

Sex, drugs and smashing skulls: Violence, gender, and hyper-masculinity in a gang community of practice

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We examine how masculinity, specifically hyper-masculinity, is constructed from the perspective of a boy growing up within a white power motorcycle gang environment. One photo and three narratives are employed as the empirical material for analysis. The autoethnographic narratives are written in chronological order from ages 10-13 focusing on the first author's first time experiences with violence, drugs, and sex respectively. The gang is conceptualised as a community of practice. A thematic analysis identified three key themes: the importance of hyper-masculine rites of passage in this gang community of practice; violence and intimidation as a means to an end; and the objectification of women and their positioning as inferior to men and the use of sexual coercion. Taken together, these themes illustrate how a hyper-masculine identity is developed within this context. This study contributes to research and knowledge on hyper-masculinity in the specific context of motorcycle gangs in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It's the Sunday morning after a large gang party that has raged all weekend. A disoriented twelve year old boy slowly walks out into the dining area to the wide eyed amazement of the two men seated there. The men have scruffy hair and goatee beards and sport tattoos. They are dressed in black and display gang insignia, including swastikas. One, a renowned womaniser, wears a shirt bearing the slogan "Lust Never Sleeps" (see Figure 1.) He is astonished that the boy is still standing and awake after two solid days of drinking large amounts of alcohol and smoking marijuana. Despite being heavily intoxicated and extremely tired, the boy has passed a test. As a result, he has moved from doing the 'women's work' of looking after gang members, to being able to take part in the festivities like a real man.



Figure 1: Tony age 12 the morning after the party.

Gangs are a worldwide phenomenon (Gilbert, 2013; Grennan, 2000). In Aotearoa New Zealand they became particularly prevalent in the 1960s, having developed out of subcultural groupings inspired by American popular culture and social identities during the preceding decade. In particular, the formation of an Auckland Chapter of the Hells Angels, a notorious American motorcycle gang, marked the formation of gangs as distinct entities within the country and introduced key gang practices (such as back patches, to be explained later in this article) and hierarchical systems of power within gangs. Through these structures gangs maintained their longevity, with many gangs becoming particularly embedded in Aotearoa New Zealand towns and cities in the 1980s through collective enterprises, both legal and illegal, recreational and financial (Gilbert, 2003).

The photograph in Figure 1, along with narratives to be discussed later, illustrate a complex set of processes that revolve around hyper-masculinity, violence, drugs, and gender within a white power motorcycle gang. These are processes that Tony (the first author and the subject of Figure 1 above) experienced in his early years. Through his familial connections to a particular gang,

Tony grew up in a gang environment where violence brought status, power and access to resources. It was also an environment in which any expression of tender feelings or displays of vulnerability by either gender were deemed feminine and were therefore despised.

Eventually, Tony became a patched member of the gang. That is, through an extended initiation process as a 'prospect' (a prospective member) he was recognised as worthy of 'full' membership, a status communicated by wearing the gang's 'colours' or 'patch' (Fleischhaker, 2011; Gilbert, 2013). Tony is no longer a gang member and no longer shares this particular gang's antisocial views. However, having grown up in a gang environment and having been a patched member of the gang, Tony possesses a rare insider's perspective on these processes. The current article aims to draw upon this insider's perspective to investigate the development of a hyper-masculine identity within a particular community context. It investigates three significant experiences from Tony's early life (10-13 years of age) that he has selected due to their role in shaping his previously held hyper-masculine identity. These experiences are analysed and discussed to provide insight into issues of violence, drug abuse, and gender – with a particular focus on hyper-masculinity. *What Does It Take To Be A Hyper-masculine Man?*

The term masculinity is common in everyday language. However, individual and collective understandings of 'what it means to be a man' and how this is enacted in everyday life can vary (*cf.* Paechter, 2003). Rather than being determined by biological factors, masculinity is heavily influenced by culture and is intricately involved in the reproduction of power relations between men and between men and women (Connell, 2005; Edwards, 2006). Connell (2005) defines masculinity as arising through the enactment of certain cultural values such as being competent, being strong and standing up for one's beliefs. These values, which are commonly valorised in society, are associated with traditional notions of masculinity which dominate in many parts of the world

(Connell, 1998). Masculinity evolves from the relationship between men and the social and physical settings in which they engage (Bowker, 1998). The contemporary concept of masculinity reflects the fluidity of constantly changing and developing enactments in response to the situation in which a man finds himself (Paechter, 2003). Enactments of masculinity can include particular actions, decisions about appearance (such as clothing), and language (Silva, Botelho-Gomes, & Goellner, 2011).

