This conceptualisation of emigration adopted the exploration aspect of Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood but with the chief aim being to find stable employment, a signifier of young adulthood rather than the exploration and identity-seeking of emerging adulthood. Schwartz et al. (2005) found that high levels of agency in emerging adulthood was associated with exploration and commitment and negatively related to avoidance. Some participants did not want to entertain the idea of leaving Ireland because of their attachment to

home or family. This possibly echoes Schwartz et al.'s (2005) assertion that emerging adults who lack agency may not be as open to making such big life transitions.

Participants who were more open to leaving for work seemed to exhibit more agency, supporting Vuolo et al.'s (2012) research showing that agentic striving is an important feature in helping young people a harsh economic environment.

Although aware of the traditional perceptions of starting a family that many students perceived from their parents, they experienced little pressure to start a family when comparing themselves to their parents at the same age. As a result of both generational differences and the Great Recession, young people delayed any thought of beginning a family until they reach their thirties. This finding concurs with Arnett's (1998) research that parenthood is not a salient factor in what young people view as essential criteria for achieving adulthood as many participants perceived parenthood as a topic to be concerned with in their thirties.

7.4.3 Interpreting the findings through Connell's hegemonic masculinity

The next research aim of this study was to investigate if the Great Recession had an impact on hegemonic masculine norms. The findings suggested that there was a gradual shift among some of the men in the importance they placed on being a breadwinner as a consequence of both the Great Recession and societal change. However, some of the men espoused Connell's (2005) assertion that men who subscribe to the traditional masculine ideal of being a breadwinner may be negatively affected by losing this status.

Although some men were comfortable with not having the highest financial income in a dyadic domestic relationship, there were some who expressed difficulty with this scenario. In terms of relationships, both partners working were perceived as

a positive occurrence by all participants particularly in a family scenario where it enabled both parents to spend time with their children. However some of the men believed it would be emasculating to lose the primary earner status or be the stay-at-home parent. This study provided some context to the argument that a recession's negative impact on male mental health is a result of losing the breadwinner identity (Gerdtham & Johannesson, 2005; Barth et al., 2011; Chang et al., 2013). Björklund et al.'s (2015) qualitative research with young Finnish men aged between 18 and 25-years-old suggested that much shame and guilt experienced by unemployed young men was a result of not being able to live up to this role. The findings in this study suggest that, although there appears to be gradual change occurring, there is still stigma among some young men in terms of not being a breadwinner. The masculine identity of men who subscribe to hegemonic characteristics of dominance and breadwinning is at risk of being greatly damaged during a recession.

7.4.4 Comparing findings to Benson's developmental assets theory

This study employed a relatively novel utilisation of Benson's (2003) developmental assets framework to identify assets that the men used to cope successfully with long-term economic adversity. The results suggested that at least seven internal assets from the developmental assets framework (Benson et al., 2006) were applied by the men. These seven internal assets were also recognised by Scales et al. (2016) as being crucial in their original theoretical framework that utilised an assets-based approach to identify the core aspects of successful young adult development. Furthermore, the results revealed that five of the internal assets that Pashak et al. (2014) identified were evident in the participants in terms of helping them overcome economic adversity.

The internal assets of *interpersonal competence*, the possession of *empathy*, *sensitivity*, and *capability for friendship* (Benson, Mannes, Pittman, & Ferber, 2004), were important assets for some of the young men in dealing with economic hardship. A few of the participants were from families that were the hardest hit by the recession and it was difficult for them to overcome the trauma of this. For others, being empathetic was important in managing the impact of the recession on their family and personal lives. There was recognition that being aware of other people whose negative financial experiences were more severe increased the ability to cope more effectively with their own comparatively minor difficulties. This finding supports Scales et al. (2016) who identified *life skills* (i.e. being competent in a number of skills in order to navigate their environment successfully) as being an important factor in successful adult development. Pashak et al. (2014) also found that *interpersonal competence* was important for the academic success emerging adult college students.

Personal power, namely the control an individual feels for oneself (Benson et al., 2004) was identified as an asset for some of the men when it came to surpassing any barriers. They believed they were more resourceful and resilient when dealing with difficulty in comparison to the previous generation who experienced economic prosperity. Witnessing the effects of an economic boom on the Irish population and the helplessness that was generated by the subsequent recession provided some of the participants with a different attitude towards hardship. As a result, they possessed the ability to traverse any unexpected barriers with confidence due to their experience of dealing with adversity. This asset was also present in Scales et al.'s (2016) construct, *psychological and emotional well-being*. This involved possessing healthy levels of self-efficacy to manage problems and having mental toughness and resilience when

faced with disappointment. This finding also supported Pashak et al., (2014) who found that *personal power* was an important asset for emerging adults in university.

A higher *sense of purpose* was an internal asset (Benson et al., 2004) that the majority of men gained from navigating the recession. A reduction in material comforts, financial income, and opportunity meant most of the men felt they needed to identify their ambitions or aspirations in order to succeed. Having purpose provided them with a positive outlook. This finding supported Pashak et al.'s (2014) research, which found that *sense of purpose* was crucial for successful young adult development. Scales et al. (2016) also identified having a *sense of purpose* as being a vital part of the successful young adult development construct of *psychological and emotional well-being*.

Being more *caring*, an internal asset in which a young person highly regards helping others (Benson et al., 2004), was a heightened quality among some of the men and perceived as being important in their positive progress through financial hardship. Values shifted, as a result of the recession, from monetary to being increasingly family and friends-orientated. The economic collapse had resulted in the men prioritising this reconnection over material pursuits and being increasingly grateful as a result. The reduction in opportunity resulted in some men ascertaining that such relationships were very important for them, diminishing the impact of the recession. This finding is also relevant to Scales et al. (2016) construct of *healthy family and social relationships*. An emerging adult who possesses this asset has attributes such as healthy social connections with their friends and being a loving member of a family unit.

Benson et al.'s (2004) internal asset, *positive view of personal future*, was cited by the majority of the students as being important for their progress. The highly

competitive environment cultivated by the recession generated different outlooks. Most of the men held an optimistic view of the future as a result of the emotional hardiness earned by persevering through the Great Recession. Some of the men talked about increased positivity in terms of reaching their potential specifically because of this experience. Indeed, the barriers posed by the recession were critical to nurturing their positive development. Pashak et al. (2014) identified that developing this type of positive future outlook can be considered a criterion for successful transition to young adulthood. The process of developing a positive view is also regarded by Scales et al. (2016) as being an important element of the *psychological and emotional well-being* construct for successful young adult development.

Some of the men believed they were increasingly academically motivated as a direct result of the adversity generated by the recession. The majority of the men possessed increased motivation and willingness to work harder due to being more focused on achieving goals, co-aligning with Benson et al.'s (2004) internal asset of *academic motivation*, the drive to attain good results in an educational setting. However, their confidence was reduced as a result of the increased competition for employment. Developmental assets have been shown to have a positive association with academic achievement among adolescents (Scales et al., 2000). Scales et al. (2016) also identified *involvement with educational pursuits and completion of third-level courses* as being an important aspect of successful young adult development. However, a few of the participants were not able to view the future in a positive light because of the dearth of opportunity.

The internal asset of *responsibility*, the ability to accept and take responsibility for one's self (Benson et al., 2004) was prominent among the men. The participants felt that, compared to the previous generation, they were able to be more responsible,

especially in terms of their finances. Being first-hand witnesses to the economic rise and fall of the generation before them had instilled a deep respect and responsibility for how to handle money. Responsibility is recognised by Scales et al. (2016) as being a factor in both the *life skills* construct, being competent socially, and the *constructive educational and occupational engagement* construct, as a productive behaviour.

An important area of investigation for this thesis was the impact of the Great Recession on the well-being of young Irish men. Interestingly, three of Benson et al.'s (2004) developmental assets that were identified among the young men (i.e., *personal power*, *sense of purpose*, and *positive view of personal future*) also corresponded with Scales et al.'s (2016) construct of *psychological and emotional well-being*. This may suggest that an economic recession has potential positive ramifications for well-being. Young men whose adult development occurs in a negative economic context may generate positive perceptions of the future in light of the proposed increased opportunity that is increasingly available once the recession ends. The lack of economic opportunity during this period also honed the importance of having a sense of purpose and personal power for the young men as the realisation that it was upon themselves and no one else to achieve future goals provided a sense of empowerment.

Each of Benson et al.'s (2004) developmental assets that were identified among the young men in this study were also relevant to Scales et al.'s (2016) constructs for facilitation of successful adult development. This research study's findings suggest that Scales et al.'s (2016) core elements constitute a potentially reliable framework for identifying the requirements for successful young adult development. The men detailed how developing and employing these assets enhanced their ability to cope with barriers they faced from their environment. However, Scales

et al. (2016) emphasise the need for the input of other researchers to contribute to their emerging consensus.

7.4.5 Implications

The findings revealed the different areas that were impacted by an adverse economy, which is a salient issue with regards to the cyclical nature of recessions and the possibility of its reoccurrence in the future. The impact of the Great Recession on young Irish men may have both negative and positive repercussions. In developing future policy on young male mental health, relevant Irish stakeholders should take into account the impact of reduced financial independence, independent living, and agentic opportunity on young Irish men. Third-level institutions should incorporate programmes that identify vulnerable students during economic slumps in terms of providing them with assistance with accommodation, managing finances, and having a shared location where young people who have been negatively affected can come and talk.

The study revealed that reevaluating relationships with family and friends, being empathetic, and developing positivity out of adversity, were all crucial factors for the men to negotiate difficulty. In identifying the developmental assets that young men use to cultivate resilience, it is important that these are targeted in future policy aimed at reducing negative male mental health, especially in times of high unemployment. It is also important to further evaluate the use of the developmental assets approach in identifying assets that aid young emerging adult males in times of economic crisis.

Times of economic stress have the potential to alter the masculine stereotype of being the breadwinner. Although some reconfiguration was revealed in terms of

how men perceived this topic, there was still hesitance among some of the young men to being a stay-at-home parent or being the secondary earner. There is need for policy to be developed in times of economic crisis that recognises the specific difficulties that could arise for young men who subscribe to hegemonic masculine beliefs.

7.4.6 Limitations

Firstly, the research sample consisted entirely of a participant base from one university. There is need to widen the research to other third-level institutions to fully understand the impact of economic adversity on young Irish male undergraduates. Secondly, using only individual interviews may hinder the research in that including focus groups could provoke different opinions on certain topics. Thirdly, since all participants were undergraduates and the interviews took place in a university setting, the participants may not have been as open to discussion as they may have been in a more informal setting. Fourthly, the gender of the interviewer was male which could have impacted how the men discussed topics relating to mental health and masculinity. Fifthly, the impact of the Great Recession impacted the men differently in terms of how severely it affected their day-to-day lives. There is need for a participant sample that bear similarities with regards to the impact of the recession on their family in order to generate a perspective specific to the most affected students.

7.4.7 Future recommendations

It is important to explore the impact of the recession on young Irish men who are not in third-level education, such as those who are in apprenticeships or are unemployed. The men who took part in the research were all affected by the recession to varying degrees. An interesting study would be to conduct a comparative study with young

men whose families were not impacted and young men from families who were deeply impacted by the Great Recession. This comparison would enable an evaluation of the severity of the recession's impact as well as provide a sense of the importance of individual experience and shared experience. Further exploration is merited into exploring the impact of a recession on masculine norms to better understand why men experience surges in negative health during these periods. Focusing on men in young adulthood who are stay-at-home parents or who are not the primary breadwinners in their relationships will provide a clearer understanding of the impact of hegemonic masculine norms on this group. In terms of PYD, it would be pertinent to further explore the utilisation of the assets identified in this study by emerging adults to gain a better understanding of how they can be developed, applied, and utilised to generate resilience.

7.4.8 Conclusion

The research enabled the participants to describe how a period of economic recession challenged Irish undergraduate men in the emerging adulthood stage. The identified themes posited that a recession might hinder young Irish male undergraduates in terms of independence and future outlook, specifically in terms of emigration and career. However, there were also positives to be gained from developing into an emerging adult during a time of recession in that it nurtured the men's internal assets such as resilience, motivation, and focus. The theory of emerging adulthood may need to encompass how this developmental stage is affected in Western countries experiencing severe economic challenges, similar to the impact that early parenthood has on emerging adults, in terms of accelerating their development into young adulthood. Indeed, the economic environment of an

emerging adult's development requires more input into Arnett's (2000) theory as its influence on the men's development was substantial. Scales et al.'s (2016) developmental assets framework corresponded with a number of the assets the men utilised to manage economic adversity. This suggests that the theoretical framework is suitable and be developed further to better understand and identify how young people can overcome adversity in their developmental transition to young adulthood. The traditional concept of emigration seemed to be reconfigured among the men to be a case of leaving Ireland for work but also incorporating the emerging adulthood desire for exploration. Interviews alluded to how hegemonic masculine ideals may still exert a form of shame or stigma on young men who are not the main breadwinners or are the stay-at-home parent.

Chapter 8: Study Three – How does the Experience of Emigration Affect the Well-Being, Young Adult Development, and Masculine Identity of Young Irish Men?

8.1 Aim of chapter

Chapter 8 presents the third empirical study undertaken in this thesis. This study explored the experiences of young Irish men who emigrated as a direct result of the Great Recession. The study uses Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to explore the lived experiences of the men. Two theories were used to subsequently explore the impact of long-term emigration on young Irish male emigrants' masculine identity and their identity as young adults. Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood states that young adulthood is achieved upon the emerging adult attaining certain adult characteristics. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity posits that men may be negatively impacted by an inability to enact hegemonic masculine roles. This research addresses three of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

- How is a young male emigrant's sense of adult identity affected by migration to a foreign country?
- How do young male emigrants navigate the experience of emigration in order to become successfully integrated?
- Are hegemonic Irish masculine norms impacted by living and gaining employment in a foreign country?

8.2 Method

The study used a cross-sectional IPA approach with seven participants. The methodology was detailed in Chapter 5.

8.2.1 Participants, procedure, & interviews

Details about participants that participated in Study Three (see Table 5.2), the Study procedure, and interview details, are presented in detail in Chapter 5.

8.3 Results

The experience of long-term emigration for emerging adult males was one of self-discovery and achieving young adulthood through the process of surpassing initial barriers associated with emigration. Cutting ties with Ireland was a difficult but necessary task for the men to cultivate their own self-belief in their independence. Navigating times of extreme difficulty and loneliness was essential in generating independence. Initial immersion in the Irish emigrant community was perceived as important but integration with the new culture involved stepping away from immersion in the expatriate circles and acclimatising into their new surroundings. Their relationship with Ireland was conflicted since, although they were proud of their identity, anger or resentment toward Irish institutions remained. The men believed that their development into optimistic, motivated young adults might not have occurred had they remained in Ireland. Nevertheless, this came at a cost of a diminished sense of Irish identity and of weakened relationships with family and friends who had remained at home.

8.3.1 Putting yourself out there

This theme describes how it was important to be able to view adaption to a new environment as positive and as a responsibility of the emigrant. Exploring and committing to the new culture was ultimately a positive experience, but the men had also endured difficulty getting involved in their new community. They had elected to do this rather than return to Ireland. When integrating in to the new culture, some participants experienced a positive release from hegemonic Irish masculine norms but confusion was evident about their masculine identity in a new culture. A healthy aspect for the men in getting involved was joining a sports team. This was a channel to socialise with new people. Joining soccer clubs was a positive experience for some of the participants as these clubs tended to attract a variety of nationalities. GAA clubs were identified as being an important first step in terms of networking and to gain employment. However, participants believed that socialising exclusively with Irish emigrants could be more harmful than beneficial. Another key to integration was stepping outside the comfort zone of Irish communities and socialising with natives of the country of migration. Some of the men who had partners from the countries they were living in identified these relationships as vital in helping them acclimatise. A crucial factor in integrating successfully and becoming responsible was being able to grow up and take on the necessary responsibilities to be able to deal with the adult world.

8.3.1.1 Embracing change

All the participants talked about the importance of adopting an approach that welcomed change in order to successfully integrate into a new culture. Dean embraced the travelling part of emigration and was now residing in Japan after stints

in Australia and Canada. He placed responsibility on the emigrant to adapt to a new environment:

I think it's up to the emigrant, or the immigrant, to make, they're the ones that have to assimilate into the new society. It should be on you to assimilate into the new culture. And then I met Irish lads that are complaining about this and that and Ireland and you just feel like saying, "go back to Ireland then, you're in a new country, stop complaining, embrace, embrace being in this country and stop giving out".

Dean displayed annoyance with Irish emigrants who did not make an effort to embrace new cultures. He held a positive attitude towards emigration, believing the onus was on the emigrant to adapt and take responsibility for themselves. He felt that a negative attitude will not nurture integration. Similar to Dean, Ronny adopted a positive perspective. He was distinct in describing how being released from Irish social constraints was a positive for him more so than being in a new culture:

I've kind of embraced not being in Ireland ... I keep referring this to my other mates, it's great having the anonymity, nobody knows who you are over here so in that respects my life is cruisey, I can get away whenever I want to, I don't have to keep up with the Jones's, I don't have to keep an eye out for, "oh the fellow next door got a new job what are you doing?" that kind of thing, because nobody knows who you are over here so you can potter away in your call centre job and have a very happy life and be happy with it.

Ronny enjoyed the newfound comfort that came with being anonymous, away from the pressures he associated with Ireland. He believed if he had the same job in Ireland, it would not be as positive an experience. Both Dean and Ronny had a mind-set that embraced change although it was, for them, different types of change. Ronny was

embracing freedom from social restraints he experienced in Ireland while Dean was more oriented towards embracing the new culture he was situated in.

8.3.1.2 Becoming responsible

All the participants talked about not being able to rely on traditional avenues of support as a major aspect of emigrating at a young age. There was a sense of an achieved hegemonic masculine identity as the men talked about becoming responsible, fighting to survive and having a sense of control. Dean detailed how the experience accelerated his adult development. He now looked at himself as fully self-reliant and independent:

You have to grow up fast, like, because no one is going to take care of you, so that was a big, and now, now, completely, like, I don't need to rely on anyone basically, I can, can do your own thing, so it's made me grow up really quick.

There was a sense that his adult development was forced in order for him to integrate successfully. He passed the test and now felt he was a self-reliant young man.

Michael viewed the process as one of struggle and striving, going from the family home to full independence in a short space of time:

I've had to come over here and fight to get somewhere to live, fight to find a job, and here you grow up very quickly to be honest. Again a lot like maybe moving out of home for the first time. I've now moved to the other side of the world. I think again, first time out of home myself, because I was always in the house until the day I moved to Australia, I'd never actually lived by myself or lived with friends.

Emigration had forced him to go from living at home to becoming a young adult very quickly. Michael used aggressive terminology of having to fight when he discussed

his transition from being dependent to becoming a resilient independent young man. Sam's experience of emigration enlarged his perspective as he was fast-tracked into young adulthood:

Being away from home and being in those situations where you're not sure what is going to happen or what to do yourself, it makes you grow up quicker. You learn by trial and error, you learn to think about things a lot more and to relax and not get too worked up about them.

For him, this harsh experience was a positive one providing him with an outlook that made him more pragmatic and stoic in terms of living in a long-term state of transitional ambiguity.

8.3.1.3 Getting involved

Soccer clubs were perceived as a masculine area where men could go and socialise and participate. They were among the first steps taken to begin assimilating to the new culture. Ben viewed the process of making friends through playing football as formulaic. Arrive, join up, play, socialise:

A lot of lads will go straight to football clubs, that is what I did anyway and that is what most of my friends did. Straight to a football club or down to the pub and you will meet lads, you know, yeah, it's fairly easy.

Ben made a connection with the pub and soccer as being two dominant masculine avenues for making friends. Sam's experience of playing soccer transcended participation to provide him with a sense of feeling at home although it was in a context where he was also meeting a variety of different nationalities:

It was fantastic, delighted to start playing football again, it was a taste of home. When I went, I met a lot of, there was a lot of Americans playing but

there usually a core of foreigners who had been out of the country for a while so I met a lot of British people, a few Irish people.

Dean was aware that there was an emphasis to join Gaelic Athletic Association [Irish sports clubs] (GAA) clubs but he preferred soccer. Similar to GAA, for Dean, being a member of a soccer club provided an important social outlet:

I never joined a GAA team, hurling, and there is a lot of advertising for that. So I had the football or the soccer experience and I really enjoyed it and people would go out after matches and on weekends for drinks so you could make friends. I think that was, through sports, you know yourself, through sports is a big social outlet.

He talked about sports as the key experience for making connections. Things could be different if this experience was not available.

8.3.1.4 Beware the expatriate community

When arriving in a new country, some of the men talked about the usefulness of Irish emigrant GAA clubs in helping emigrants to acclimatise and meet fellow Irish emigrants. For those that did partake, there was an awareness that this first step at acclimatising was healthy but how it was also vital to leave the comfort zone of Irish emigrant communities at some point. Sean talked about how joining GAA clubs is, as well as participating, a rite of passage that cultivates opportunity for meeting people relevant for socialising or work. It is something he saw as imperative in terms of achieving any success:

To try to get ahead, even if you can say to friends coming “even if you don’t play Gaelic, just fucking go down, get your boots, just go down and just show your face and here’s plenty of networking to do there”.

Sean reiterates how he viewed the importance of these groups primarily for gaining employment but he also issued caution in joining the clubs:

You're kind of, you're getting stuck back in with the Irish rather than trying to meet different nationalities and stuff so you can kind of get caught in a rut there but, em, but as I said the main thing is to get work first and that's the main reason I went down now.

When describing GAA clubs, Sean saw positives but also recognised that total immersion in the Irish community can potentially halt positive integration. Indeed, he interpreted socialising exclusively with Irish emigrants as damaging for successful integration. Philip held similar convictions about Irish sporting clubs, which he joined for the first time when in Denmark:

People get stuck in that hole of just hanging out with Irish people feicing [slang] talking about Ireland and being bar flies at the end of it basically but the good side is you make networks. You don't have any networks moving to this new country, it certainly helps in that regard because a lot of longer established people, they're professionals with their own, you know, their own context, that's good and just for like, I guess, combat homesickness for some people as well. So like it's definitely, definitely a good thing but you do see lads just getting caught up in the rut, like, you see guys who have been there for eight years and just haven't integrated because they have got their little bubble, it's not a good thing.

Similar to Sean, Philip saw exclusive immersion in GAA communities as damaging or as being caught in a rut ("that hole") where there was potential for negative behaviours to develop. Sean viewed it purely as a social and occupational vehicle whilst Philip perceived it as more of barrier to homesickness. Both men agree that it

was an initial necessity but, from their perspective of valuing integration in to the new culture, it was described as an avenue that limits individual development and enrichment.

8.3.1.5 Step outside the comfort zone

Awareness of one's interaction with migrant Irish communities extended beyond sports. In describing how they themselves had developed, participants had formed the view that reliance on the Irish emigrant community for socialising was a negative, limiting inclination. Sean viewed failure to integrate with locals as potentially stalling his progress:

I'm involved in so many different stuff that I don't just get stuck in the Irish community. I coach for a soccer team that is absolutely nothing to do with Irish people so I've plenty of networking there through Canadian's.

Sean seemed happy to integrate outside of the Irish community as he believed this was a healthy perspective. Philip's experience was similar to Sean in coming to view socialising in exclusively Irish circles as a barrier to successful integration. However, Philip was at a stage where he was still trying to make local friends:

I sort of avoid hanging out with big groups of Irish people. I would go to the pub to catch some rugby or maybe if [Irish county] were playing in hurling [Irish sport] or something like that and that's where you see people but I wouldn't be hanging out there, you know, more of my time has gone into trying to crack those ... Danes (laughs).

Although, Philip had to navigate a language barrier which caused him huge frustration:

I'm sick to death of not living in English speaking countries, sick to death of it. My vocabulary has gone dire, absolutely terrible. You just feel frustrated, you can never really express yourself fully. I can never speak with my ... I have to slow down the mechanics of my speech for people to get me. People are, you can tell they are frustrated talking to you at times. My Danish is sort of functional but it's just not, it'll take a long time to get good, you know, and I think it's just, maybe I'm acutely aware of this when talking to people so I get quite uncomfortable. That's, actually for me that would be the biggest issue, it'd be the biggest issue forcing me home or to an English speaking country.

Integrating into a non-English speaking country was a very stressful issue. Philip used strong words of dissatisfaction that convey distress at his situation. His anger was compounded by his desire to step outside the comfort zone of Irish emigrant associations and integrate with the locals. Philip seemed to feel like a hindrance to Danish people when he tried to converse with them.

Some of the men had begun relationships with nationals in the country of their migration. Philip, living in a non-English speaking country, espoused the functional benefits of having a partner from Denmark: "That has helped me a lot with integration and sorting stuff out". For Ronny, it was more to do with curbing loneliness. His partner eased any burdens for him. Without this support, he may have found the process far more difficult:

She has definitely made my life a lot easier because instead of travelling on your own you are now travelling with a companion where you become reliant on them for the smallest of things, whether it is just keeping your spirits up or whether it is giving you a couple of dollars when you need it.

In both cases, integration is made easier by having that extra support whether it was functional or emotional.

8.3.1.6 An Irishman abroad

Masculine comparison with men from the countries they had emigrated to contributed to a reevaluation of their masculine identity. Some of the participants were in countries that did not subscribe to the traditional masculine ideals that they experienced in Ireland. For Sean, Canada provided a more relaxed atmosphere which he contrasts with his experience on returning to Ireland for visits. Here he described having become so accustomed to the Canadian norm of politeness that the Irish culture seemed more like the foreign one:

You wouldn't see as much fights here as you would back home, like, after a night out or in the pub or people getting aggressive with each other. The people here seem to be more kind of chilled out but I don't know if that's more so because they're not drinking as much as we would at home but I found, like, after I was here for a couple of years, I went home and I went into [nightclub] ... And I was walking around and I was getting bumped and pints flying everywhere and I was like, I couldn't handle it because I was like, I wasn't used to it. I was so, like whereas here it's more laid back. You wouldn't be, everyone would be sorry anytime they bump of you, they'd be "oh sorry".

Philip was very aware of the comparatively less hegemonic masculine norms in Danish society, saying "in Denmark certainly the gender roles are (exhales) ... it's just a different world really, you know, this bullshit Irish male masculinity thing that's certainly not the case with them". Although he views Irish notions of manliness with

very negative connotations (“bullshit Irish male masculinity”), he did not wholly embrace the Danish version:

Maybe I look at myself a little bit more objectively because I am pretty different to a lot of the Danish guys, you know, which is not necessarily a bad thing either (laughs), I think something in between the Irishness and the Danishness is the way to go.

He was still reconfiguring his sense of masculinity to align with his goals of integration but wanted to retain some elements of Irish masculine norms even though there were aspects of hegemonic Irish masculinity he detested.

The participants talked about being exposed, and acclimatising, to the traditional masculine norms of the countries they currently resided in. Ben found Australia to be more hegemonic in how the men acted: “the men over here, it’s a lot more sort of like Ireland was 20 years ago, you know, they don’t, the lads over here, you wouldn’t have too many heart-to-hearts with them”. Ben believed there was more emotional openness between the young Irish male emigrants especially as they are away from an environment where men who shared their emotions could be perceived as emasculating:

I find with our generation, we are a lot more, em, outgoing in terms of stuff, in terms of feelings and if you’re having problems or anything like that. So I found that the Irish guys, even if they’re older, they’re coming from a background where they didn’t really talk about anything like that. Over here I suppose they’re not bound by those same shackles where they can talk about things and I found that a lot more with the older Irish guys. Younger lads are the same like, it’s, eh, I have no problem, if I’m struggling or anything like that, I’ve no problem ringing any of the lads and telling them “listen, I’m

having a bad week or I'm having a bad day", you know, and we'll go the gym or go for a run or else go for a pint.

The ability to be emotionally open with other young men because of their new environment enabled Ben to counteract any struggles he or his friends may have had. His use of the word "shackles" encapsulated how he felt about the hegemonic masculine norms of Ireland.

8.3.2 Young adulthood: A voyage of self-discovery

As the emigrant experience unfolded within this time period of rapid change during early adulthood identity development, it became a time of self-discovery that enabled the men to realise their inherent capabilities. The men experienced a heightened sense of an independent and unique self, an emerging identity in which home was not a central part. Consequently, increased confidence was evident for some participants when discussing future challenges. The emigration experience was talked about in a manner that conveyed gratitude for how it pushed them out into the world and enabled them to generate a new perspective on life. The self-discovery process allowed the men to do what they wanted rather than what was expected, and this cultivated a sense of release from traditional Irish societal expectations.

8.3.2.1 Resilience

The experience of being a long-term emigrant provided some of the participants with the ability to become increasingly resilient in the face of adversity. Michael explained the internal impact of becoming more resilient on his life:

I'm definitely, definitely more resilient. I've picked up a lot more belief in myself. Like I said before I couldn't see myself from five, six, seven years ago

being at this stage of maybe having the same kind of beliefs as what I have now and the same drive and stuff like that. I'm a totally, totally different person.

There was no doubt in his mind that being an emigrant transformed his sense of self. The experience has revitalised him and motivated him to a point that he would not have expected when he was in Ireland.

Dean, who was more of a transient emigrant, reflected on how his character had been changed by his experience where he had become strong from resisting external influences:

Emigrating, it makes you tougher, you don't fall for all the bullshit you used to fall for and you can better read people and you're not afraid to tell someone, like a lot of people just say "yes, yes, yes" and they agree with everything and I used to be like that. But now I think from living abroad, I was able to learn to open up more and just tell people I'm not feeling this or I don't want to go out tonight ... It's okay to disagree.

His discourse revealed how he developed a resilient approach, worldly wise and expressive, where he exhibited agency and assertiveness rather than pandering to a crowd mentality. He felt unable to be emotionally open in Ireland whereas being an emigrant has enabled him to be more assertive. Dean indicated that he was not as gullible as the person he used to be by getting wise to what was going on. The ability to rely on his own judgement relayed a sense of masculine control he did not access when in Ireland.

Ronny's experience was similar to Dean's but different in that his was more of an internal struggle against adversity where he had to find his feet:

Enough kicks in the teeth and enough pushing downs can make you stronger, because if you don't keep fighting for it, you just can't give up, if you give up, that would definitely affect my mental health. So yeah I probably had a couple of down days, sick of this, but I fought my way out of it and I find I am a very positive person and I always look on the brighter side of things.

His account was one of developing resilience through the endurance of struggle and tough times during the early phase of emigration. He saw himself as having to toughen up, to cultivate a steeliness, or he would fail. As a result, having achieved that goal, his pride is evident as he reflected on his current general outlook. Ronny's language is very confrontational ("kicks in the teeth", "pushing downs", "fighting", "can't give up") and he seemed to go through a harsher process than Dean. There was a hegemonic masculinity element in the aggressiveness of the challenge and harnessing the positive capacity required for him to overcome this.

8.3.2.2 Becoming solvent

A significant factor in young adulthood is achieving a stable financial income. Having an income was a major source of contentment among some participants, especially as they had left Ireland as a direct result of financial problems. Philip, after going through long-term financial difficulties, had difficulty understanding that he could finally purchase items for personal enjoyment:

It took me about a year and a half for it to register "hold on Philip, you can actually go to the pub and watch that match and buy a pint, or "I can get a steak once a week if I want", so after a lot of hoarding, yeah, it felt pretty damn good.

Philip relayed a sense of disbelief that he was free to live his life as a young adult, as a result of increased financial income, in a manner that was previously unattainable.

Ben, who had a young family, had also achieved a level of financial contentment that was not possible for him in Ireland. He differed from Philip in that for him, increased financial income was more about reducing any mental strain, not purchasing luxuries:

I will never be filthy rich or anything but I will always be comfortable and that is the main thing that anybody wants at the end of the day. I don't need to buy a speed boat but once there is food in the fridge and I don't worry about the electricity bills anymore, I don't worry about the car payments, I don't worry about paying the rent, it's all there. I can go for a meal at the weekend or go out for a few pints with the lads. In Ireland that's a constant thing, you know, do we pay for the electricity or do we go shopping? That's not a fucking life.

The words provided a sense of the mental strain he experienced living in Ireland at time of recession. His awareness of how things were when unemployed in Ireland still looms large and has power in his view of where he is now. This underscored the relief Ben achieved through attaining a comfortable life, free of worry or anger he associated with this previous period of his life. Having a financial income, a characteristic of young adulthood, provided him with an increased sense of contentment where his worries had reduced dramatically.

Ronny was different to Philip and Ben in that increased financial income was beneficial but it also had a slight drawback:

I have kind of taken my foot off the gas because these call centre jobs, they're easy but obviously not what I want to be doing, I went to college to get a

qualification so I could get a job that I was interested in ... They [call centre job] don't require me thinking and I probably have become lazy.