Masculinity can be pro-social, with the bonds men make with other men providing a sense of support, recognition and reinforcement of familial obligations, and feeling part of a community (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). However it is more commonly linked in literature to antisocial beliefs and actions such as aggression, extreme competitiveness, and sexual promiscuity (Roberts, 2012). This is referred to as hyper-masculinity or, in more everyday interactions, as 'macho'. Hyper-masculinity is "a gender-based ideology of exaggerated beliefs about what it is to be a man" (Voker, Tefft, & Tysiaczny, 2013, p. 562). In other words it is an extreme form of masculine identity consisting of beliefs and actions related to toughness, violence, risk-taking, and sexist attitudes toward women and physical intimacy (Zaitchik & Mosher, 1993). According to Zaitchik and Mosher (1993), hyper-masculinity is comprised of four inter-related components: (1) a callous attitude towards women and heterosexuality such that sex equates with male dominance over women; (2) a belief that violence is an acceptable expression of dominance over other men; (3) a belief that danger is exciting and survival in its presence is manly; and (4), a particular set of emotional practices such that self-control is to be prized, that anger is regarded as the most legitimate male emotion, and that other emotions such as sensitivity and empathy are seen as feminine and therefore to be treated with disdain. Combining these elements "reflect a [hyper-masculine] man's desire to appear powerful and to be dominant in interactions with men, women, and the environment" (Vokey, Tefft, & Tysiaczny, 2013, p.563). The enactment of such an ideology can have detrimental consequences

for women such as defined and rigid gender roles and the male's expectations regarding sex. Hyper-masculinity has been found to be directly related to increased violence against women (Parrot & Zeichner, 2003).

There are many practices that can be described as hyper-masculine (Vokey et al., 2013). The present study seeks to focus on three practices that were chosen due to their relationship with Zaitchik and Mosher's (1993) elements of hyper-masculinity. These are violence (as an acceptable expression of dominance over other men), drug use (a belief that danger is exciting and survival in its presence is manly), and sex (a callous attitude towards women where sex equates with male dominance). The fourth element (sensitivity is to be avoided) is threaded throughout the narratives, as young Tony attempts to make sense of the experiences as they are occurring when he is 10-13 years old. These practices are not solely enacted in gang communities. However, when combined, these elements represent men's desire to appear in control, powerful, and to be dominant in all social interactions with both genders, and also their environment (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988). These three practices were powerful contributors to Tony's early understanding of masculinity in a gang environment. Therefore, these specific choices of narrative topics are useful in examining the formation of a hyper-masculine identity. These understandings were subsequently challenged by Tony, and eventually led to him leaving the gang environment.

Gangs as Communities of Practice

Gangs can be conceptualised as communities of practice, in which people learn what it means to be a member through participating in communal activities. Communities of practice are those groupings where potential members learn the established rules or, in other words, the acceptable ways of knowing and performing specific tasks, duties, and other actions through observation and participation (Wenger, 1999). Through the process of becoming patched, gang members learn how to use intimidation and violence through what was done to them by others. They learn how other members expect

them to act in order to represent the gang. Members do this through acting aggressively, and symbolically represent this through embodied enactments of gang identity, for example through the patch on their backs, and some display tattoos with controversial symbols (e.g. swastikas). These symbols serve as a means to visually represent the hyper-masculine gang identity consisting of the four elements Zaitchik and Mosher (1993) identified. There are other groups and communities that can be defined as hyper-masculine. However, given the importance of representing the gang through symbolism via the patch and being able to deliver and sustain often vicious physical attacks, gangs provide particularly visible and violent manifestations of hyper-masculinity.

Gangs also consist of various levels of membership and acceptance, with a corresponding level of power and access to resources that other communities of practice often exhibit (*cf.* Merriam et al., 2003). For example a Chapter President has more power and benefits than a regular member. While there is a hierarchy for women, this operates more for them to differentiate themselves from one and another, and establishes who gang members can have sex with (for example a gang member cannot have sex with a woman who is a committed partner of another gang member). There is little opportunity for social mobility for a woman other than moving from 'hanger-on' to partner, at which point her partner's status may give her limited power in relation to other women. Gender roles are very clearly defined and enforced. Patched gang members attain status, power and access to resources unattainable by female associates. While this is not necessarily the case in all motorcycle gangs (see van den Eynde & Veno, 2007), in Tony's experience of this gang women, whether single or not, were always subservient to the men and used as cooks and cleaners, or if not with a gang member, used for sex.

In this article we examine the early experiences of a boy raised in a gang environment, in order to identify how his community membership led to a hyper-masculine identity. The article focuses on Tony as a young boy growing up in a white power motorcycle gang environment and his hyper-

masculine experiences of sex, drugs, and violence. Growing up in this environment, Tony learnt what the expectations of the gang were in relation to his gender identity within the gang, an identity that the gang expected him to maintain in order to represent the group. As a young man Tony learned this through observing others and through his interactions with existing patched members. Once he had successfully completed the initiation rituals of prospecting, Tony was guided by other gang members, albeit through violence, when he was ‘corrected’ (e.g. punched) by those higher in the hierarchy if he conducted himself incorrectly. Through participating in such practices in a communal environment, Tony developed a hyper-masculine identity. Although he has since distanced himself from such practices and reassessed his identity, the experiences mentioned above and elaborated below shed light on the development and characteristics of hyper-masculinity.

Method

This research is a selective auto-biography written retrospectively as an adult from the insider perspective of a boy who grew up in a motorcycle gang environment. We draw on aspects and techniques of auto-ethnography in order to provide insight into how a boy growing up in such an environment can come to consider hyper-masculinity as the preferred and acceptable identity to adopt within society.