Ronny was aware that with increased comfort and quality of life, came diminished motivation to achieve further goals. For him, emigrant life was comfortable but he also reflected on having become “lazy” as a result, no longer having to think. Although this suggested that he was suspended in his young adult development, Ronny’s priority was to escape Irish social pressures and gain employment in an area where he was comfortable. He had achieved this goal in a way that would not be possible in Ireland.

For Michael, becoming economically solvent did not erase internal masculine ideals of being a breadwinner. He possessed ingrained hegemonic notions that, although he was now successfully employed, were still in the forefront of his mind:

Even though we are both working, both bringing in a wage, still I have it in my head I still need to provide. I can't even take a sick day without sitting at home telling myself I need to be at work. I always have to be working.

His discourse provided a vivid description of the internal masculine pressures he experienced (“I have it in my head I still need to provide”). Unlike Ronny he was continually motivated to keep working, due to his internalised need to provide for his family. Michael’s internal pressure continued even though he was employed with an income.

8.3.2.3 Not afraid any more

The constant demands and challenges associated with being an emigrant and building a new life diminished previous concerns with perceptions of others. Being in

a constant state of transience and meeting people made Dean become less self-conscious and more confident:

I'm not afraid to go places and talk to people. Like, as I said, at the start you are, you're a bit nervous, you're a bit apprehensive but in my experience after a while you just stop giving a shit (laughs). It's hard to explain.

Dean talked about this development as something he did not fully understand ("it's hard to explain"). Being an emigrant was an enlightening experience that cultivated new levels of confidence for him. Michael, similar to Dean, also experienced a growth in confidence, but his was more specific:

When I was in Ireland and looking for jobs and stuff like that I was always really sceptical and wary of maybe job interviews and stuff like that, even applying for a job and sending off a CV and stuff like that, hesitant and very scared about it but over here if I wanted to apply for a job I wouldn't even think twice about it.

His perspective was now less fearful of rejection and since leaving Ireland Michael had become braver and increasingly optimistic. Being away from the Irish environment nurtured a change in his outlook and how he presented himself.

8.3.2.4 Moulding positivity

The men exhibited gratitude towards the emigrant experience in terms of its positive effect in moulding their character and igniting motivation. Sean felt this experience had energised him to take a necessary step in becoming an active, positive person that may not have occurred if there was no recession:

I think it made me better because it made me kind of get up and get at it.

Things don't come to you in life for free so you can't, if you want to make things better you got to go and chase them.

It seemed as if there was more opportunity in Ireland, he may have adopted a less agentive approach to his life, which emigration did not allow. Indeed, the lack of opportunity forced him to developing motivation ("it made me kind of get up and get at it"). Dean adopted a similar stance as he credited emigration as being an extremely formative experience in his life: "I 100% think it's beneficial, 100%, as I said it's opened my eyes to so many things, it's made me grow up, it's made me be responsible, mature, it gave me confidence travelling". The experience comes across as being transformative in how it forced him to tackle hurdles that he may not have in a different context. He felt that being an emigrant had moulded him into a confident young adult ("it made me be responsible, mature"). The positivity that Michael experienced as a consequence of leaving Ireland made him almost grateful for the recession:

During the recession it was a terrible thing to experience but now that I've kind of come out of it on the other side it's, you look back on it a little more fondly, well maybe not fondly, but you have a greater sense of it, you understand it a bit better.

In reflecting on his experience, Michael was more at peace with the recession's impact on his life. Although he did not want to view it as a positive experience, its occurrence was beneficial for him from his long-term perspective.

8.3.2.5 Off the beaten track

Leaving Ireland caused the men to open up to a different perspective on how they should plan their lives. Some of the men experienced a reformation in their outlook, questioning popular social constructs and taking ownership of their future. Sam, on reflection, viewed staying in Ireland as a narrow life path when compared to his experience of emigration, which he perceived as vehicle to a better way of life:

Where I was on that track to get the job, get the wife, get the kid and stay in Ireland, I would probably have been a very rigid person in that regard, just followed the trend or whatever it was. Since I left Ireland I have met so many different people in so many walks of life in so many different stages of their lives, you can just generally, I have come to the conclusion you can pretty much do whatever you want with your life. You just have to be able to work hard and you can do it. So I can see my options over here are unlimited.

Being an emigrant had made him evolve into a positive person as a result of the numerous different experiences. Sam was not afraid to be himself instead of subscribing to popular social constructs (“following the trend”).

Ronny also felt that the change he experienced would not have been the same if he had stayed in Ireland:

I would have changed but it probably would have taken me a longer time to change. When I was at home I would have had my same group of friends, great circle of friends or whatever it was and, you know, I would have evolved with them as a group going forward and, you know, I would have probably maintained a lot more friendships and probably stayed ... more like Irish Ronny, I wouldn't have changed too much rather than going out on my own, getting influences from all over the world, wherever I have been, meeting

different people, whatever it is. I've definitely lost and changed far greater, to a far, I suppose, greater level than I ever would have changed if I had stayed in Ireland. I would have probably been a very typical Irish person before I left and if I'd stayed I would've been a typical Irish person.

If Ronny had stayed in Ireland, he would have perceived himself as a totally different person ("Irish Ronny"). There was sadness that he separated from Ireland but he acknowledged that the changes he had experienced as an emigrant were far greater than he could have possibly hoped for if he lived in Ireland. The change in character was worth the sacrifice in terms of being different ("if I'd stayed I would've been a typical Irish person").

Ben's reflection was markedly different to the others in that he had achieved what he needed to financially and he found this did not make much difference to him:

I found that when we sort of sat back and got the house with the swimming pool and, you know, the flat and two nice cars in the garden and not worrying about going for dinner or going out with the boys or anything like that, and I found when I got it all, that all the stuff that I'd worked hard to get, I tried my best to get it, and then when you actually get it, I didn't feel any different. I didn't feel it changed me or anything like that, I still felt the way I was before.

The financial reward that he strived for when gaining employment in Australia had made no difference. These were merely trappings and he felt himself unchanged as a person. He achieved his goals and realised that he believed there was more to life than money. The other men realised that life contained far more possibility than they had been aware of before emigrating whilst Ben figured out that the monetary goals behind his emigration were not as crucial to his life plan as he initially thought.

8.3.2.6 *Comfort in oneself*

Being away from friends and family meant that some participants experienced extended periods of being alone. This separateness was a transition that was not easily reversed. The men's connection with home had been broken but they were also determined not to return back to Ireland. Ronny talked about how the isolation he experienced as an emigrant was a beneficial experience allowing him to explore the outer limits of his character:

Emigration has definitely made me a stronger person. Because I have had to survive effectively on my own, not for long periods of time but like when I moved to Canada on my own I didn't know anybody, I spent a lot of time on my own before I etched in a couple of friends and jobs and things like that. So that's definitely given me a stronger resilience and a greater understanding of who I am personally as in a lot of time on your own will lead to you talking to yourself a lot. I remember in the first couple of weeks and months I was there I definitely [did that].

He emphasised the isolation he experienced (“on my own”) during this early period conveying the first months of emigration as a harsh test of self-discovery. In retrospect he was grateful for this period as it provided him with increased levels of self-awareness and emotional strength.

Although Ronny had transitioned through this stage of isolation, it was still an issue for Michael. He was aware that he was stronger as a result but the loneliness was exceedingly difficult:

I lived on my own for a short period of time for about two or three months and where I did love the freedom of being on my own, the loneliness of not having anyone around really drew on my homesickness and a number of teary nights

where you are sitting on the coach on your own watching something and something just clicks and you get a memory of home and you just start thinking, you can't turn it off. That's kind of, was one of the hardest things.

The longer you're away the better you get at it.

Michael was caught between wanting to return home and being his own person. Thoughts of home became obsessive for him but time and endurance of these difficult periods generated an ability to deal with loneliness. He talked about navigating loneliness like it was a skill, the more practice he put in meant the better he got. Breaking ties with home seemed to be necessary for him to find confidence in himself.

There was a sense of hegemonic masculine ideals from some of the men in how they did not seek help or want to burden loved ones in Ireland during times of isolation or financial distress. Sam discussed how he was extremely hesitant to relay his true feelings to home:

There were plenty of times where I haven't hung out with anyone for about maybe seven or eight or nine days and you go a little bit stir crazy in your house, you go out for walks and stuff, you just get bored, you get lonely. And then my mam would call and I'd be like, "ah yeah, everything's grand." "What are you up to?" "Ah, I'm down here at this thing, going to the beach." You know, just, you'd lie, you don't want then to feel bad, you don't want them to be concerned because you are so far away.

Sam was unable to broach with his mother any of the distress he had felt. His primary motivation in doing this was selfless as he was more concerned with how his distress would affect loved ones that were too far away to be able to help. To do this, he had to bottle up his emotions, evoking hegemonic masculine norms of self-containment

and stoicism. Michael also talked about keeping financial distress from his parents but viewed this as a rite of passage for emigrants:

I was starting to get a bit, fretting a bit that I was running out of money but when I called home I'd be keeping my mouth shut, I wouldn't be saying anything and I know my friends would be the same. Other guys that I talked to, other immigrants from England and stuff like that, they all said the same, they just sorted themselves, they wouldn't ask for help. It's kind of a ... I don't know, like a rite of passage kind of thing that, you know, I made this decision to leave and I'm not going to burden anybody else with my decision.

His perspective is one of self-sacrifice as an emigrant ("rite of passage") because he bore sole responsibility in deciding to leave. Both Michael and Sam did not relay their difficulties with Sam not revealing his suffering to his family out of concern whilst Michael perceived his challenges as his responsibility for deciding to emigrate. Both men initially refused to seek help, a hegemonic masculinity norm, and had cultivated a general level of comfort as a result of tackling any difficulties they faced in isolation.

All participants remarked on how their current quality of life had positively affected their outlook and their quality of life. Michael was very positive in terms of his future although there was some ambiguity in terms of concrete plans:

I've got a, like a really good outlook on life now, I can see a future for myself and I can see a future for the wife. Maybe I won't be able to predict what'll happen and where I'll be and stuff like that but it's definitely, it's a bit of a rosy outlook.

The idea that he was now able to see a future compared to when he was in Ireland propelled him forward. Ronny echoed this sentiment of improved mental health and

this came across in his optimism about his long-term future. Indeed, he felt he was at peak mental health and the epitome of contentment, but more due to his sense of freedom rather than having a distinct plan:

I'm mentally as good as I could have ever been, I have no stresses or strains, I don't have any mortgage or kids or anything like that so right now potentially I'm very happy and I'm looking forward to the rest of my life between now and, lets say, when I retire.

His perspective on his long-term future seemed considerably relaxed and unburdened to a point where he foresaw little difficulties up to his retirement.

8.3.3 Relationship with Ireland

The men talked about aspects of their Irish identity that had been lost or magnified as a result of being a long-term emigrant and their feelings towards Irish institutional failures that caused them to emigrate. This heightened national awareness generated different responses from the men in terms of how their Irish identity affected them as foreigners. Institutions, such as the Irish government, still caused much annoyance, ranging from trying to ignore Irish politics to outright anger at the government's perceived lack of interest in Irish emigrants. This rejection of Ireland as a place, but not of Irish identity, meant a few of the men did want to return to Ireland at some point but viewed it with trepidation as a result of their current quality of life. The long distance affected relationships with family and friends who remained in Ireland, nurturing a sense of separation from social circles or family developments. The concept of home had been affected by the men's successful integration into a new country in that what once was very familiar in Ireland was becoming unfamiliar to them.

8.3.3.1 How Irish am I?

Leaving Ireland resulted in some of the men feeling detached from their national identity. This was a development they felt would not have happened had they stayed in Ireland. Michael's sense of national pride had been diminished by emigration and, as a result, he felt the need to emphasise his Irish-ness:

You lose your identity when you leave. I like to carry my identity with me when I go everywhere, I wear the jersey everywhere but you still feel, because you are not in Ireland you feel like you are not as Irish kind of thing. Except when you have some sort of group where you can all get together.

Michael wished to reclaim the sense of identity he possessed in Ireland but was discouraged. His pre-emigration sense of national identity was only possible if he returned to Ireland suggesting that his efforts to emphasise his Irishness were frustrating. Only when he mixed with other Irish people did he feel a sense of being Irish.

Emigration had made Dean realise that he did not think about being Irish when in Ireland. It was only when he left that he gained pride from it:

In Canada and Australia when people would say, "oh you're Irish, we love your accent", that would give you a little boost and make you proud to be different I suppose but when you are in Ireland it doesn't, eh, you don't think about being Irish, you just, you are just one of the others.

Unlike Michael, Dean experienced no identity confusion. Michael felt the need to exhibit his Irish identity visibly whilst Dean was constantly reminded that he was Irish. Both men had an affiliation for Ireland but were experiencing this differently. Dean became more aware of, and secure in, his Irish identity as a result of being an

emigrant (“pride”). He did experience being different as a result of his Irishness but this was a positive for him when compared to Michael.

Philip perceived his Irishness as an aspect of his identity that he felt he needed to perform to:

As a young Irish man you’re supposed to drink lots, you’re supposed to be very talkative and social, and you’re supposed to be good at fighting or something like this. These are the three things that I constantly get from people of all cultures, not just Danes and Germans, everybody has that stereotype of you, so. And they always want to, honestly, they always want to talk to the Irish guy to be honest ... it’s not all bad but it’s a little bit, I guess you can either, like, brush the stereotype off or own it a little bit. I’m still not sure which I’m doing.

That Philip found positives in certain stereotypes and negatives in others caused conflict. Between the three men, Michael felt less Irish, Dean was more aware of his Irishness, whilst Philip felt under pressure to perform his Irishness. Each reacted differently to being the only Irish person in their separate but similar situations with Michael feeling his identity was in flux (“you lose your identity”), while Dean felt pride (“give you a little boost”), and Philip was confused (“I’m still not sure which I’m doing”).

8.3.3.2 An emigrant’s anger

The men reflected on how they felt about Ireland and how the process of emigration had affected their identity. Being Irish was a positive identification but Irish institutions had caused anger and alienation. Sean maintained a purposeful ignorance when thinking of Irish institutions. For him, merely entertaining thoughts

about the Irish government caused annoyance: “even since I’m here the six years I try not even to look into the politics of home ... or watch what’s going on or I don’t want to be getting pissed off or annoyed”. It was not as easy for Philip to ignore Irish governmental issues, as he was adamant in trying to alter change from afar. But even on this issue, Philip experienced further negative repercussions: “I feel very detached from Ireland, you know. Because you live abroad, it doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have a say. If you’re a citizen of Ireland, I think it’s sort of ludicrous”. His feeling of detachment or alienation was further heightened by his country’s lack of recognition of his status. This sense of still being ignored was supported by Ben, who still described anger at how his government viewed the rights of Irish emigrants: “They [Irish government] don’t care less. That is how I feel and that is how every one of my friends feel. They didn’t give a shit about us when we were there, they don’t give a shit about us”. His thoughts about Irish governmental affairs were negative and his perception that his, and his fellow emigrants, rights were not respected by them maintained and nurtured this anger. It developed further in that Ben began to resent Irish emigrants who revelled in their national identity:

It [emigration] didn’t make me more Irish. To be honest, I was very angry about Ireland when I got here. I didn’t like Ireland. I didn’t understand lads over here going to the Irish pub every weekend ... I was annoyed that the other lads were over and they were down in the Irish pub every weekend making a show of themselves.

His distaste for the economic difficulties he experienced in Ireland spread to his perception of all things Irish. Indeed, it seemed that Ben did not want to be associated with anything or anyone Irish.

Feelings were influenced by the impact of the country's economy in the emigrant's decision to leave. Dean's emigration was more one of choice rather than being forced to leave and this was reflected in his feeling towards Ireland: "I don't feel angry because I wasn't forced out of the country, I didn't have to leave to support my family or, you know, yeah, so I didn't feel anger". Dean's reflection suggested that he felt that there are certain requirements that warrant feeling anger towards Ireland whereas Ben's anger was a result of a decision that he felt was forced upon him. The opposite was the case for Sam whose account of emigrating was one of being forced out: "It will never be, 'ah I graduated and I felt like moving to Canada'. It will be like 'I had to leave and Canada was the place I chose to go'". It seemed that experience of emigration, regardless of how beneficial the experience was for him, would be permanently associated with having no other options.

The negativity that the majority of the men exhibited toward Ireland was also revealed when entertaining thoughts of returning home to Ireland in the future. Ireland was perceived as a place that lacked momentum and opportunity when compared to the environment the emigrants were currently in. Some participants viewed returning home almost like it was another stage of emigration. Sean was very unsure about whether to go home or not:

Two years ago, I'd be like "yeah, I'm staying", like I'll never go home but as I say the last two years there's been a lot of changes here. It's, em, yeah, I don't know. I'd say I might end up going home and giving it a lash but I don't know, I don't know if I'd last. I might end up hating it again (laughs) ... I think I'll definitely give it a year at home at some stage.