In order to do this, three narratives, along with the photograph presented as Figure 1, are analysed to provide insight and context. These narratives are based on three critical incidents in Tony’s life that are ‘flashbulb’ memories: first time experiences with violence against a person outside of Tony’s family in a new town and school, unrestricted use of drugs and alcohol, and having sex. In each case, Tony has employed the ‘heartful auto-ethnography’ techniques described by Ellis (1999). This technique provided a way for him to describe and analyse the emotions, feelings, bodies, and spirits that these evocative stories created. Through this process Tony examined incidents from the perspective of personally lived experiences, as well as applying the auto-ethnographer’s gaze

to theorise these experiences. Heartful auto-ethnography is described as a fusion between social science, literature, and the “living of life” (Ellis, 1999, p. 669). It provides a means to reveal social and cultural structures and influences from an authentic insider perspective. It also encourages compassion and empathy in the reader by providing a way of explaining concrete experiences and intimate details. While being a gang member does give access to resources such as alcohol, drugs, and money, as well as some level of social support or kinship (Gilbert, 2013), it is also a hard life that can take a serious toll on members. It can affect future relationships with other people that a gang member has even after leaving the gang.

Common criticisms of autoethnographic approaches focus on issues of generalisability from a single case. Concerns can also be raised in regards to the process of narrative selection – if the researcher is the topic of the narrative, there is the potential for the moments that have been selected to not have had the actual influence that they claim it to have. It may not be the first instance of that behaviour. However the use of the single case, or a limited number of cases, can be a valuable approach to research such as this. Individuals co-construct meaning with others and no single voice is completely isolated from the environments and people that surround them (Bochner, 2001). Drawing upon in-depth cases of everyday life, particularly through insider perspectives, ensures that academic knowledge is practically orientated (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012; Philaretou & Allen, 2006). Examining the processes on a deeper level than broader, experimental methods can encompass helps to illuminate how such processes shape people’s lives (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012).

This is particularly the case when researching sensitive topics such as gangs and gender (*cf.* Philaretou & Allen, 2006). As Philaretou and Allen (2006) explain, autoethnography allows the researcher to provide valuable academic knowledge on topics that may not otherwise be addressed. Such approaches offer detailed evidence of how individuals make sense of personal events through reflections of the co-construction of life worlds – in this instance the development

of a gang community of practice shaped by the gang's development and processes that are illustrated in the narratives in the following section. Narratives were selected by Tony not necessarily because they were the first instances, although some were, but because upon reflection these exemplars provide insights into the development of a hyper-masculine identity.

In the process of communicating and analysing these narratives, we hope to provide a deeper understanding of what occurs within the context of gang life in order to contribute to addressing practices that damage people's lives. The first step is to understand how such identities are formed which is the scope of the present article.

The second and third authors, Dave and Neville, add a further layer of analysis to the three narratives. Their outsider positioning, as neither have been members of a patched gang, allows a particular level of critical distance. This further layer of analysis aims to capture those practices or insights that can be potentially overlooked by an insider perspective. Each additional author also brings his own area of expertise and experience in the areas of community psychology, communities of practice, gender, and violence. The present article represents our attempt to analyse empirical materials that were produced through Tony's account of his past experiences (*cf.* Davis & Ellis, 2008). The resulting interpretation encompasses both etic and emic approaches. As an insider, Tony is able to provide specific examples to include in the study, while also having other insights and personal reflections that guide the analysis and writing that may not be immediately evident within the narratives. As outsiders, Dave and Neville are able to situate these insider perspectives in the wider context that includes other world views and academic perspectives.

Findings

The three narratives explore the role of violence, substance abuse, and sex in the development of a hyper-masculinity identity. Each is preceded by contextual information to help the reader understand the narrative. The qualitative analysis of these narratives was used to identify emergent themes which

contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role that context plays in the development of hyper-masculinity.

Narrative One: Violence

In this narrative Tony is ten years old and in his last year of primary school. The event takes place midway through a lunch recess on a typical Aotearoa New Zealand day at the school. His family had moved towns at the end of the previous year and so he was a new student at this primary school, which was very different to his previous one. Violence in Tony's family was considered normal, acceptable behaviour. He had witnessed and participated in violence his whole life and it was considered by his family and the wider gang community as an acceptable and legitimate means of resolving any form of conflict.

We're on the lower school field and I'm playing a game of volley ball with a bunch of kids I have recently come to know. I am feeling very proud of myself and happy that I had got up, off my ass, and was playing sports. The opposition serves the ball and it goes flying past me. I turn and run and catch up with the ball. As I am running towards where the ball is rolling, I see the 'cool' kids approaching. The ball is too fast for me, and it reaches the crowd of cool kids first. The leader scoops up the ball and he is just standing there waiting for me to arrive in front of him. I run right up to him, face to face. Without saying a word he starts moving the ball around, constantly keeping it out of my reach in a way that makes me furious. Out of breath from running and playing, I know that what he is doing is a deliberate attempt at mocking and belittling me. I am so offended and angry, I punch him in the face as hard as I can, and knock him to the ground.

After picking the ball back up, I think to myself "now who's funny?". He finally gets to his feet, and I watch the group quickly run to the office. I turn around to go back to the game to continue playing where we had left off. I look at the other players and I am met with shocked looks on their faces. I assumed we would all just carry on

playing volleyball. As I stand on the edge of the court, most of the players are silently walking away. I ask everyone "what is happening?" No one replies. My name comes over the loud school speaker in an angry tone.