Sean's thoughts on returning to Ireland seemed to align with his pre-emigration perspective of fear and being tested ("I might end up hating it again"). If he failed to

settle in Ireland, he had the security of being able to return to Canada. Sam, who had enjoyed the travelling aspect of being an emigrant, had a similar perspective in that he felt that returning to Ireland would be a test:

If there is a job available for the both of us [him and his partner] then absolutely, I'd love to go back to Ireland and live there for a little while and see how it'd go. Do I see myself going back to Ireland and staying there permanently in three years? I don't know about that, I think I might have a bit of travel left in me.

His love of the travel experience he gained from being an emigrant was prevailing over committing to returning home (“I might have a bit of travel left in me”) as opposed to Sean for whom the decision was more serious.

Ben and Michael were adamant in not returning to Ireland for different reasons. Ben’s experience of being forced out of Ireland still soured any desire to go back:

If things went belly up in Australia I still wouldn’t go back to Ireland. I’d go to New Zealand or Canada or bloody Mexico. I would not go back to Ireland.

I’ve actually said to my missus, I don't want to be fucking buried in Ireland.

Ben was very angry towards Ireland and his positive experience of being an emigrant meant that he was open to going anywhere else but Ireland. Michael did not entertain the idea as a result of the experience he had leaving Ireland but it was more out of concern for his partner:

You think of things like what I would do in the future, the whole coming home and things like that. My wife is Australian and she has said to me from day one, if you ever want to go back she is with me 100% and stuff like that. Now that helps, helps a lot but I know from first-hand experience from being away

from family I wouldn't do that to her so I took that off the table, I wouldn't put anybody through that.

His hesitance is compounded by not wanting to inflict the trauma he experienced on to his partner (“I wouldn’t put anybody through that”). Ben is adamant to point of not wanting any association because of his previous troubles whilst Michael was more mindful of inflicting the uprooting experience on others after going through it himself.

8.3.3.3 Distancing relationships

The men talked about how their relationships with family and friends had been affected by the physical distance that now existed between them. Sean’s level of contentment in Canada was bolstered by trips back to Ireland. Whilst happy to experience reunions with friends and family, he perceived Ireland as stagnant, a negative environment that reinforced his desire to return to Canada:

It’s made me appreciate home as well because anytime I go home, I love it but I’ve never been leaving Ireland, I’ve never left Galway coming back here thinking “oh fuck, I’d love to stay at home”. I’ve always been content to come back. I’ve had my fill while I was at home and I just find everyone’s in the same rut every time I go home. Nobody’s changed. Nobody’s done anything different. So I don’t feel like time is ticking on there that everyone’s doing different things. It kind of seems the same anytime I’m home.

There was still no opportunity or potential to thrive in Ireland (“the same rut”; “nobody’s changed”), which made the return trip to Canada a positive experience. The lack of change among his peers provided Sean with a sense that he was doing something different that deviated from his Irish social environment, which was one of little opportunity or progress. For Michael, his relationship threads with those at home

were affected differently. Long-term emigration meant he lost his sense of belonging to his social circles, that his concept of home had changed: “I know the couple of times that I’ve gone home, you know, around friends and stuff where you used to feel familiar and stuff like that, you don’t feel a part of it, you miss all the in-jokes” but this was counterbalanced by his surprise at the level of emotional openness displayed by family members upon his return:

When I went back in June it was a completely different relationship, those couple of months away, I think it helped the both of us to open up to each other. Something that has never happened in my family anyway (laughs).

His enforced absence nurtured a desire for them to be more open when he came back home on holiday, putting the relationship in a different perspective to what it was when he was living at home previously. Sam’s experience was similar to Michael’s in his sense of dislocation when conversing with people in Ireland:

I found that difficult when I’m talking to people from back home or if I’ve ever gone home to meet them, you know, go to the pub to hang out with the lads and stuff and you have lost touch with things, and you’d expect to lose touch, you know, with the in-jokes and all that sort of stuff but then when it comes to talking about sports and the usual garb, you’re not up on it at all, you know, they try and include you and stuff but you just look like a bit of an idiot.

He was aware that, although not actively excluded, he was now on the periphery of his social circle to a degree that it affected his self-esteem (“you look like an idiot”). The concept of home seemed to be affected for the men in different ways. Sean did not feel isolated from his Irish social group but was more affected by their lack of progress. Michael felt alienated from his friends by his absence but was aware of how

much more open his family were when he did return. Sam, similar to Michael, also experienced a sense of alienation but to a point that he seemed uncomfortable.

Missing family was an emotional aspect of emigration that many of the men found difficult. Michael automatically thought about family when Ireland came into his mind. Social media contact helped him cope with the physical loss of social circles but this was not adequate when it came to the family relationships he cherished:

When you think of Ireland, it's more family, I'm a very family-orientated person and that's probably been the hardest thing, being away from family. You can deal with friends and that, you have all your social media apps and that, but family ... Because I had a two-year-old and a one-year-old nephew when I left and I've now got a niece as well and it's, eh, it's hard not being in their lives, seeing them grow up through pictures and stuff like that.

Viewing development of relations through a medium rather than in person is something Michael had trouble with. The feeling of missing out on family moments provided a rationale for his desire to open up with family more.

Sam emphasised how the physical distance between him and his family generated an emotional distance, nurturing a sense of isolation:

It's changed how things are back home, changed my relationship with my family massively because I'm so far away and as you get far, as you get ... As the time goes on when you're far away you just become more distant ... so obviously my connections with my family, I would have been very, very close, and I would have seen almost all of my family about once every month or two months, we'd get together in my grandparent's house. And you just, you know, obviously you don't have it when you're away and you don't talk to them as much. So my cousins who are six or seven years old at this stage,

they'd know me by name and face but they wouldn't, they wouldn't, I wouldn't be anything as close as I should have been.

His repetitive use of certain words conveyed a distinct sense of distance (“far away”) and regret (“should have been”) about his lack of closeness with his younger relatives. That as their uncle, he felt he should be there for them. Sam exhibited regret and seemed to partially accept his current relationship status with his family.

How the men's lives were affected by missing home varied from big family events such as births to minor events such as text messages. Ronny talked about how an innocuous text message about the domestic lives of loved ones in Ireland tended to affect him the most:

It's when you get the text messages from home every week or two, “oh yeah, Mary's expecting a child and John's got a new job”, that kind of stuff. They're the bigger ones that probably hammer home a little bit more.

He viewed these messages as have a larger impact in terms of understanding how emigration has affected his family life. The technology seemed to be a way of reminding him of what he was missing out on, emphasising that he was losing touch.

8.4 Discussion

The main aim of this study was to explore how the experience of emigration affected young Irish men's identity and adult development. Results suggest that national identity is conflicted during the process of acclimatising to a new country whilst masculine identity is reconfigured as a result of contextual factors and being away from home. Some of the men still held hegemonic Irish masculine norms but were experiencing a release from other masculine pressures. Achieving young adulthood was accelerated for the participants in this study as a consequence of migration,

putting their experience in a positive light despite the sense of having to leave and of now being dislocated from their Irish roots. The men had assimilated a sense of resilience from having come through the transitional period and being able to stand on their own feet as independent, resourceful young men.

8.4.1 Summary of findings

The men generally believed that the onus for successful migration and integration was on the emigrant. Integration was seen as a process that required the migrant to adopt an attitude that embraced change. Failure to do so could result in the migration experience ending prematurely. Successful integration was also perceived as being obstructed by immersing oneself in the expatriate community. The men discussed how, initially, being a member of such communities was healthy for networking and building a social circle but that it was vital to step away before becoming entrenched in this environment. To do this successfully, an individual was required to develop comfort in oneself and not be afraid to leave their comfort zone. Participants believed they developed self-confidence, agency, and responsibility as a result of their experience.

The men's sense of self underwent major changes throughout the initial emigrant experience predominately as a result of how difficult the integration period was. However, the resilience one developed as a result of enduring this experience meant the men developed several positive characteristics that altered their sense of self and, as the men revealed, improved it. Home was now not a central aspect of their identity and, as result of not coming home early, they cultivated more confidence, resilience, and a release from societal expectations they felt they were burdened with in Ireland. There was an undercurrent of gratitude towards the recession for forcing

the men to begin the path they now occupied in terms of perspective and exploration but anger was residual towards Irish institutions.

Characteristics of hegemonic masculinity featured consistently in the participants' discussion about emigration. Their experience had allowed them to cultivate a masculine sense of agency, and their masculine stoicism and self-reliance was attributed with meaning as having enabled them to weather the transition. Whilst a release from Irish traditional masculine norms was welcomed by some of the men, hegemonic elements still lingered in terms of restricted emotional openness about inner states and in the importance attributed to being a breadwinner. Securing a financial income was a positive experience for some whilst others were satisfied that they were now able to be providers. A few of the men felt the need to keep any mental stress or loneliness hidden from their families as they believed the decision to emigrate was their choice and, therefore, so were the consequences. Some participants displayed amusement or confusion as they incorporated the masculine norms of the countries they had migrated to.

8.4.2 Comparing findings to Arnett's emerging adulthood

Côté and Bynner (2008) highlight Arnett's (2000) exclusion of socio-economic factors, such as opportunity for employment and education, which may prevent a young person from being able to engage in the exploration associated with the emerging adult stage. The authors argue that the emerging adulthood stage is more adequately explained through difficult economic circumstances that may provoke a reduction in an emerging adult's social status and increase the likelihood of precarious trajectories. This research posits that Arnett's (2000) stage of emerging adulthood is not feasible when socio-economic events occur such as the mass

emigration of young people during a global recession. The opportunity for exploration of self is closed off due to the need to find economic stability, and the space needed for emerging adulthood development is not afforded to them.

There is a parallel with parenthood. Arnett (1998; 2000) identifies becoming a parent in the emerging adult stage as an occurrence that accelerates young adult development due to the responsibilities that come with being a parent. This research suggests that having to emigrate during the emerging adulthood period also accelerates young adult development, minimising the period of emerging adulthood. Indeed, emerging adults who are unable to develop the attributes identified by the men were perceived to be more likely to return to home and remain in the emerging adult stage. Dean believed that returning home could be perceived as a failure whilst Sean viewed fellow young emigrants that returned home early because they did not adapt with annoyance.

Reviewing their adult development retrospectively since their emigration in the emerging adult stage, the men did reveal characteristics that corresponding with Arnett's (2000) theory. Arnett (2000) states that progress into young adulthood usually occurs in the late twenties to early thirties when individuals make enduring life choices in career, marriage, and parenthood. Three crucial factors for an individual in the emerging adulthood bracket to transition into young adulthood are financial independence, independent living, and agentic functioning (Arnett, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2005; Kins & Beyers, 2010; Arnett & Padilla-Walker, 2015). Each participant seemed to achieve all three features as they detailed their experience of emigrating, finding accommodation and work, and, upon reflection, believed they had developed responsibility and resilience. This is particularly evident in the subtheme "*Becoming responsible*", where the men discussed how emigration had forced them to

generate a strong sense of independence and agency in navigating numerous obstacles in order to gain employment, achieve financial independence, and find accommodation.

Financial independence was a welcome aspect of emigration that seemed to alter some of the men's sense of identity. Philip revealed how he was initially surprised when he realised that he could afford luxury purchases. This was a development that took him time to accept and comprehend. Ben seemed to achieve a sense of peace after spending a long period of time in Ireland worrying about providing basic needs, such as food and shelter, for his young family. The findings support previous research (Luyckx et al., 2008), which suggested that gaining employment was associated with experiencing a greater sense of adulthood.

Similar to the participants in Vuolo et al. (2012), developing agency was important for the men in navigating the difficulties associated with the Great Recession. Sean talked about the expatriate organisations as being initially useful for making friends and building networks but to be aware of socialising exclusively in expatriate circles, a view which Philip also espoused. Dean felt this aided him in cultivating confidence in his ability to take care of himself, something he felt would not have been achievable had he not emigrated. Michael also believed the experience forced him to become an adult, going from living with his parents to living by himself in a different country. The lack of familiarity with the new surroundings also meant having to adopt a mature attitude for Sam. The men believed that it was crucial to develop confidence in order to step away from expatriate groups and get involved in their local community. Indeed, responsibility for successful integration was very much an issue of self-responsibility for the men rather than any external factors. The main difference between Vuolo et al.'s (2012) research and this study is that the

participants were emigrants that needed to develop agency to migrate to a new country and successfully acclimatise there, highlighting the impact of different socio-economic conditions in this developmental stage (Côté & Bynner, 2008). Ironically, although exploring the world, the need to quickly navigate self-sufficiency meant that they moved quickly through the personal exploration phase associated with emerging adulthood. They came to see themselves as independent and self-determined within a relatively short period, and saw themselves as strong and wise to the world as a result.

Similar to previous research (Côté, 2000; Côté & Levine, 2002; Schwartz et al., 2005), the findings revealed that a strong sense of identity was crucial for preparing the men to accept the roles and responsibilities of young adulthood. Nelson and Barry (2015) stated that an enhanced sense of identity was one of a number of features that signified adulthood. The findings suggest that identity may be a more complex issue in the case of emerging adult emigrants, as the participants' sense of identity was a feature that caused some confusion. Although all the men seemed to achieve young adulthood status, identity was still an issue. For Dean, his Irish identity escalated due to being continually recognised as Irish but for both Michael and Philip, their current sense of identity was becoming increasingly difficult for them to grasp.

8.4.3 Interpreting the findings through Connell's hegemonic masculinity

There was a sense of release from traditional Irish masculine norms for some of the men. Alcohol consumption, a common signifier of masculinity (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Iwamoto et al., 2011; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Conroy & de Visser, 2013), was a practice that was perceived differently upon integrating into a new environment overseas. Sean, on a visit home to Ireland, discussed how a night out in a busy nightclub was extremely disorientating. Although Philip, who was

happy to be released from Irish masculine expectations, experienced confusion when he encountered other nationalities that held stereotypical expectation for him to be a heavy drinker. Interestingly, all the men believed their alcohol use had greatly been reduced since emigrating.

Not seeking help, a traditionally masculine feature (Brownhill et al., 2005; McCusker & Galupo, 2011; Vogel et al., 2011; Berger et al., 2013; Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Galdas et al., 2005), was evident among some of the men. Michael revealed how he refused to tell his family about his initial financial struggles whilst Sam lied to his family about his mental health issues when he initially emigrated. However, all the men did not share this outlook. Ben relayed how he had no difficulty in contacting home when he was going through periods of stress. He also felt that younger Irish male emigrants were more open to talking about their emotions when compared with older men as he believed that emigrating had released them from negative Irish masculine standards. Indeed, although not seeking help was evident, there was also evidence that

Being unable to provide a financial income during a recession is associated with greater risk of mental health among men as a result of perceived masculine pressure to be the breadwinner (Gerdtham & Johanneson, 2005; Barth et al., 2011; Backhans & Hemmingsson, 2012; Chang et al., 2013; Björklund et al., 2014). The men talked about the positive impact of being able to earn a financial income both in terms of identity and comfort. Philip seemed to experience a shift in outlook in that he was able to afford luxury purchases. Ben was more focused on being able to provide shelter and food without any worry. Gaining employment and an income seemed to alleviate any potential for mental health or identity-related difficulties. Interestingly, Michael still experienced substantial internal pressure to be a breadwinner despite

both him and his partner being employed. Although the men felt a release from Irish masculine pressures, there was evidence that the ability to attain some hegemonic masculinity characteristics was an affirming experience.

It is important to note that not all the themes presented in this Study related to the two theoretical perspectives of Emerging Adulthood and Hegemonic Masculinity. For instance, when the men talked about their perception of Ireland in the “Relationship with Ireland” theme, this content had no relevance to any of the theories. The same can be said for the “Not afraid any more” theme where the men talked about losing inhibitions in terms of being rejected when applying for jobs or simply approaching people they are unacquainted with to converse. Such themes are pertinent in terms of the research question but do not align cohesively with either theoretical perspective being used to underpin the research study.

8.4.4 Implications

Due to the cyclical nature of recessions, future periods of increased emigration are certain. Although emigration is traditionally viewed as having a negative impact, and was seen in Ireland as a national tragedy, there are numerous positives to be taken from the experience. There is need for emigration to be reconceptualised as a potentially non-permanent opportunity for personal growth and exploration, albeit one that reduces the time associated with passage through the phase of emerging adulthood. It is important to tackle the negative connotations traditionally associated with emigration so that in future periods of economic adversity, this option is viewed as a positive. Although there was evidence of some of the men refusing to seek help when experiencing difficulty, the confidence and resilience that was generated as a result of successfully navigating such a pivotal life transition enabled the men to learn

other ways of being and interaction that bypassed other hegemonic characteristics (i.e., negative alcohol use, appearance, toughness). This would suggest that emigration could be presented as an option that has the potential to allow emerging adults Irish men to beneficially reconfigure their sense of identity without negative Irish contextual pressures.