I listen while the Principal calls my mother and informs her I am suspended. What they are saying is not very comforting. I know I am in trouble. "But I only punched him?"

Walking home, there really doesn't seem too much to be worried about. It was just a punch. As I come through the ranch slider at home, I feel a sting on my ass. I turn around and see Mum about to land a second blow with a length of bamboo and she continues beating me with it. "Shit this hurts and sucks. What am I getting such a beating for?" I wonder. I feverishly rub the parts of my body that have the welts from the bamboo after the sixth and final strike.

After the beating I manage to control the pain, hold back my tears, and stand upright. Several men around me pull money out of their jeans and vests and walk over towards me smiling. They shake my hand and hand me the money with comments such as "That's how real men handle their business Tony" and "You'll have your patch in no time!" Why am I getting a hiding and money for the same thing? Feeling embarrassed but also accepted and encouraged at the same time, I just shake hands and thank them.

Narrative Two: Drugs

The party this drugs narrative describes was the birthday party of one of Tony's family members. Figure 1 is a photograph taken the day that the party concluded. Like violence, alcohol and marijuana had always been a part of Tony's family and home life. Alcohol was viewed as normal and freely available to anyone, rather than only being a drink for adults. For example, Tony had been able to have drinks at parties, Christmas, and family occasions since being a very young boy. Smoking cigarettes or marijuana had been actively discouraged by his mother until this

weekend. There were times when family and gang members would discretely share a joint or cigarette with him or would give him a bud of marijuana. However this was not the norm and was frowned upon by his mother.

The goal of this weekend, from his family's perspective, was to teach 12 year old Tony a lesson. Up until this point he was considered disrespectful and opinionated, speaking about things he had yet to do. Tony thought he was already a man and could handle more than he was given credit for. His family and the wider gang community decided to teach him a lesson by giving him unlimited access to both alcohol and marijuana in an attempt to make him more humble and less boastful. The adults found it easy to stay awake from Friday to Sunday as they all were using amphetamines (speed), but none of them believed Tony would be able to last Saturday until Sunday without such help: nevertheless, he did. From this night on everyone conceded that he could consume as much alcohol and marijuana as he liked, anywhere, anytime. It therefore marked a rite of passage for Tony.

What a day! Don't have to go to school this Friday and we'll be partying all weekend. My brothers and I spend all Friday moving tables, chairs, glasses, everything needed for the huge celebration. I find myself all over town getting the things needed to the farm house for the birthday party. This sure beats sitting in class being bored, wasting time at school. My brothers and I sweat in the blistering heat moving all the equipment, working all day and getting very excited in anticipation of the weekend to come. Tomorrow will be so much fun. I wish someone else had to go home and do the mundane chores.

Saturday morning, after completing my chores, my brother and I drive out to the party very excited about the thought of having unlimited access to the kegs and also marijuana for the first time. I cannot believe mum agreed with the members and gave me permission to smoke as much as I like! I saved money and have a small bag of

marijuana to smoke with the boys. No one turns up to party with nothing. I hope it is good enough smoke for them. I know that everyone will have heaps of dope at this time of the year, and probably better than mine. I eagerly look forward to getting as smashed as I can.

When we arrive there are a lot of people. I walk in with my brother thinking 'I cannot wait until I am old enough to have my own party'. I see Mum and her husband: they had been partying all night and they look good. I do my best to avoid eye contact with them both, knowing there is always a job to be done. I really would just like to party with the boys.

As I walk up to the kegs to grab myself a handle, one of the members calls me over to him with a job to do. After completing the work I sit down to enjoy what I believe to be a well-earned drink and smoke with some members. They have big bags of dope and give me some buds for the work I have put in, and tell me I am doing a good job as usual. Throughout the afternoon and evening I never really get a chance to party. Someone always wants me to do cleaning, lifting or get something. Knowing my place, I jump to attention every time, without question.

I think to myself I cannot complain too much, as all evening and night members and family are passing me a smoke or giving me a shot of whiskey. I should just be happy as I know my classmates at school think I am the man. I also can help myself to the kegs when I am not on bar duty, which I am enjoying very much. By late Saturday night I am feeling very jaded and intoxicated. I sit on a bale of hay and the world starts spinning. After a couple of minutes of this I feel the distinctive feeling of needing to throw up. I struggle to put one foot in front of the other and slowly walk out of sight to be sick. I would hate to be caught throwing up like a girl. Looking at the men around me they are all laughing, standing upright and appear to be

handling things far better than I am. I try to hide that I am very wasted and feeling like I need a sleep. I will prove I can party like a man.

As always there is something to do, and during the early hours of Sunday morning I am feeling tired and very cut, but damn it I am going to keep up with the men. I am receiving a lot of banter and comments from the older people referring to the state I am in, but I am also dishing out my fair share of comments and jokes. At times I am inappropriate and loud because of being so drunk and wasted. I try to be respectful, but at this stage of the party, respect and knowing my place have become blurred.

I wish these guys would find someone else to stoke the fires and do the bitch work, but I do get to walk around smoking and drinking. Life is not all bad.

Well after midnight and into the early morning I am very inebriated. My work is still being done, I am still holding coherent conversations and I appear to be on top of everything. People start to say comments like "You really are the man!" and "I have seen hard men fold with less than that Tony". My thoughts have not changed all night; "I will show you guys I can make it until the morning, because yes I am the man." As the morning progresses I start feeling light-headed and exhausted, but see the sun start to rise. For the last few weeks and especially today, I have been shooting my mouth off and telling everyone I can handle drugs. As Saturday turns into Sunday, it becomes harder and harder to stay awake and I start to doubt my capabilities as a man. I become excited as the sun breaks through the darkness and things transform from night into daytime. I really am going to make it. "Ha ha told you all!" I feel like I get a second wind as I jump back into action and start cleaning things up. This constant moving helps me stay focused, though I cannot

help but stumble around.

After daybreak some of the men call me over to the house. As I walk over to the house I notice many of the people present at the party are still drinking and smoking, and not looking a single bit tired. I wish I felt that way: they must be hard men. As I walk through the ranch slider I am greeted with applause! Why? I hear again "You're the man!" and they make me stand for a picture, and then one of the members orders me to go crash out in the back of a car. I just agree. I stumble to the car to collapse thinking "I did it! I can party like a man. I am the man. I just think I am going to have to party as much as I can, to get as good as the other guys".

Narrative Three: Sex

By age 13 Tony had graduated beyond alcohol and marijuana, and had become a regular user of speed and hallucinogens such as acid and magic mushrooms. Drug use assisted his energy levels when working very hard for long periods of time but although hard physical work was not uncommon for him, this week's work was particularly back breaking. The party mentioned in this narrative was the first party Tony had attended where he was recognised as one of the men and was treated like an equal, not a boy or prospect. As a 13-year-old Tony had the appearance and demeanour of someone a lot older and was often mistaken for someone old enough to buy alcohol. This was also the age that he became interested in the opposite sex. Within gang culture women are not considered equal: instead they are viewed as possessions or servants. In the narrative below, a woman who frequented the clubrooms who the gang members nick-named "Gumbboot", was also at the party. She had been objectified and coerced into a particular gender role over a number of years. In this role, she was expected to cook, clean, and have sex with whomever a patched gang member told her to, but was not actually in a relationship with any gang member or considered anyone's partner. It is important to note here that while we use this alias to refer to her within this article, this is not meant to dehumanise or for us to participate in her degradation. Readers may feel that we

should have used a different alias. However, we use this term here to illustrate how these women are treated and to emphasise how a hyper-masculine identity functions within this context. Given the narrative is from Tony's experiences at the time, to change the name would be to alter the experience. Further, while autoethnographic approaches on sensitive topics do require a duty of care to those represented in personal reflections (Philaretou & Allen, 2006), in this case we felt that to censor the self-reflection would be to minimise the plight of women in roles such as this. This is particularly relevant given the other characters in this narrative were making light of the disturbing situation related by Tony.

What a hard week's work! I cannot believe how many wheelbarrows of concrete I pushed across the yard or how many shovels full of concrete powder and metal I loaded into the concrete mixer constructing the piggery this past week. Even after all the speed we snorted this week, I still feel shattered and cannot wait for the party tonight to relax and celebrate.

After we finish cleaning the tools and make sure everything has gone back to where it lives, we all walk up as a group to the main house, which we could not see from where we were working. As we all walk around the side of the house we are all greeted with a poured handle of beer and one member has a CD cover full of lines for us. I am wrapt as I am feeling very tired, sore, and worn out from working so hard. After I have a few lines, beers, and a joint I am back to feeling full of energy, on top of the world, and invincible.

I walk around the party and ask if anyone is in need of help like usual. I am told by a member "Sit down boy! We have the prospects and bitches taking care of everything. Go have a drink with the men". I sit down with the members and other men and I feel a sense of achievement and status. I think to myself "I have made it to the men's table".

I spend the night drinking,

smoking, snorting and eating. While all this is happening, the women are taking care of everything. I am happy about this, but also feeling like I should help. I attempt to help and several times I am told “work like a man Tony and we will treat you like a man, leave it to them”. I cannot take my eyes off this girl known as ‘Gumboot’. It does not matter what she is doing, she captures my undivided attention throughout the night. Often she comes and asks me if I need anything and I find myself constantly tongue-tied and stumbling through whatever answer I am trying to give her. I am infatuated with her.

Before nightfall several of the people I am drinking with notice my attraction to Gumboot. One member says “Tony just go and grab her ass and take her out the back and give her one!” I feel very embarrassed and unsure about what exactly is going on. I desperately want to be viewed and treated as a man, but to be known as a man you have to have had sex. I am starting to feel like a fake and not worthy of sitting at the table, being a virgin. The whole group at the table decide to join in and tease me for what feels like forever with questions like “Have you had a root Tony? When was your last root?” I feel very uncomfortable, so lie and make up stories. I have seen many movies and books, so attempt to bluff my way through the questioning. Desperately trying not to lose any of my newly acquired status, I wish they would just drop this subject and leave me alone.