Many of the men seemed to experience a reconfiguration of their masculine identity, which suggest that there is a need for mental health services to be aware of the difficulties that young men face in the first few months of emigration. Specifically the propensity for young male emigrants to view seeking help as in issue that should be internalised. Positively altering such beliefs about emotional openness among young Irish men and adolescents who subscribe to a hegemonic masculinity identity may ultimately better prepare these populations for emigration, and the difficulties this transition brings, during future periods of recession.

8.4.5 Limitations

All interviews were conducted through Skype or Facebook messenger. In order to gain a more authentic understanding, it would be useful to conduct research with emigrants in their actual country of migration. Qualitative research often forms the basis for larger quantitative studies. A potential avenue of interest would be to employ a quantitative approach with emigrants' both pre- and post-leaving Ireland to gain a better understanding of how their mental health is affected by this major life transition. The participants who came forward for the study may reflect a relatively positive perspective on the emigrant experience. Individuals who were unable to make the transition, and who subsequently moved back to Ireland, were not interviewed. Nor were young men who had experienced greater or more intractable

difficulty in making the transition and were still engaged in the emigrant experience. These individuals were unlikely to come forward to participate in the study. As a result, the study documents a positive interpretation of the emigrant experience. Nonetheless, this continues to have value as a legitimate perspective on the experience.

8.4.6 Future recommendations

Each participant had lived abroad for a long-term period of time and had integrated successfully. An interesting study would be to look at emigrants who returned to Ireland prematurely to explore the psychological factors behind this decision and whether they felt that this negatively impacted their young adult development and sense of identity. The inclusion of women in future research on emigration would be useful to explore if there are gender differences in how emigration is experienced.

8.4.7 Conclusion

This study allowed the participants to reflect on their experience as long-term emigrants. The men believed the experience helped them to achieve young adult development, a transition that may not have happened had they remained in Ireland. Hegemonic masculinity values were evident with some of the men being unwilling to contact anybody when experiencing difficulty but there was also a sense of release from Irish masculine norms that the men welcomed. Although initially good for networking and socialising, there was an awareness that successful integration involved stepping away from Irish expatriate organisations and becoming more comfortable in the presence of one's self. The concept of emigration being permanent

seemed to be slowly changing for the men although there was a feeling among some of them that they were now excluded from family and social circles as a result of being away. National identity was a potential conflict for some of the emigrants. The men, as a result of surpassing many difficulties, were mentally stronger and now identified as resilient, productive young adults.

Chapter 9: General Discussion

9.1 Aim of chapter

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the general findings of all three qualitative research studies in light of the literature surrounding masculinity and the impact of economic recession, and the further perspectives introduced during the research as tools to interpret the findings. This chapter will also present a general discussion on how this research contributes to existing knowledge on emerging adult identity, male body objectification, and masculine identity in young Irish men during times of recession. Finally, there will be a discussion of the implications of these findings to inform theory and provide recommendations for future research.

9.2 Summary of findings

Overall, the three studies within this programme of research contribute to our knowledge of how young men react to economic adversity. They demonstrate the capacity among emerging adult males for resilience and growth, despite adversity, and show evidence for a continuing rebalancing of masculine identity to accommodate novel elements alongside hegemonic principles.

9.2.1 Study One

Study One investigated how hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms affect the masculine identity of emerging adult Irish males, taking into account the perspective of young women as a point of triangulation. Since masculinity was a central feature to this thesis, the goal of the first study was to evaluate how the current social context may be impacting what being masculine now means within the college

student demographic. This study took a qualitative approach to investigating the impact of both hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms on young Irish emerging adult undergraduate males. A sample of 30 undergraduate male and female students completed individual interviews that explored their thoughts and perceptions on the influence of hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms on young men in the current climate. The assessment of this broad topic through qualitative interviews was supported through the use of thematic analysis as a methodology to generate common themes.

The analysis proposed a novel model of contemporary masculinity which suggests that the participants were cognisant of masculine identity being in a state of constant flux among young men. There were elements of similarity between hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms such as the desire for recognition of dominance, a primary motivator of certain male objectification behaviours. A number of hegemonic masculine characteristics seemed to be less practiced or intertwined with behaviours traditionally inconsistent with a hegemonic masculine identity. A general perception from the participant group was a rise in objectifying behaviours (i.e., body aesthetics, male fashion, grooming) among certain groups of young Irish men. This finding suggested that a gender convergence was occurring in body objectification practices, an area traditionally associated with women's social identity, that was predominately fuelled by the ubiquitous presence of social media. However, there were still potential differences between sexes in why these practices were occurring since men seemed to specifically prioritise a muscular physique in order to be recognised as the strongest. Participants talked about positive developments they perceived among young men such as increasing tolerance towards non-heterosexual groups, and freedom to express themselves in terms of fashion and appearance. Some

also suggested that men were becoming more emotionally open. However, there was still evidence of hegemonic masculinity norms being practiced specifically in relation to a lack of openness to help-seeking and also alcohol use.

9.2.2 Study Two

This study employed a qualitative approach to investigate if young Irish men's well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity had been impacted by the Great Recession. 22 male undergraduate students, a sub-sample of Study One, participated in individual interviews that explored their life experiences growing up during the recession, the impact of the economic slump on their college experience, and how they viewed their masculine and adult identity as a result. Similar to Study One, thematic analysis was used in order to represent the men's perspectives on these topics.

The analysis portrayed the impact of the Irish recession on their adolescent and young adult development. Conventional aspects of a young person's development such as moving from the family house for university, part-time job opportunities, and having a financial income all were impacted. For many of the students, these changes were also combined with family circumstances that had altered as a result of recession. Participants talked about how resilience, motivation, and personal responsibility were honed as result of this adverse period. Such assets helped them to cope with a lack of opportunity by placing value on non-material aspects of life. The students' concept of emigration appeared less daunting than that of the traditional notion of forced migration or exile although there was evident hesitance from nearly half of the sample in entertaining this idea. Reframing emigration as non-permanent and a chance for exploration provided this formative choice with a positive outlook.

Finally, the men looked at how the recession and societal changes had altered traditional masculine roles, such as being a breadwinner and starting a family. This was consistent with the notion of a recession being an accelerating factor in existing social trends towards marrying and starting a family later in life. Views were mixed in this area as some men welcomed the idea of being a stay-at-home parent while others were aware that one's masculine identity could be negatively affected by failure to occupy a traditional manly role in the house.

9.2.3 Study Three

Study Three was a qualitative exploration into how the experience of long-term emigration affected the well-being, young adult development, and masculine identity of seven young Irish males who left because of the Great Recession. Participants in Study Three had been through this experience, and were in a position to talk about how it had impacted their development of adult identity. Since this study was concerned with looking at the experience of the emigrant and how their lived experience impacted their identity, IPA was deemed to be the most suitable methodology to approach the analysis. IPA studies place more emphasis on a small sample in order to generate a thorough exploration into an individual's experience (Smith, 2011a). As a result, the sample size consisted of seven Irish male emigrants.

Analysis revealed that the young men's experience of being a long-term emigrant was initially a difficult process but one that accelerated young adult development and, from a long-term perspective, was extremely rewarding. The men revealed how enduring an initially lonely and difficult integrative period resulted in them cultivating increased internal strength and confidence of character. Sense of national identity had become a source of confusion for some of the men and was

further compounded by their negative image of Irish institutions and distance from family and friends. Masculine ideals also experienced change with some traditional values still having an impact whilst there was a sense of release from other Irish masculine ideals as a result of integrating into their new environment. With emigration came a loss of social identity in terms of location and social context of the men's family and friends, but this experience was also one where they gained personal robustness and hardiness. The men felt their sense of self had been vastly improved and they now viewed themselves as positive, contributing young adults, which they believe would not have occurred if they did not have to emigrate.

The men's accounts revealed that the emerging adulthood stage was in ways curtailed. Even though they were exploring and had freedom, they nonetheless had to focus more quickly on achieving financial independence, independent living, and agentic striving. Being unable to do this would result in an early return to Ireland that some of the men would be perceived as being a failure. Financial independence and independent living seemed to be a practical result of gaining employment but developing a high level of agency was a characteristic that seemed to take time for some of the men. Weathering the initial feelings of loneliness and forcing oneself to take action and acclimatise to a new culture meant developing agency was a vital requirement for successful integration.

9.3 Theoretical & empirical implications of the current findings

The aim of this thesis was to explore the impact of economic adversity on the adult development and masculine identity of emerging adult Irish men. The research displayed a sensitivity to the emerging findings, and in the course of the research a number of theories were identified and employed to provide a framework for each of

the three empirical studies that are presented in this thesis. Subscription to a hegemonic masculinity identity was a crucial feature in determining how young Irish men reacted to the adverse economy. Hegemonic masculinity was evident among young men but in non-traditional avenues with regards to body objectification and the desire to be recognised as dominant and possess the best physique. The emerging adulthood stage, from an environmental viewpoint, seemed to be drastically impacted by the recession to a point where young people are unable to facilitate the exploration that Arnett (2000) associates with this developmental stage. The emigrant men demonstrated increased well-being as a result of being able to find work and provide, characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, rather than focus on lifestyle aspects associated with emerging adulthood. Lack of opportunity meant young men with a hegemonic masculinity identity either felt a lack of control and inability to achieve young adulthood whereas those who emigrated seemingly bypassed or sacrificed the emerging adult stage as a result of both the integration process and urgency in gaining employment.

9.3.1. Hegemonic masculinity

Participants in Study One believed that, among the current generation of young men, some practices were endorsed although they are not consistent with Connell's (2005) concept. It seemed that men and women were not stringently subscribing to conventional gender roles, cultivating a gradual transition from a hegemonic stance of dominance to an approach that espoused tolerance and convergence. Convergence in gender roles among young people and increasing tolerance would seem to suggest that Connell's (2005) hegemonic requirements of dominance, complicity, and subordination, require re-evaluation or at least re-

interpretation within a more complex, nuanced set of current masculine norms. The findings align with Moller's (2008) argument that the complexity of masculinity means conceptual reconstruction is needed to integrate new socio-cultural behaviours, meanings, and groupings. However, there was still evidence of internalised hegemonic outlooks among some of the men. There was also recognition of hegemonic behaviour within exclusively male social circles, in terms of discourse and alcohol use, and in specific 'manly' environments (i.e., farms, factories, competitive sports) suggesting that hegemonic influences still held a dominant influence. This finding supports previous research that found men-only environments tended to nurture hegemonic norms (Adams et al., 2010; Seabrook et al., 2018). Young men who subscribe to a hegemonic ideal may also experience increased internal pressure to demonstrate competence in other masculine domains. Specifically, honing their physical appearance in order to be perceived as physically dominant to compensate for lack of control over other aspects of their life that are hindered by lack of opportunity (e.g. breadwinning role).

Study Two suggested that the combination of societal change arising from the recession, along with broader, more slowly developing economic changes, and converging gender roles could impact hegemonic masculine norms. Numerous studies state that increases in negative mental health among men during recessions is possibly due to loss of the breadwinner role and masculine identity being damaged (Gerdtham & Joannesson, 2005; Barth et al., 2011; Katikreddi et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2013). The negative impact of this is potentially further compounded by the tendency for traditionally masculine men to avoid seeking help (McCusker & Galupo, 2011; Vogel et al., 2011; Berger et al., 2013). Connell (2005) suggests that men who subscribe to a hegemonic perspective may experience their masculine identity being

threatened by their inability to inhabit the breadwinner role. Although a few participants stated they would be positive towards not being the breadwinner, Study Two's results suggested that young men would be tolerant of it but still perceive this role as difficult to accept. A few of the men believed it would be damaging to male identity. This research posits that loss of employment during times of recession is potentially damaging to men who possess a hegemonic masculine identity, which is also detrimental to the likelihood of seeking psychological or emotional help.

Study Three differed in that it analysed young men who initially experienced loss of employment or faced a severe dearth in job opportunities in Ireland but had chosen to emigrate and, consequently, gained employment. The emigrants talked about experiencing a release from Irish masculine norms, particularly alcohol consumption which is a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Iwamoto et al., 2011; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Conroy & de Visser, 2013). However, not seeking emotional help was a hegemonic characteristic that was evident for most of the men. Any loneliness or financial difficulties tended to be hidden from loved ones in Ireland with the aim of not causing worry. Overall, the men viewed the experience as one that was re-affirming and extremely positive. Being able to inhabit the hegemonic masculinity characteristic of being a breadwinner seemed to have positive impact when the men compared their current situation with their lives back in Ireland. The men had moved into a position of agency and self-efficacy consistent with the goal-directed, action-oriented ethos of traditional masculinity. This research argues that the experiences of being an emigrant provides young men with more opportunity to inhabit hegemonic aspects of masculinity, such as being a breadwinner, whilst also enabling them to escape socio-cultural masculine norms such as alcohol misuse.

Upon reflection, Connell's (2005) theory is possibly in need of modification as the emergence, and ubiquity, of social media use among young men appears to be generating a state of flux in masculine identity. The impact of economic volatility and the increase in globalisation and consumerism also lay a substantial contextual factor to these social media practices that further alter the meaning of masculinity in the Western world. Connell's (2005) theory is still very relevant but, according to findings, the concept requires increased inclusivity of factors such as objectification, social media practices, societal change (i.e., attitudes towards homosexuality, gender convergence). Such inclusion would aid future research into crisis tendencies that arise among men who subscribe to hegemonic masculinity in an environment that is becoming gender convergent. These findings align with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) argument that the concept of hegemonic masculinity should be reformed in terms of gender hierarchy, recognising the interaction of local, national, and global levels of masculinities, and also a more pronounced emphasis on the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity with reference to internal contradictions.

9.3.2 Objectification theory

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) was applied in Study One to determine whether the traditionally female domain of objectification was becoming a gender convergent domain. The participant sample of young undergraduates suggested that body objectification, internalising an observer's perspective on the physical self, was becoming an increasingly common practice among some groups of young Irish men. Participants discussed how hyper-masculine men were viewing their body in an objective fashion, focusing on improving its aesthetic appearance. Such perceptions disagree with previous research (Lerner,

Orlos, & Knapp, 1976; Franzoi, 1995) in which men traditionally experienced their bodies as vehicles for athletic optimisation.

Male objectivity partly seemed to be a result of the desire to be seen as a dominant male, a characteristic that would align with Connell's (2005) theory. Indeed, Study One's primary conceptual argument was its novel use of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) to understand competitive masculine practices that revolve around objectification. In doing so, the findings revealed that objectification practice is largely fuelled by a masculine competitive desire to be perceived as an alpha male. This masculine aspiration is common in different areas such as being able to drink the most alcohol (Peralta, 2007) or be the physically toughest (Robertson, 2003). There is scant evidence in the literature of applying a hegemonic approach to male objectification. This research suggests that there is scope to further explore the influence of social media on gym culture and the dual representation of hegemonic masculinity and objectification within this.

The findings of Study One appear novel in their juxtaposition of both theories in uncovering the motivations behind such occurrences in certain groups of young male gym-goers. Traditional objectification theory and research (Lerner et al., 1976; Franzoi, 1995; Frederickson & Roberts, 1997) imply objectification is an overwhelmingly female domain. However, it appears there needs to be awareness that objectification practices are also increasing in young men. A gender difference is also important in that competition may be a primary motivator for young men who adopt an external observer's view of their body.

9.3.3 Emerging adulthood

Arnett's (2000) developmental theory of emerging adulthood was used in Study Two and Study Three as a framework to investigate the young adult transition of emerging adult males during a period of adverse economy. Study Two results showed that the emerging adulthood period seemed to be obstructed by culturally adverse periods. Participants exhibited agency in surpassing difficulty which supports Vuolo et al.'s (2012) findings that agentic striving was vital in aiding emerging adults navigate the Great Recession. Emerging adulthood characteristics were still evident but Arnett's (2000) emphasis on the theory being activated by Western culture is not inclusive of periods of restricted opportunity. There was awareness among the men that their experience of this stage was acutely different to previous generations who developed during times of economic prosperity. This supports Côté and Bynner's (2008) argument that emerging adulthood can be better explained from an economic perspective and that Arnett's (2000) model mistakes young people's coping mechanisms for freely chosen options to postpone transition into young adulthood. According to the results, a recession introduces contextual elements such as emigration and lessened opportunity into this period whilst also negatively influencing other aspects such as financial independence, independent living, and agentic striving.