As we sit there as a group drinking and laughing, mainly at me, a senior member calls Gumboot over and whispers something in her ear as I sit across the table watching. I watch Gumboot listen for a few seconds and then look my way smiling. As the member continues whispering in her ear, she maintains eye contact with me. Immediately Gumboot walks over to me and asks me to come and help her with one of the kegs out of the truck. I was wishing I could fuck her, but have no idea this is about to become a reality. I get up and follow her to the car

park. When we are out of sight of everyone, she grabs me, kisses me and immediately proceeds to unbutton my fly to give me a blow job. I feel a raft of emotions. Am I doing it right? What comes next? Is there an order? Will she tell everyone how bad I am? Is my dick big enough? Luckily Gumboot is very experienced and is a very good teacher. I am a little overwhelmed at her actions thinking “aren’t men supposed to be in charge? Why would sex be different?”. Still enjoying it regardless, we carry on to the point of having sex.

After Gumboot and I re-emerge, we are met with applause. I am so embarrassed, never having dealt with this situation, and feeling like the men can just see right through all the lies I have told. I feel a sense of achievement also; I have taken the final step and am being recognised as a man. Gumboot is not fazed at all and just goes back to her duties. I get myself a beer and sit back at the table. I cannot believe how amusing everyone finds the situation. I constantly hear comments for the next little while “Was it good?” “That didn’t take long” and “What does it feel like to be a real man?” I find all these questions uncomfortable, as I cannot truthfully answer them without exposing my deception. I am sure they all know this, which as usual encourages them to carry on mocking me.

I excuse myself to go to the toilet with the goal of them leaving me alone. I return, and thankfully they have found someone else to pick on. I just sit there thinking. Under the influence of several drugs, having just lost my virginity, and combined with all the hard work we had done this week and the results we achieved, I feel proud. Tonight, throughout the party, I was not expected to lift a finger. I feel on a par with the men around me. I sit there knowing I am a man.

Discussion

This section represents our critical examination of Tony’s narratives through the combination of insider and outsider

perspectives of all three authors. We explore the events and processes that are a part of everyday life in a gang and which helped to form the hyper-masculine identity that has shaped Tony's life (*cf.* Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Three themes emerged during our analysis: the role of rites of passage, the use of violence and intimidation as a means to an end, and sex and gender roles. Each played an important role in the development of Tony's previously-held hyper-masculine identity, an identity, it is important to note, that can be, and in Tony's case was, reshaped later on in life.

Rites of Passage and the Hyper-masculine Man

Interconnected throughout the three narratives outlined previously are the levels of acceptance within the gang community. Actions that result in social mobility within groups such as gangs are often conceptualised as rites of passages (Irwin, 2003). This can be seen within the drugs and sex narratives. In the drugs narrative, 12-year old Tony was given access to drugs and as a result consumed a large quantity. The next morning he was still awake and mobile, and this drew admiration from the gang members. Being able to consume copious amounts of drugs at a young age was viewed as particularly impressive by the gang, an element of risk-taking that Tony survived. This risk taking is a component of Zaitchik and Mosher's (1993) conceptualisation of hyper-masculinity. In this narrative, while Tony is probably too young to be exposed to other more dangerous forms of risk-taking such as inter-gang violence, this drug-taking is still a form of risk. It provided a rite of passage into a hyper-masculine identity that Tony passed. The gang community of practice recognised this by acknowledging him with exclamations of "you're the man" and by taking a photograph. This in turn reaffirms to Tony that this hyper-masculine identity is something he wishes to attain in order to further connect to this community - young Tony feels that he is "the man" and that he wants to "party like those guys". This experience, and subsequent others throughout Tony's life, represent a graduation to full acceptance of a range of drugs by the age of 13 when the events described in the sex narrative took place, where Tony was an accepted member of the gang despite his

relative youth. Since the event discussed in the narrative Tony had continued to use the hardest drugs available to him at the time, which reaffirmed his hyper-masculine identity as a 'hard man' through continued risk taking.

Successfully navigating a rite of passage is also represented in the sex narrative, and as a result of this achievement, Tony was promoted from doing menial tasks to being served by others. Through the third narrative, his experiences of manual labour, aggression, drug use, and then losing his virginity convinced Tony at the time that he had made it as a man. Experiences like sitting with the men, being treated as an equal, and not having to be a servant reinforced those beliefs. To 13-year old Tony, having sex was the final stage of acceptance as a man in the gang. Having lived through many stages or levels of acceptance, young Tony felt there was no further experience to have to make him 'more of a man'. In his mind at that time, and with limited life experience, Tony compared himself with the men he observed and interacted with and convinced himself that he had imitated them correctly and had indeed achieved full manhood. Readers of this may question young Tony's view of his 'full manhood' given that he was only thirteen years of age. However, successfully passing these rites of passage and engaging in hyper-masculine practices had accelerated his maturity in the eyes of his peers: that is, other patched members. Tony's peers during this time were always a minimum of ten years his senior, and trying to imitate these men resulted in Tony missing other important social interactions that could have led to a more pro-social identity developing (for example in school). He had very quickly, in the space of thirteen years, become a member of this community of practice and thought of himself as a man in its terms.

Each narrative constitutes a rite of passage into a hyper-masculine identity that Tony successfully accomplished through his actions. While Tony was not aware of them as such at the time, reflecting upon his experiences allowed him to identify them as formative to his identity. Part of his reason

for identifying them as such was due to the acknowledgement given to him by the gang community of practice through the appreciation shown by Tony's role models, all of whom were men with hyper-masculine identities. These experiences were how Tony learned how to 'be a man' in the way that the gang required in order to be a member.