Study Three looked at how the emerging adulthood stage was affected when a young person emigrated from a culture of adversity to one of prosperity where agency, financial security, and personal independence could be achieved. Indeed, in these cultures, given the position of the men in having relocated to a new country, the men's integration resulted in them seemingly bypassing or not engaging in the emerging adulthood stage. The men achieved social markers previously unattainable

to them in Ireland that corresponded with achievement of the tasks that mark ‘emergence’ from emerging adulthood without experiencing the freedom that Arnett (2000) associates with this stage. In line with previous research, the men identified themselves as adults as a result of being financially independent, living independently, and possessing agency (Arnett, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2005; Kins & Beyers, 2010; Arnett & Padilla-Walker, 2015).

This research posits, akin to Côté and Bynner (2008), that the emerging adulthood stage excludes socio-economic factors such as employment opportunity and education that possibly prevents each young person from being able to experience the developmental processes associated with this stage. Arnett’s (2000) theory does not seem applicable in a context where socio-economic events negatively impact the trajectory of young people in terms of employment and financial income. Integration of contextual factors is important to understand the developmental processes of young people and the characteristics required to develop into young adulthood.

9.3.4 Developmental assets

Benson’s (2003) developmental assets model is a PYD model that this research utilised as a theoretical framework for emerging adults in Study Two. This theory was used to explore if emerging adults drew upon internal or external assets in managing adversity produced by the recession. This is a relatively novel approach as Benson et al. (2004) initially designed the theory to look at assets used by adolescents, and there is an extensive base of research on the impact of assets on adolescent development (Benson, et al. 2006; Benson & Scales, 2009; Benson et al., 2011). More recently, Pashak et al. (2014) successfully applied the developmental assets framework to an emerging adult sample. Building upon this, Scales et al.

(2016) identified the eight core constructs required for successful adult development. Participants in Study Two exhibited seven internal assets to manage adversity that were identifiable from Benson et al.'s (2004) developmental assets model. The results revealed that five of the internal assets were also identifiable in Pashak et al.'s (2014) developmental framework. Thus, access to assets was an important component of successful resilience in the face of economic recession.

Scales et al.'s (2016) study was deemed to be important since their model was a redesigned version of the developmental assets table specifically for emerging adults. The results of Study Two largely corresponded with Scales et al.'s (2016) constructs. The men exhibited:

- Life skills: Being competent in a number of skills in order to navigate their environment successfully
- Psychological and emotional well-being: Possessing healthy levels of self-efficacy to manage problems and having mental toughness and resilience when faced with disappointment
- Healthy family and social relationships: Having healthy social connections with friends and being a loving member of a family unit.
- Educational attainment: Involvement with educational pursuits and completion of third-level courses.
- Constructive educational and occupational engagement: Engagement in productive behaviours, education, occupation, beginning a family, or a combination of these.

Due to the novelty of applying a developmental assets approach to an emerging adulthood cohort, Scales et al. (2016) emphasised the need for other

developmental researchers to contribute to fitting the construct to young adults' developmental experiences.

This research argues that Scales et al.'s (2016) emerging adulthood framework is a credible, robust structure to identify the specific assets that are required for an emerging adult male to successfully achieve young adulthood. The field of emerging adulthood and developmental assets is still very much at an exploratory stage. These findings suggest that these two theories can be combined successfully in order to identify what constructs are required for an emerging adult to successfully transition into young adulthood.

9.4 Practical implications

This section provides an overview of the implication of the findings to aid increased awareness of the difficulties that young men face in terms of masculine identity and adult development in the face of future recessions, and of the scope for positive growth and resilience in the face of adversity. General recommendations will be made about how the present findings can inform future policy and creation of mental health programmes that target young men during the next economic crisis.

9.4.1 Study One

The focus of Study One was to evaluate current perceptions of masculinity among emerging adult men and women. The findings suggest that, although there is evidence of current masculine norms veering from damaging hegemonic stances, there still needs to be more focus on challenging traditional Irish masculine norms. Alcohol abuse is a harmful practice that is pervasive in Irish society (Health Research Board, 2014). Study One revealed that alcohol abuse is a domain where traditional

stereotypes about being able to consume the most alcohol are still commonly upheld. Participants outlined that a further consequence of alcohol abuse is the heightened ultra-masculine behaviours that occur as a result of consuming a large volume of alcohol and being in a group situation. In order to combat these practices, the annual HSE national service plan should implement strategies that revolve around deconstructing the young male group dynamics that exist around alcohol use and, in particular, the impact of Irish traditional masculine expectations have on such practices.

Although Study One revealed recognition by young men and women that young Irish males were gradually becoming more emotionally open, there was still a notable reticence among a few of the young men to embrace this transition. A primary reason, in line with previous research (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Galdas et al., 2005; Brownhill et al., 2005; McCusker & Galupo; Vogel et al., 2011; Berger et al., 2013) was to uphold a traditional, strong, silent type of masculine identity. Interestingly, locations were identified as being important in cultivating hegemonic masculinity norms. Programmes that aim to enable young men to talk more about their mental health should focus on particular areas such as farms, construction sites, factories, and gyms. Some older Irish men were also identified as being influential in nurturing hegemonic masculinity norms in younger men. As well as focusing on young men, programmes that cater to an older male demographic (e.g. Men's Sheds Association) should inform them of the potential hazards of pressurising young men to adhere to hegemonic masculine stereotypes. Popular athletes were also perceived to hold much influence over how young people deem what is acceptable. Promoting positive mental health behaviours through such athletes could encourage the practice of emotional openness among young men.

Traditionally, body objectification and its negative repercussions are an area specifically associated with women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, Franzoi, 1995). However, a growing body of work is highlighting the negative impact of increased objectification among men in terms of anxiety (Murray et al., 2010), body dissatisfaction (Tiggeman et al., 2007), shame (Manago et al., 2015), depression (Ciccolo et al., 2016), and eating disorders (2014). Participants in Study One believed that there was a rise in objectification practices among certain pockets of young Irish men, particularly frequent gym-users. In light of these findings, Irish mental health policy should recognise the burgeoning impact of body objectification on young men. There is greater need to understand the influence of social media on such practices as many participants viewed this medium as being instrumental in increasing levels of male body objectification. Boosting awareness of this topic should be pursued through promotion campaigns in gyms and creating accounts on social media outlets where men exhibit objectifying behaviours.

9.4.2 Study Two

Many of the men in Study Two talked about how the recession impacted both masculine and adult identity and how they coped with this. Discussions about the Great Recession's impact on man's place in society regarding the traditional role of being a provider, compounded by societal gender convergence, suggested that the loss of this hegemonic role might provoke feelings of inadequacy in some men. Due to the cyclical nature of recessions and the increase in negative male mental health during these periods, policy should prepare men and focus on programmes that reconfigure threats to masculine identity when recessions recur in the future. The male-dominated Irish construction industry experienced a severe collapse during the Great Recession.

Over 1,000 male suicides from 2008 till 2012 were from a construction industry background (Pieta House, 2015). The Pieta House 'Mind Our Worker' (2015) report proposed to utilise concepts such as Toolbox Talks, a space on the construction site where construction workers should be encouraged to talk about their mental health. Also, social media campaigns should target male-dominated areas like the construction sector and GAA and soccer clubs. Another important area for intervention is boys and girls in primary and secondary schools. Potential programs could aim to challenge traditional Irish gender roles that children and adolescents are inculcated with during their early development, reducing pressures on men to be a provider and generating more acceptance of gender equality.

The men, in comparing themselves to previous generations of undergraduates, felt that their experience of university was dictated by financial regulation and frugality where traditional student social outlets were sacrificed. Some participants were affected more than others while some students stated that they chose a university close to their family home in order to save financially directly as a result of the recession. Applying Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood to the results suggested that this period of development was frustrating for the students. The adverse economic environment seemed to further delay their transition to the young adulthood stage. Important developmental factors such as financial independence (Arnett, 2000), independent living (Kins & Beyers, 2010), and agentic functioning (Schwartz et al., 2005) were all negatively impacted directly as a result of the financial impact that the recession place upon their family. In times of future recession, universities need to place increased emphasis on developing programmes for students who are severely financially impacted. This could be in the form of aiding such students with assistance in affording campus or nearby accommodation,

financial management, and having a shared location where such directly impacted students can come and talk about their day-to-day issues.

The young men in Study Two revealed a number of internal assets that corresponded with Scales et al.'s (2016) constructs for successful young adult development. These assets helped the participants to cope with, and overcome, common hurdles they experienced such as periods of high unemployment and probable emigration. As well as the aforementioned focus on threats to masculine identity, it is also important for future policy to develop programmes aimed at the cultivation of developmental assets that young men use to develop resilience.

9.4.3 Study Three

Study Three results revealed that the concept of emigration was not perceived as a negative experience. In fact, participants were grateful for the positive impact of the experience on their sense of self. An interesting aspect of Study Two in this thesis was the split among the undergraduates in how they viewed the option of emigration. A few of the Study Two participants viewed emigration as a permanent, negative option. There is need to reconceptualise emigration especially in light of the cyclical nature of recessions as a more positive, non-permanent option that enables personal growth and exploration.

A few of the men relayed their feelings of exclusion from social circles and family activities back in Ireland as a result of being a long-term emigrant. Some of the men felt this social exclusion acutely especially when they returned home on holidays. Although they reunited with friends and family, they were not knowledgeable of current local news and, consequently, felt on the periphery of some

social events. For emigrants who return to Ireland, there is a possible need to raise awareness of the difficulties they potentially face in relocating.

Many of the men espoused a hegemonic masculine norm of refusing to seek help when in their first few months of emigration. As a result, many of the men went through lengthy bouts of isolation and loneliness that they refused to acknowledge externally during that time. Mental health services both in Ireland and in countries that experience high levels of migration should focus on developing programmes that target newly arrived emigrants with the goal of aiding their integration. Also, creating official social media sites and social spaces where emigrants can go to meet and talk with fellow new emigrants or long-term emigrants who can advise them on day-to-day issues to help them integrate.

9.6 Future Recommendations

From a qualitative perspective, there is scope to explore the hegemonic masculinity underpinnings of body objectification within the gymnasium context with a population that identify as regular gym-users and that prioritise body appearance over athletic optimisation. An important piece of quantitative research would be to look at young men from different socio-economic backgrounds to see how each group was impacted by the economic slump in terms of their well-being. Due to the cyclical nature of recessions, further exploration is crucial into exploring why a recession impacts masculine norms. Qualitative research with ‘house husbands’ and men who are not the primary breadwinners would provide a clearer understanding of the impact of hegemonic masculine norms on this group. From a quantitative perspective, it would be interesting to look at emigrants who returned to Ireland prematurely. This may involve evaluating the psychological factors that underlie the decision to return

earlier than planned. Also, the inclusion of women who have emigrated as a result of the recession in any future research with emigrants to explore if there are any gender differences in how emigration is experienced.

9.6 Reflexive statement

In my role as principal researcher, it is important to provide a reflexive statement that recognises my cultural and background knowledge and my understanding of the world. The reasoning being that these aspects of my identity may have influenced my experience of the research, how I interpreted the research data, and how I viewed the results.

For my BA research, since my family background was steeped in the bar industry and I was also working part-time in a bar in Galway during my degree, I entertained the idea of researching alcohol use and hospitality workers in Galway City. My knowledge of this area was informed by my experiences and perceptions of heavy alcohol use being commonplace in the trade. I had developed an interest in qualitative methodologies and Dr. Pádraig MacNeela, my PhD supervisor, was an expert in qualitative methodology at NUIG. Consequently, he was my supervisor for my BA degree in psychology and agreed to be my supervisor again for my MSc in health psychology where we used qualitative methodology again to explore the impact of emergency accommodation environment on homeless male health behaviours. By this stage, I thought that my interview approach was steadily improving as a result of researching delicate topics and also, I believe, from working in a bar part-time for over a decade where an aspect of my employment was to easily relate with customers. These experiences made it hard to opt for a non-qualitative methodological approach when I drew up my PhD proposal.

My interest in researching masculine identities and the influence of traditional masculine norms on young men partly stem from my own experiences growing up. My father possessed a traditionally non-emotional approach towards manliness and was a regular consumer of alcohol, a staple behaviour of Irish hegemonic masculinity. My secondary school was an all-male comprehensive school that was comprised of over a thousand male students. Day-to-day interactions in this environment, and how the hierarchy of masculinity was dictated, were influenced by the common occurrence of impulsive, reckless behaviour. Being a goalkeeper for both my soccer and Gaelic team meant I was also privy to masculine displays in a sporting context. Many social events at this age with my friends were also dominated by consuming alcohol. I am aware that such experiences may influence how I perceive these issues among young men today. Towards my late twenties, my relationship with my older brother and with my male friends operated on a basis of emotional openness and other values that tended to disagree with many of the traditionally masculine values that we espoused in our youth. I believe that I possess both conventional and unconventional aspects to my masculine identity as a result of my upbringing and adult development.

Being in a university environment and working part-time in a popular bar over the last decade revealed to me how younger generations of men are putting increasing effort into their appearance. Indeed, this was not as common an occurrence among men when I was in my twenties. These observations provoked thoughts into how being a young man in a world dominated by social media must be one where young men increasingly look at themselves from an external perspective, as personal image is a prominent social media aspect for those who wish to use it. Ireland also has undergone a cultural change with regards to how minorities are being recognised. The recent gay marriage vote demonstrated how the voice of young Irish people was one

overwhelmingly of tolerance. These observations ignited a potential research interest for me as they seemed to demonstrate a sea change in how young Irish people are reconfiguring entrenched social constructs that previous generations adhered to rigorously.

I was surprised at how many of the men in Study One still subscribed to some aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, being in a university setting for the last 8 years may have nurtured a slightly lopsided view in how I perceived the younger population to be marching progressively towards a more gender convergent society. It was unexpected when some of the men relayed beliefs about masculinity that evoked stereotypical Irish manly beliefs that could be perceived as being damaging.

Having lived a large proportion of my adult life during the Great Recession, I possessed some anger towards Irish institutions for their reckless behaviour, and the consequent financial and occupational squeeze that many people my age experienced as a result. I was also aware of a seeming lack of organisational care or interest for men in my age group or, especially, younger men even though there appeared to be a general awareness of the silent epidemic of suicide and mental distress that many young men were experiencing. This context motivated me to investigate how, and why, the Great Recession affected young Irish men.

Considering that there is a high likelihood that I will emigrate, conducting research with young Irish male emigrants was a research design of some personal interest. The sheer number of young people I knew personally that emigrated also revealed the magnitude of the situation. Another aspect for friends of mine who left Ireland was their annoyance at the lack of care or interest they perceived from Irish government and institutions towards their current situations. Although there was much anger, there was also, for the majority of male friends I knew, a new lease of

life in such a change of lifestyle. Such experiences led me to believe that, for those who had been away for a long-term period of time, they had found a level of happiness that they believed was not attainable in Ireland due both to contextual and attitudinal factors. An emergent topic that surprised me was the participants' contentment with their lives in their new environment in Study Three. There was very little complaint from the group and any negative aspects that they did experience as an emigrant were vastly counterbalanced by the opportunity, quality of life, and general contentment they were experiencing. An interesting occurrence when the official interview finished for the participants in Study Three was that the majority of them revealed how the interview had been a positive, therapeutic process. Many of them had not been provided with the opportunity to relay their thoughts and feelings about this life-changing experience, supporting their previous assertion that there was a distinct lack of care or interest from Ireland, apart from family members, about their well-being.

Being a white Irish male in my mid-thirties, I was aware that how the participants viewed me may affect the information they provided during the interviews (Richards & Emslie, 2000). As the interviewer, I was also aware of my perceptions of the participants and the possible effect that this may have had on the interviewer interviewee dynamic, the phrasing of questions, and how the interview process was dictated. As a frequent exerciser and also being employed as security in a bar well-known to the NUIG student cohort, it occurred to me that my appearance to participants might appear to be mixture of both hegemonic and contemporary masculine norms.

9.7 Summary & conclusions

This thesis is distinctive in proposing that there are a number of positive ramifications for young men who experience a long-term period of economic adversity. Although there are numerous barriers that arise as a result of the recession, this difficult environment motivated some young men to develop a number of assets that otherwise would not have been cultivated. However, there was also much evidence of characteristics of hegemonic masculinity that were having a damaging effect on how some men coped with difficulty. The efforts that this research thesis made to advance knowledge on the recession's impact on emerging adult Irish males provides some reasoning into why men specifically experience increased negative mental health in such times. A potential loss of identity and emasculation may occur for men who subscribe to hegemonic ideals but there is the possibility that positive attributes arise from showing resilience in the face of difficulty.