Violence and Intimidation as a Means to an End

Through examining these three narratives, status and power emerged as dominant themes. These dominant themes are heavily implicated in the development of a hyper-masculine identity. Status and power are achieved and a reputation is established through successful use of violence in order to reach goals. Violence, or the threat of violence, is interwoven amongst many of the gang's community practices. In the school playground, at age 10, Tony thought "now who's funny?" after knocking the boy to the ground. The act of violence gave him a sense of power and superiority that he enjoyed. It positioned him as physically superior to the more popular boy. Violence helped him attain a form of status that, in comparison, the other boy could not access as successfully. At home, at this time of his life, Tony was regularly beaten by older brothers and gang members, with no chance of winning the conflict. At home, violence was a key tool in establishing hierarchies and maintaining status. It was a community practice with which Tony was very familiar.

The incident with the ball in the first narrative was the first time he had used physical violence outside of his gang community. While violence was officially frowned upon at school, within the gang, it was a common practice, especially when issues of dominance or submission within a hierarchy were at stake. The 'cool kid' was 'mocking' and 'belittling' Tony, in an obvious attempt at asserting a higher position in the hierarchy. In the gang ethos, the punch in the face was the only way to maintain credibility as being 'staunch': that is, aggressive and physically dominating.

Tony could conform to some aspects of the school community, but proving to himself and other that he was tough enough to be a gang member was paramount to him. Doing well and fitting in at school was very much a secondary consideration.

As noted, violence was a way of maintaining hierarchies: a means for those higher in the ranking to remind others of 'their place.' For example when Tony talked back to the gang member who gave him alcohol, the gang member hit him: this was necessary to keep a prospect in his place. However, Tony's reaction shows that hierarchies are often contested. In this instance, the gang member's punch did not hurt Tony and instead helped reinforce his view of himself as being sufficiently staunch to absorb a full force punch to the face from a much older experienced man. While Tony kept to himself the thought "Is that all you have?", the incident served to diminish the respect he had for the older man. Through this experience, Tony learned that power and status meant being able to do things your own way because other people feared you. This association between being feared and being respected characterises the hyper-masculine identity common in Tony's gang community.

Actual violence is a common tool for disciplining and resolving disagreements in the gang community. But even the threat of violence can be used in order to establish and maintain status and power. Intimidation is an underlying theme that appears throughout all three narratives. Hyper-masculine men seem to use intimidation as a way of taking control and acquiring a position of power and superiority over others. In all three narratives Tony recalls an aura of superiority emanating from the patched gang members. They were 'real men' due to their physical superiority, their ability to consume more drugs than Tony and their sexual conquests. Once Tony believed he was able to keep up with the men, he modelled his behaviour on theirs. He no longer felt inferior but considered himself to be an equal. Similarly, at school, Tony attempted to use physical intimidation, as learned in the gang environment, when he ran straight up to the other boy 'face to face' as

described in the first narrative.

Often intimidation is very blunt and obvious; at other times, it can be established by more subtle manipulation. The gang member with the moonshine in the second narrative attempted to intimidate Tony by offering it to him, and when Tony 'took it like a man' and spoke back, the gang member had to resort to physical violence to re-establish order. Tony also felt intimidated in the third narrative when being mocked about being a virgin and attracted to the woman called Gumboot. In a gang environment, making people feel uncomfortable can lead to them feeling inferior. This in turn gives the hyper-masculine gang member who is intimidating a feeling of superiority, higher status, and a sense of having a greater level of knowledge and experience. From Tony's perspective as a young boy, people who became intimidated were viewed as weak, soft, or even feminine. This made intimidation a valued skill within the gang community. Without the ability to intimidate others, full acceptance within the gang would be almost impossible to achieve. The ability to intimidate is an important component of a hyper-masculine identity within the context of a white power motorcycle club in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is something Tony developed at an early age due to his physical size and early success in physical confrontations with his peers, and his ability to deal with substantial drug use.

These three narratives show that status and power, along with violence and intimidation, were interwoven throughout this stage of Tony's life. Tony recognised at a very young age that attaining status and power resulted in substantial tangible, and in many cases immediate, benefits. Upon acquiring a certain level of power or status, Tony would always try extremely hard to make it to the next level on the hierarchy within his community. Tony's desire for status is reflected in his ambition to be able to drink and smoke all night and to be able to sit at the table where the men sat. Having sex added to his feelings of attaining power and status. Tony could feel that he was moving through various levels of what he perceived

as manhood. Within Tony's gang community there were limited acceptable male identities that he could adopt or develop. Tony, from a young age, recognised that if he did not conform to the gang's established rules and ways of knowing, he would not be a desirable member and becoming accepted would become a much harder process.

Sex and Gender Roles

Sex is not necessarily a hyper-masculine activity. It is hyper-masculine when men coerce women into performing sexual acts, perhaps conditioning them to think that this type of behaviour is kind and caring, when in reality it could be thought to be more like rape than consensual sex. This is what occurred in the third narrative, with 'Gumboot' being told to have sex with the then 13-year old Tony.

The inferior status of women is an expected and reoccurring theme in gang narratives (Grennan, 2000). In naming her Gumboot, gang members were making a statement about the status of this woman. She was as an item of clothing, whose purpose was to provide comfort for the male "wearer" – and as clothing goes, there are few items which could be thought of as of lower status than the humble gumboot, exposed to mud and fit for only for that part of the body which is furthest from the head.

Hyper-masculine practices are enacted in ways that ensure gang members benefit from positioning women in a sub-ordinate role. Women are used by the gang as a resource that can be accessed when gang members prove themselves as 'real men'. If the genders were equal, the gang members would lose power over the women, and would no longer benefit from the tasks women do in relation to cooking, cleaning and sex. In particular, sex between gang members and unattached women is frequently an enforced transaction, devoid of intimacy and romance. A gang member's power and status is expressed through his deciding when and how sex occurs. In this regard it might be noted that Tony, while being interested in a particular woman, had only a limited say as to whether sex should or was going to occur. While he had attained a

certain level of power, Tony was not of the same level as the senior gang member who gave the woman the order. Tony was unsure and scared. His agency was also compromised, albeit in a different way to hers.

The practice of hyper-masculinity involves constructions of femininity with which masculine actions and identities are contrasted. From a hyper-masculine man's perspective in this culture, as discussed in the narratives, cooking, cleaning and other household chores are referred to as 'bitch work'. This suggests that these types of jobs are suitable for women and boys who are not yet men: they are not jobs for men who have acquired status in the gang. This type of thinking places women on a par with children, except that boys are given the chance to rise up and gain greater status by proving themselves and making the transition from boy to man, something which is unattainable for girls.

Within the gang environment any duty or action perceived as feminine is considered too embarrassing or degrading for a hyper-masculine man to engage with. This is similar to the embarrassment Tony felt after being hit by his mother with bamboo. In Tony's mind as a boy, real men are not physically hurt by women. Though he had received many beatings prior to this incident, Tony had never been beaten in front of men he respected and admired, and for him this was a greater punishment than suspension, pain or his mother's disapproval. This first narrative then was not just about violence but was also about gender roles. Tony was beaten by his mother, a woman, but the potential for him to gain status as a result of his gender was still recognised by the men present, who gave him money and words of encouragement after the beating.

To the hyper-masculine male within a motorcycle gang community, engaging in challenging physical labour or 'working hard' is man's work. Tony's family and gang placed little importance on academic achievements and, as a result, neither did Tony. Academic work was viewed on a par with household chores and as a result deemed

feminine and thus unworthy of the hyper-masculine man. In the gang community of practice, physical labour was valued whereas academic labour was not. This can be seen in the drugs narrative as Tony was granted a day off school by the family to set up a party. Wanting very much to be a full and accepted member of this community, Tony worked extra hard to attain a higher status by proving his physical worth to the gang members, to the detriment of attending school and gaining an education. The identity Tony saw as desirable was modelled on hyper-masculine men around him, all of whom had been previously convicted of at least one crime.

Conclusion

Discussions of how identities and beliefs are formed can assist in challenging and changing antisocial identities such as those that are hyper-masculine – a need that Tony is intimately connected to as he hopes to continue research in this area to assist others. Tony developed a hyper-masculine identity through his membership of a gang community of practice. He was born into it through his family and was immediately surrounded by hyper-masculine men, who reaffirmed his developing gang identity through financial reward and praise. As we have shown, early exposure to violence, drug use and sex was particularly important. The development of a hyper-masculine identity in this case was primarily the result of Tony not knowing any other way. The men he admired were the men he modelled himself after, in this case violent, drug using, hyper-masculine men. However this identity was not fixed as socialisation plays a significant and ongoing role in identity development (*cf.* Paechter, 2003).

Often people will reassess their lives with further life experiences and maturity. While Tony acquired a hyper-masculine identity at an early age, he later rejected this identity due to wider exposure to other belief systems. Through his experiences, he now believes that hyper-masculine men may desire to change once they realise that these identities are restrictive and destructive. Often men in gangs can struggle with such

conclusions and view change as a process that conflicts with their constructions of masculinity, identity and worth. Tony had to undergo a huge paradigm shift, a change of beliefs as well as a cultural transformation, to construct his current identity. Tony considers himself an outlier in this respect and has plans to do further auto-ethnographic studies through his academic career to explain in greater detail the joys and trials of such a commitment. Such experiences can impact people's understanding of their identity, allowing positive changes to occur (Hodgetts et al., 2010).

This article contributes to research and knowledge on hyper-masculinity in the specific context of motorcycle gangs in Aotearoa New Zealand. The present study also illustrates the importance of auto-ethnographic work in the area of gang communities and culture. Gang culture consists of a complex web of interactions and practices. While we have touched on broader themes of violence and gender that underscore many specific practices of hyper-masculinity, these practices themselves need further investigation. Finding healthier alternatives to these destructive practices aided Tony in developing a more positive masculine identity, more analogous to Hodgetts and Rua's (2010) discussion of working class men.

Although this study focused on the rites of passage associated with Tony's development of a hyper-masculine identity, both men and women within gangs are offered only a limited range of acceptable identities within this community of practice. While adopting a hyper-masculine identity and entering the criminal world may have been fairly predictable given Tony's early childhood experiences, his identity could be, and indeed was, later challenged and as a result changed. There is a need for those working in these areas to understand how anti-social identities are constructed, so that gang affiliated gender identities can be deconstructed and reconstructed to enable positive change and growth to occur.

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