Findings related to current perceptions of masculinity among young Irish emerging adults revealed that hegemonic masculine norms still had a considerable influence but there was also a developing tolerance towards non-hegemonic characteristics. A perceived increase in male objectification behaviours, traditionally a female domain, was being propelled on social media and in gyms through hegemonic masculine competitiveness. Findings pertaining to how the recession impacted emerging adult undergraduate males showed that a direct result of economic adversity for some men was increased resilience and motivation to achieve specific aspirations. There was evidence that males who subscribed to hegemonic masculine ideals could be susceptible to negative mental health during a recession as a result of losing the status provider. This was further compounded by gender convergence and societal changes. The findings that the emigrant experience is wholly a positive one reveals

how, after initially overcoming integrative difficulty, this transition nurtures young adult development. It also bolstered and developed one's sense of self, enabling a release from some hegemonic Irish masculine norms.

The present research has addressed some important empirical gaps in to why, specifically, young Irish men are impacted by adverse economic conditions. It is hoped the findings generated from this research will be used in informing programmes that focus on the mental health of young men, both students and emigrants, during future recessions. However, there is still research in this area is far from complete and this thesis emphasises the need for more effort to understand the complexity of Irish masculine norms in different contexts and how this impacts the young male mental well-being.

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Appendix A: Study One & Study Two Information Sheet

National University of Ireland, Galway. School of Psychology

PhD in Child & Youth Research

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: Evaluating the impact of the Great Recession on the developmental transition of young Irish males.

1. Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This *Participant Information Sheet* tells you about the purpose, risks and benefits of this research study. If you agree to take part, we will ask you to sign a *Consent Form*. If there is anything you are not clear about, we will be happy to explain it to you. Please take as much time as you need to read this information. You should only consent to participate in this research study when you feel you understand what is being asked of you, and you have had enough time to think about your decision and you are not obliged to participate once you have consented. Importantly, you can leave / stop at any point during the interview. Thank you for reading this and please do not hesitate to ask if you have any further questions.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study / research project is towards the attainment of my PhD in Child and Youth Research. The purpose of the study is to research the thoughts and experiences of current third-level students on the impact of the recession. It is a qualitative study so information will be gathered from around eighty participants using one-to-one interviews and focus groups, both may last from 30 minutes to an hour. Before the interview, you will be asked to complete three very short questionnaires that measure well-being and resilience. The interviews are recorded and then analyzed afterwards for specific themes common to all. You have been asked to participate as you are attending college in a period where the Irish population are experiencing adverse economic conditions, and as such, may be interested in taking part in this study.

3. Taking Part – What it Involves

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part as participation is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part you will be given this *Information Sheet* to keep and be asked to sign a *Consent Form*. If you do decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your rights in any way. You can ask for the interview to stop at any time, and you don't have to answer questions if you don't want to.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The interview will take place at a location convenient to you, whether it is in the National University of Ireland in Galway, a quiet setting convenient to the participant, or a different third-level setting that is more convenient to you. It will be recorded by the researcher and then transcribed afterwards. This is an interview study, so we want to hear from you in your own words as to what it is like to be a student in a time of recession.

How long will my part in the study last?

The interview / focus group will last from between 30 minutes to an hour but you may take a break anytime you wish during this period. Should you decide to take part, you will be contacted once to arrange a suitable time for you for the interview and you will be interviewed only once.

What are the topics that will be discussed?

Topics will include: reflections on the past before the recession began, students' current circumstances in light of the recession, and participants' future outlook and how the recession has affected this in a positive or negative fashion. *Only general findings will be reported, without reference to identifiable individuals. All information is confidential and will only be available to the researcher and the researcher's supervisor.* Names of individuals, colleges, etc. will be replaced with aliases in order to ensure that the participant can be confident in being treated with the utmost confidentiality.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Perhaps on reflecting about different aspects of being a student during a recession, you might feel concern about some aspect of the lifestyle, whether in relation to finances, mental health, etc.

What happens at the end of the study?

When all the participants have been recruited and the project is completed, if you would like, you will receive a summary of the main findings. We would only be pleased to include you on an address list to receive publications arising from the study.

Who do I contact for more information or if I have further concerns?

If you would like any more information or have any further concerns, please feel free to contact me at the details below.

Thomas Conway

conwaythomas@hotmail.com & t.conway3@nuigalway.ie

Mobile Phone – 0876484373

Or my supervisor Dr. Padraig MacNeela, Lecturer, School of Psychology, NUI Galway (padraig.macneela@nuigalway.ie; 091 495121).

If you would like to take part please text or call me at 0876484373, or email me at conwaythomas@hotmail.com .

Appendix B: Study One & Study Two Consent Form

**National University of Ireland, Galway. School of Psychology
PhD in Child & Youth Research
Consent Form**

Participant Identification No.: _____

Title of Project: Evaluating the impact of the Great Recession on the developmental transition of Irish male students (A Qualitative Study)

Name of Researcher: Thomas Conway

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes: _____ No: _____

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information.

Yes: _____ No: _____

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without any giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.

Yes: _____ No: _____

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Yes: _____ No: _____

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher; 1 copy to be kept with research

Appendix C: Email transcript for Study One & Study Two recruitment

Dear Student,

We are carrying out research into college students' thoughts and experiences of attending third-level during a recession and how this has impacted them. We want to learn about how the economy has potentially affected them. In particular, their experiences and aspirations before the recession, current day-to-day living, and the recession's positive / negative impact on their future outlook.

Focus groups and individual interviews are being used to allow students the opportunity to input to this study. If you decided to take part, you will be asked about your own personal experiences of being a student during a turbulent economic period. Each focus group will be gender-specific (i.e. male students only, female students only).

There are two options to take part:

A. Individual interviews. We will be holding one-to-one interviews in the next few weeks. To find out more about this option, please contact the principal researcher through email (conwaythomas@hotmail.com). If you express interest you will receive an information sheet and the opportunity to email, telephone, or meet with the principal researcher. To recompense students for the time involved in taking part in the interview (approx. 30 mins – 1 hour), each interviewee will receive a Shopping Voucher worth 20 Euro.

B. Focus groups: We will be holding focus groups in the next few weeks. To find out more please contact me through my email (conwaythomas@hotmail.com). If you express interest you will receive an information sheet and the opportunity to email, telephone, or meet with the principal researcher. To recompense students for the time involved in taking part in the focus group (approx. 30 mins – 1 hour), each focus group member will receive a Shopping Voucher worth 20 Euro.

The NUI Galway Student Counselling Service can provide you with assistance and counselling services:

http://www.nuigalway.ie/student_services/counsellors/

The counselling centre is located at: 5 Distillery Road near the main campus. The phone number is 091 524411 and email is counselling@nuigalway.ie.

Thomas Conway,
PhD Candidate in Child and Youth Research,
NUI Galway School of Psychology & UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre.

Appendix D: Debriefing Sheet for Study One & Study Two

Evaluating the effect of the Great Recession on young Irish males.

Thank you for taking part in the interview.

In case any of the topics we discussed cause you some further thought or reflection, we have prepared this document on sources of information and support.

If you do have any concerns arising from points we covered in the interview you may find it helpful to contact one of the following organizations:

Mental Health Ireland – Promoting positive mental health
<http://mentalhealthireland.ie>
Phone: 01 284 1166

Yourmentalhealth.ie – HSE Website to help us mind our mental health

Healthpromotion.ie – HSE Website on health promotion

Support services available at NUI Galway:

Counselling Service

- See http://www.nuigalway.ie/student_services/counsellors/Support_groups_and_services.html
- http://www.nuigalway.ie/student_services/counsellors/Alcohol.html
- Email: counselling@nuigalway.ie
- Counselling services are located at No.5, Distillery Road, near the entrance to the university from AIB
- Telephone: 091 492484 / 087 6644299

Health Promotion Service

- http://www.nuigalway.ie/student_services/health_promotion
- Email: cindy.dring@nuigalway.ie
- Telephone: 091 492048
- Drop in: Aras Ni Eimhigh, situated near the Education building / Quad

If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact me at 0876484373 or conwaythomas@hotmail.com / t.conway3@nuigalway.ie, or my research supervisor, Dr Pádraig MacNeela, School of Psychology, NUI Galway, 091 495121, padraig.macneela@nuigalway.ie.

Appendix E: Descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual notes for Study Three

Theme - Being content

This theme explores the feeling of contentment that a lot of the participants experience in their host country. Sean and Philip are now able to provide for themselves after a lengthy period of financial difficulty. Philip underwent a process of comprehension that one can enjoy life. Simple things like being able to enjoy a meal out or have a drink with friends. For others, the freedom from day-to-day worries and the excitement of a new culture cultivates an ability to view life differently. However, for Ronny, the contentment he is experiencing in Australia (i.e. quality of life, weather, financial security) may also stagnate him in terms of occupational ambitions. For Michael, Ben, and Ronny, the desire to return home is stifled by their quality of life and their partner being from their host country. Ireland cannot offer the same lifestyle aspects that the countries they are in can. Some participants' talk about the long-term future quite confidently because of the sense of happiness they have generated in their migrant country. This may not have been the case before they emigrated.

Descriptive = normal text / *Linguistic = italic* / Conceptual = Underlined

Sean

I'm self-employed so I do my own taxes so, em, no, em, like I said I'm, I'm financially secure. I can do what I want. I can take plenty of holidays. I was just home at Christmas for a month. I went, I went to Vegas – In control of his own destiny. Not at a loss for anything. Very self-managed. Not dependent on anyone or anything. Feels like he is living his dream life. No restrictions.
Disbelief?

I take plenty of holidays. I think I took over two months off last year. I was home to Ireland twice. A month at Christmas and then three weeks for a friend's wedding. –The flexibility of modern emigration. Comes and goes as he pleases. Earning plenty.

It's made me appreciate home as well because anytime I go home, I love it but I've never been leaving Ireland, I've never left Galway coming back here thinking "oh fuck, I'd love to stay at home". I've always been content to come back. I've had my fill while I was at home and I just find everyone's in the same rut every time I go home. Nobody's changed. Nobody's done anything different. So I don't feel like time is ticking on there that everyone's doing different things. It kind of seems the same anytime I'm home – Never is sad leaving Ireland. Happy, not sad, when he returns to Canada, get away from the Irish environment. Ireland is perceived as stagnant, damaging, negative. Canada is where he is currently happy and content.

Philip

it took me about a year and a half for it to register “hold on Fionn, you can actually go to the pub and watch that match and buy a pint, or “I can get a steak once a week if I want”, so after a lot of hoarding, yeah, it felt pretty damn good. –Difficulty in recognising that he could begin to enjoy himself. Reflection causes him to be happy. Disbelief. Free to live his life.

I’m enjoying the ride. – Happy. *Happy in the moment.* At peace with his situation.

It is very laid back there, extremely so, you get a lot of breaks, you only work around seven hours a day, a lot of holidays, bosses are chilled out, no formal dress code in work. Apartments much nicer, much, much nicer than the places I have lived in in Ireland, eating better, drinking better, more social time –Seems to be experiencing less stress and more enjoyment. Holistically better.

Dean

After so long living away you just stop giving a shit, like, to be honest, you stop caring about all the little worries and crap like that, you just get on and do it – Constantly travelling and emigrating provides a sense of comfort and reduces worries. *Negative words associated with things he has left behind.*
Developed perspective. And resilience. He is leaving all negativity behind. It has washed off him or doesn’t bother him.

Tom

in Thailand, well obviously they are completely different over here but they are very laid back *which is me.* – Found the perfect country for his persona. Materialism of the US did not suit him. *Strong identification with host country.* Contentment.

I am enjoying it here, it is very nice but my girlfriend wants to get a proper job. – Traditional external pressures still have an influence.

Ronny

I have kind of *taken my foot off the gas* because these call centre jobs, they’re easy but obviously not what I want to be doing, I went to college to get a qualification so I could get a job that I was interested in ... They [call centre job] *don't require me thinking* and I probably have become lazy – The quality of life over there also brings difficulties in terms of laziness. Emigrated to get work in his field but still didn’t get the job he wanted, does not seem too motivated. *Seems to not want any challenges.* Content to a point of detriment.

I never planned to stay away as long as I've stayed away but it's definitely the longer you've stayed away the harder it is to go home. Where I'd love to be going home in the morning and taking her home with me there's no point in both of us going home because, one, we'd struggle to get a job for a while but even, too, the lifestyle over here has won me over as well, the weather, way of life – Living away has become more than job-oriented, it is quality of life reducing the desire to go home.

I'm mentally as good as I could have ever been, I have no stresses or strains, I don't have any mortgage or kids or anything like that so right now potentially I'm very happy and I'm looking forward to the rest of my life between now and, lets say, when I retire – Feels he is at his peak mental health even though he is a long-term emigrant. *Extremely long-term. The epitome of contentment.*

Ben

I will never be filthy rich or anything but I will always be comfortable and that is the main thing that anybody wants at the end of the day. I don't need to buy a speed boat but once there is food in the fridge and I don't worry about the electricity bills anymore, I don't worry about the car payments, I don't worry about paying the rent, it's all there. I can go for a meal at the weekend or go out for a few pints with the lads. In Ireland that's a constant thing, you know, do we pay for the electricity or do we go shopping? That's not a fucking life – 10. Rob – Content that he has achieved a certain level of financial security. Enjoying his life more as a result of quality of life. Doesn't want any more riches. *Freed from material and trivial burdens. Achieved a level of contentment unachievable for him in Ireland.*

I have mates on the football team who are coppers, I have mates who are solicitors and doctors and everything, no one gives a shit, they all go down to a party, have a few beers. That was one big thing that I suppose I had a bit of a chip on my shoulder back home, but over here everyone is on the same playing field. It is such a big thing and it is such an important thing. And it makes you feel good about yourself – 10. Rob – The feeling of being on an equal playing field is as important to him. Escaping his experiences of a class system in Ireland. *Very important for his self-esteem. Equality. He realises how much of a difference it makes to his identity.*

Michael

I've got a, like a really good outlook on life now, I can see a future for myself and I can see a future for the wife. Maybe I won't be able to predict what'll happen and where I'll be and stuff like that but it's definitely, it's a bit of a rosy outlook – Comfortable with ambiguity. Positive. Not like when he was in Ireland

Appendix F: Study One & Study Two Interview Schedule

Qualitative Interview – Topic Guide

- 1) Ask participants to take some time to read through the information sheets provided.
- 2) After reading the information sheet, ask participants to read through the consent form.
- 3) Make them aware of their right to withdraw at any time.
- 4) Tell participants that everything discussed in the focus will be audio-recorded and that all recordings are confidential and each participant will be given an alias to preserve anonymity.
- 5) Ask for views expressed in the group to remain confidential within this group.
- 6) Explain that the researcher and his supervisor will be the only people who have access to the recordings.

Introductory comments:

This aims of this interview are to study your experiences, those of male third-level students, of the Great Recession. The focal points will be how the economy shaped your experiences currently and over the last few years, the impact of the recession on traditional male roles, and recent changes in Ireland. I also want to ask you to talk about your plans for the future. This will include questions on future studies, travelling, employment, emigration, and so on. Finally, the last section of questions will explore how you feel the changes in Ireland in recent years have affected how you think about your possibilities, your potential, and the future.

Demographics:

What is your name and age?
 What subjects are you studying?
 Where in Ireland are you from?

Beginning Stages:- Reflection on the Past (Keep an eye on time and move on when necessary)

If we take ourselves back to the early 2000's, before the recession, this is the area that I am interested in. Do you remember the time before the crash (i.e. the Celtic Tiger time)?

- Can you tell me what your general lifestyle was like back then?
- Was there more affluence or wealth?
- How would you describe the way you saw the future then?

Now we come to when the Celtic Tiger ended and the recession began. What kinds of changes took place in your family as a result, if any?

- Did your parents talk to you about how things were changing?
- Do you have any examples to show what level of prosperity your family had at that point?
- Were there other symbols (cars, holidays, etc.) did you had to let go of?
- Do you think your well-being is the same now as it was before the crash or did the recession become an extra burden for you?
- If so, have you become resilient or does it still affect you?

Can you tell me about any of your friends and their families that were badly affected?

- Did you see any changes around you in your community?

Can you tell me what the recession meant to you personally?

- Can you describe your access to money at that time (i.e. did you find yourself being broke more often?)
- Have any of you had any part-time jobs have you had over the past 6 years?
- If so, what kind?
- Did the recession have an influence on your decision to get a job?

Did the economy have an impact on your decision to come to college?

- Did it have any effect on what subjects you chose to study (as opposed to the ones you wanted to study?)
- Do you think that your college experience would have been any different for you if the recession had not happened?
- If so, how?
- What's been your experience of college, socially and academically?
- What has the college experience provided you with?

Middle Stages (i):-Reflection on the Present

Okay, now we're going to move on from the past to talk about the present. Can you talk about how students in general (yourself or your mates) current day-to-day life is affected by financial issues (e.g. amount of money you have access to?)

Do you think that many students are supporting themselves financially through college?

POT NOODLE, BEANS, AND PIZZA IMAGES

What sort of help are students receiving from their family?

What are the main costs of university (e.g. fees, social life) that students find hardest to meet?

- Financially, what are the most important things for you, as students, at the moment?
- Can you tell me about part-time work etc. that you are doing at present?
- How have you spent your summers during your time at university?
- Have your economic circumstances in any way affected your university experience – socially or academically?

How do you feel about the recession that Ireland has had?

- Have you seen any examples of the effect of the recession years on your friends or your own wellbeing?
- If so, do you think it has had a lasting impact on the wellbeing of young people your age?
- Is there any difference do you think in how it has effected men and women of your age?
- Have there been positives emerging for you or your generation as a result of the economy changing over the past 6 years?

Middle Stages (ii):- Thoughts on Masculinity & the Recession

We now come to the other part of my research which looks into whether the economy has changed the traditional gender role of what it is to be a man. I am now going to show you a few images that I would like your thoughts on (images of recession, 80'/90's images of masculinity, modern images of masculinity).

Can you explain to me what your experiences of being a man are like in today's society?

- What do you like about being a man?
- And what do you dislike?

Do you think that your notion of what being a man involves has changed in the last 10 years (e.g. compared to what your older brother or Dad may have thought what being a man is when they were your age)?

- Do you think that modern Irish society's idea of masculinity has changed also?
- Do you think the recession years have had any impact on young men's role in modern Irish society?

Does the current economic climate affect what it is to be a man?

- What do you aspire to?
- Has the recession been a factor in what you think modern man's role in society is?

What do you perceive as the challenges to your role as a young male in modern society?

- Do these challenges have a negative affect or do they motivate you?

Do you find it difficult to measure up to those things that we just talked about?

Is there a social emphasis on young men in today's society to conform to any stereotypes (e.g. from media, sports, films) that may not have been there in the late 90's?

- What, in your opinion, are the most masculine behaviours you see in young Irish adult males?
- What behaviours would you think are seen as not masculine?

Finishing Stages:- Looking forward to the Future

Finally, we'll be looking at how do your economic circumstances and prospects now affect your future outlook. You are in your XXX year and we are interested in how you view the coming years in light of the economy and your first steps after college into finding the right career path.

What are the prospects for you in your current course's career path?

- What kind of preparation has your course given you for preparing you for life and career once your college course has come to an end?
- Do you feel it could do more to help prepare you?

How well prepared do you feel for life after university?

- Do you feel your mental health has been affected by your future outlook?

Are there positives emerging as a result of there being fewer certainties about what to do after university?

- If there was more opportunity or there was no recession, do you think that your motivation would be affected?
- Do you see the recession as a positive or a negative in terms of approaching the future? (i.e. will you adapt and flourish or will there be struggle?)
- Have you thought of being involved in entrepreneurship (i.e. creating your own opportunities) after university?

Do think you'll stay in Ireland when you have graduated or have you considered emigration or travelling?

- Can you tell me about these plans?
- If there had been no recession, what would your preferred plans be?

Have you thought about taking a postgraduate course?

- What would you find appealing about a course that meets your needs – e.g. career focus, academic focus, networking possibilities?

How would you sum up the view of yourself and friends about the future prospects – that is, the view of your generation about how you have to manage your prospects and fulfil your potential?

- Think 10 years down the road, what kind of lifestyle do you foresee yourself leading?

Is there anything which you would wish to add?

Thank you for your co-operation.

Debriefing and offer of follow-up assistance if any difficult issues have been raised.

Appendix G: Facebook ad transcript for Study Three

Study looking at the impact of emigration on young Irish males

My name is Thomas Conway and I am a PhD psychology student at the National University of Ireland, Galway. I am currently exploring the impact of the recession on Irish male emigrants. If any males in this group are interested in taking part in online research and were aged between 18 and 25 when they initially emigrated, please contact me through Facebook, twitter (@tomcon81) or email (t.conway3@nuigalway.ie). Upon registering interest, I will send you an information sheet detailing exactly what the study entails. If you still wish to participate after reviewing the details, I will contact you to arrange suitable times.

Interviews will be about an hour long and you will receive a **€10 Holland & Barrett voucher** for your time.

Thomas

Thomas Conway, BA. MSc.,

Researcher,

NUIG School of Psychology & UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,

Email - t.conway3@nuigalway.ie

Twitter - @tomcon81

Appendix H: Study Three Interview Schedule

Qualitative Interview – Topic Guide

- Ask participants to take some time to read through the information sheets provided.
- After reading the information sheet, ask participants to read through the consent form.
- Make them aware of their right to withdraw at any time.
- Tell participants that everything discussed in the focus will be audio-recorded and that all recordings are confidential and each participant will be given an alias to preserve anonymity.
- Ask for views expressed in the group to remain confidential within this group.
- Explain that the researcher and his supervisor will be the only people who have access to the recordings.

Introductory comments:

The aims of this interview are to study your experiences, those of a young Irish male who has emigrated during the Great Recession. The focal points will be how the recession and the migratory experience has shaped your situation, both now and over the last few years, the impact of the recession on traditional male roles, and recent changes in Ireland. I also want to ask you to talk about your plans for the future. This will include questions on future aspirations, travelling, employment, returning to Ireland, and so on. Finally, the last section of questions will explore how you feel the experience of emigration in recent years has affected how you think about your possibilities, your potential, and the future.

Demographics:

What is your name and age?

Where in Ireland are you from?

Beginning Stages:- Reflection on the Past (Keep an eye on time and move on when necessary)

If we take ourselves back to the early 2000's, before the recession. Do you remember the time before the crash (i.e. the Celtic Tiger time)?

- Can you tell me what your general lifestyle was like back then?
- Was there more affluence or wealth?
- How would you describe the way you saw the future then?

So the Celtic Tiger ended and the recession began. Did any changes took place in your family as a result?

- Did your parents talk to you about how things were changing?
- Do you have any examples to show what level of prosperity your family had at that point?
- Were there other symbols (cars, holidays, etc.) did you had to let go of?
- Do you think your well-being is the same now as it was pre-recession or did the recession become an extra burden for you?

- Did you go to university? How did you feel about your qualifications once you graduated? Did you go on any working for free schemes (e.g. job bridge) and how did this make you feel? Did it affect your parents?
- If so, have you become resilient or does it still affect you?

Can you tell me about any of your friends and their families that were badly affected?

- Did you see any changes around you in your community?

Can you tell me what the recession means to you personally?

- Can you describe your access to money at that time (i.e. did you find yourself being broke more often?)
- Have any of you had any part-time or full-time jobs in Ireland over the past 6 years?
- Did the recession impact on your ability to get a job you went for? Would your employment history be different if there was no recession or would you have emigrated anyway?
- If so, what kind?
- If there was no recession would you have had the same work ethic?
- Did the recession have an influence on your decision to get a job?
- Did it influence you to emigrate or would you have travelled anyway?
- Did the experience of being an emigrant affect your identity?

~~Did the economy have an impact on your ability to get a job in Ireland?~~

- ~~— Did it have any effect on what type of job you went for?~~
- ~~— Do you think that your employment history would be different if the recession had not happened?~~
- ~~— If so, how? (Would you have emigrated anyway?)~~
- How has being an emigrant affected your experience over the last few years?
- Has this experience provided you with any positives or negatives?
- What emotions does the recession and Ireland bring up for you?

Middle Stages (i):-Reflection on the Present

Okay, now we're going to move on from the past to talk about the present. Can you talk about how young emigrants in general (yourself or your mates) current day-to-day life is affected by financial issues?

- and adapting to a new culture?

Do you think that many young emigrants are more able to support themselves financially then they were in Ireland?

Do you think that emigrants receive any extra financial, or other types of, help?

- If so, from who?
- Is there any services in Ireland, or ... , to help emigrants to adjust to the new country?
- If so, are they helpful, & if not, is there need for them?
- Is there any social hub for emigrants?
- Is there any stubbornness / pride regards communicating with people back home with how you're doing?

- Are you a member of a GAA organisation? If so, what are the positives and negatives of this?

What are the main costs of everyday life in ...?

- Financially, what are the most important things for you at the moment? What are your luxuries?
- Can you tell me about any work that you are doing at present?

How do you spend your free time in ... (place of emigration)?

- Do you find your quality of life has improved or reduced? Does it affect you?
- How is your social life in ... as opposed to what it was back in Ireland?
- Did you find it difficult to adapt to a new culture / culture shock?
- Do you think that emigrating has been beneficial or would you prefer to be in Ireland?
- Did the change in your economic circumstances affect your life experience – socially or in terms of ambitions?

Do you think emigration will have an impact on your life or will you view it as something you did?

- Have you seen any examples of the effect of emigration and the recession years on your friends or your own wellbeing?
- If so, do you think it has had a lasting impact on the wellbeing of young people your age?
- Is there any difference do you think in how it has affected men and women of your age?
- Have there been positives emerging for you or your generation as a result of emigrating and the economy changing over the past 6 years?

Middle Stages (ii):- Thoughts on Masculinity & the Recession

We now come to the other part of my research that looks into whether the economy has changed the traditional gender role of what it is to be a man.

Can you explain to me what your experiences of being a man are like in today's society?

- Do you think being in ... affects it?
- What do you like about being a man?
- And what do you dislike?

Do you think that your notion of what being a man involves has changed in the last 10 years (e.g. compared to what your older brother or Dad may have thought what being a man is when they were your age)?

- Do you think that modern Irish society's idea of masculinity has changed also?
- Do you think the recession years have had any impact on young men's role in modern Irish society?

Does the current economic climate affect what it is to be a man?

- What do you aspire to?

- Has the recession been a factor in what you think modern man's role in society is?

Is there any difference in masculinity in your current residence and masculinity in Ireland?

What do you perceive as the challenges to your role as a young male in modern society?

- Do these challenges have a negative affect or do they motivate you?

Do you find it difficult to measure up to those things that we just talked about?

Is there a social emphasis on young men in today's society to conform to any stereotypes (e.g. from media, sports, films) that may not have been there in the late 90's?

- What, in your opinion, are the most masculine behaviours you see in young adult males both here and back home (i.e. Irish vs. Canadian / Australian / New Zealand)?
- What behaviours would you think are seen as not masculine (i.e. Irish vs. Canadian / Australian / New Zealand)?
- Do you think social media is having an impact on masculinity?

Finishing Stages:- Looking forward to the Future

Finally, we'll be looking at how your current prospects have affected your future outlook. We are interested in how you view the coming years in light of the worldwide economy and what your preferred future plans are.

What are the prospects for you currently living in ...?

- Has the experience of emigrating help prepare, or hinder, you in terms of future aspirations and lifestyle?
- Do you feel there could be more help in place to help emigrants adjust to a new country and culture?
- Would it be well received?

How well prepared do you feel in terms of future outlook?

- Do you feel your mental health has been affected by your future outlook?
- Do you think there is need for emigrants to be able to talk about their experiences of being uprooted?

Are there positives emerging as a result of there being fewer certainties about what to do?

- If there was more opportunity or there was no recession, do you think that your current situation would be affected?
- Do you see the recession as a positive or a negative in terms of approaching the future? (i.e. will you adapt and flourish or will there be struggle?)
- Have you thought of being involved in entrepreneurship (i.e. creating your own opportunities)?

Do think you'll return to Ireland or will you stay abroad?

- Can you tell me about these plans?
- If there had been no recession, do you think your experience would be different as opposed to emigrating because of economic hardships?

How would you sum up the view of yourself and friends about the migratory experience and your future prospects – that is, the view of your generation about how you have to manage your prospects and fulfil your potential?

- Think 10 years down the road, what kind of lifestyle do you foresee yourself leading?

Is there anything that you would wish to add?

Thank you for your co-operation.

Debriefing and offer of follow-up assistance if any difficult issues have been raised.

Appendix I: Study Three Information Sheet

National University of Ireland, Galway. School of Psychology

PhD in Child & Youth Research

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: Investigating the impact of the Great Recession on the developmental transition of young Irish males experiencing emigration

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This *Participant Information Sheet* tells you about the purpose, risks and benefits of this research study. If you agree to take part, we will ask you to sign a *Consent Form*. If there is anything you are not clear about, we will be happy to explain it to you. Please take as much time as you need to read this information. You should only consent to participate in this research study when you feel you understand what is being asked of you, and you have had enough time to think about your decision and you are not obliged to participate once you have consented. Importantly, you can leave / stop at any point during the interview. Thank you for reading this and please do not hesitate to ask if you have any further questions.

Purpose of the Study

This study / research project is towards the attainment of my PhD in Child and Youth Research. The purpose of the study is to research the thoughts and experiences of young people who emigrated about their experiences of the Great Recession. It is a qualitative study so information will be gathered from around 10 participants using one-to-one interviews that may last from 30 minutes to an hour. The interviews are recorded and then analyzed afterwards for specific themes common to all. You have been asked to participate as you have experienced emigration in a period where adverse economic conditions have had a massive impact on young Irish people, and as such, may be interested in taking part in this study to voice your opinion.

Taking Part - What it Involves

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part as participation is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part you will be given this *Information Sheet* to keep and be asked to sign a *Consent Form*. If you do decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your rights in any way. You can ask for the interview to stop at any time, and you don't have to answer questions if you don't want to.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The interview will take place over internet telephony (e.g. Skype). The participant can choose a place of comfort that has access to wifi and is a quiet location for audio purposes. It will be recorded by the researcher and then transcribed afterwards. This is an interview study, so we want to hear from you in your own words as to what it is like to be an Irish emigrant during a time of recession.

How long will my part in the study last?

The interview will last from between 30 minutes to an hour but you may take a break anytime you wish during this period. Should you decide to take part, you will be contacted once to arrange a suitable time for you for the interview and you will be interviewed only once.

What are the topics that will be discussed?

Topics will include: reflections on the past before the recession began, participant's current circumstances in light of the recession, experiences of being an emigrant and how this affects identity and if it affects the participant's perception of Ireland, the impact of an adverse economic climate, and participants' future outlook and how the recession has affected this in a positive or negative fashion. *Only general findings will be reported, without reference to identifiable individuals. All information is confidential and will only be available to the researcher and the researcher's supervisor.* Names of individuals, places, etc. will be replaced with aliases in order to ensure that the participant can be confident in being treated with the utmost confidentiality.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Perhaps on reflecting about different aspects of being unemployed during a recession, you might feel concern about some aspect of lifestyle, whether in relation to finances, mental health, etc.

What happens at the end of the study?

When all the participants have been recruited and the project is completed, if you would like, you will receive a summary of the main findings. We would only be pleased to include you on an address list to receive publications arising from the study.

Who do I contact for more information or if I have further concerns?

If you would like any more information or have any further concerns, please feel free to contact me at the details below.

Thomas Conway

conwaythomas@hotmail.com & t.conway3@nuigalway.ie

Mobile Phone – 0876484373

Or my supervisor Dr. Padraig MacNeela, Lecturer, School of Psychology, NUI Galway (padraig.macneela@nuigalway.ie; 091 495121).

If you would like to take part please text or call me at 0876484373, or email me at conwaythomas@hotmail.com .

Appendix J: Debriefing Sheet for Study Three

Evaluating the effect of the Great Recession on young Irish males.

Thank you for taking part in the interview.

In case any of the topics we discussed cause you some further thought or reflection, we have prepared this document on sources of information and support.

If you do have any concerns arising from points we covered in the interview you may find it helpful to contact one of the following organizations:

Mental Health Ireland – Promoting positive mental health
- <http://mentalhealthireland.ie>
- Phone: 01 284 1166

Yourmentalhealth.ie – HSE Website to help us mind our mental health

Healthpromotion.ie – HSE Website on health promotion

Samaritans - 1850 60 90 90

Aware - 1850 24 1850

If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact me at 0876484373 or conwaythomas@hotmail.com / t.conway3@nuigalway.ie, or my research supervisor, Dr Pádraig MacNeela, School of Psychology, NUI Galway, 091 495121, padraig.macneela@nuigalway.ie.