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**The tightrope walkers: non-Hegemonic Men's Experiences of
Homosocial Environments**

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Abstract. Masculinity is complex, and so is interaction between different masculinities. In semi-structured interviews, six non-hegemonic men, aged between 26 and 45, were asked about how they perceive masculinity and the homosocial environment. The analysis showed two main themes: Configurations of the laddish culture and Coping with the laddish environment. The first theme reflected a laddish culture that was competitive, emotionally restrictive, and hierarchical, that was used as a mean to create homogeneity and consensus within the group. The second theme showed that by social adaptability, choosing non-hegemonic social circles, and cultural changes, the participants could engage in homosocial environments without its negative aspects. This implies that there are great benefits in adding more nuances to what being a man entails.

“We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages.”

-William Golding, *Lord of the flies*, 1954

A school of thought emerged three decades ago and brought forward the idea that there is not a single masculinity, but several. Inside the plurality of masculinities, some masculinities are awarded higher social status than others (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985). Several studies (e.g. Bird, 1996; Reigeluth & Addis, 2015; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford & Weaver, 2008) have examined how the differences in status, and the power dynamic between men, are manifested in all-male environments. This study aims to explore how non-hegemonic men experience masculinity and these homosocial male environments, both how they relate to them in the past, and how they relate to them today.

R.W. Connell (1995) expounded on the ideas of the plurality of masculinities, the power relations between them, and described the framework in which the different masculinities are at work. This framework is known as the masculine hegemony and describes a social and cultural ideal of masculinity that lends legitimacy to men's dominance over women, and over subordinate men (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men's power and dominance over other men is what Demetriou (2001) calls the internal hegemony. The masculine hegemony is, according to Connell (1995) a layered structure, with the hegemonic masculinity standing above complicit and subordinate masculinities. The hegemonic masculinity is set as an overarching norm, to which all men must stand in relation (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed set of traits or type of man, but is a certain configuration of behaviours that maintain men's power over women, and some men's power over other men (Connell, 1995). There are very few men who can truly embody the hegemonic ideal, so a large share of men enact a complicit masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The complicity in their masculinity comes from that the complicit masculinity reap the benefits of the patriarchal society, without actively vying for the social dominance by enacting a hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The men

that neither strive for the social dominance, nor are complicit in upholding the hierarchy, could be called non-hegemonic, or enacting what Connell (1995) calls subordinate masculinities.

The study “Precarious manhood” (Vandello, et al., 2008) tells that being a man is fraught with its own particular dangers. The study indicates that being a man, which is constructed through enacting masculine behaviours, is a precarious state: precarious in the way that it has to be won, but can also be lost (Vandello, et al., 2008). Being regarded as a man is not something one acquires as result of age or rite of passage, but something that constantly needs to be proved, and validated by other men (Kimmel, 1994; Vandello et al., 2008). Masculinity can therefore be regarded as a homosocial enactment, wherein a man’s masculinity is under the constant, watchful gaze of other men (Kimmel, 1994). Threatening someone’s masculinity by, for instance accusing another man of being effeminate or physically weak, is therefore a way to maintain the power dynamic: the status hierarchy within the male gender role (Vandello, et al., 2008).

Bird’s study “Welcome to the Men’s club” (1996) specified male homosocial contexts as a breeding ground for the masculine hegemony and how young boys are socialised to maintain men’s dominance over women and, more importantly for this study: subordinate masculinities. Homosociality refers to a non-sexual preference for the company of members of one’s own gender (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). A homosocial environment refers to any environment that is more or less exclusive to one gender, an example of which is same gender sports teams. Men’s dominance over other men is achieved through a discourse that delineates what is correct behaviour for a man, and what is regarded as a transgression of the masculine norms (Bird, 1996; Reigeluth & Addis, 2015). Bird (1996) found that the homosociality and the hegemonic power is created, recreated, and maintained through three tenets of discourse within the group: The first theme was Emotional detachment which was characterised by not being bothered by emotions, and that men should stay, as it were, the “strong and silent” archetype. The second theme was Competition wherein the men felt the urge and the expectation to compete with other men to define themselves, and their position within the group (Bird, 1996). The third theme was Objectification of women wherein women were “othered”, meaning they are not men, and therefore not included in the environment (Bird, 1996). Women were furthermore used as pawns in a play for social status among the men in the homosocial environment (Bird, 1996).

A recent interview study by Reigeluth and Addis (2015) examined how adolescent masculinity in the homosocial environment was regulated and upheld. The authors used the concept of ‘Policing of masculinity’, which refers to how non-masculine behaviours; e.g. showing weakness or exhibiting feminine interests or traits, are suppressed. This is done in order to make the group adhere to the standards set by the hegemonic masculinity (Reigeluth & Addis, 2015). This policing of masculinity is represented by a discourse wherein all non-masculine behaviours are subjected to various insults; e.g. misogynist, homophobic and/or targeted towards physical shortcomings (Reigeluth & Addis, 2015). Another theme the authors found was Status elevation and preservation wherein the members of the group used the policing of masculinity as means to claim a place in the internal status hierarchy. The authors viewed the policing of masculinity as a result of social learning, wherein the adolescent boys learned the policing by observing peers and their elders. Through this policing of masculinity and cultural expectations, the behaviour was internalised by the boys and the policing of gender was perpetuated (Reigeluth & Addis, 2015).

The rationale for choosing men and masculinity for the subject of this study was because of two primary reasons. Firstly: strong adherence to Masculine norms has been connected to

destructive and negative outcomes in regards to health, both physical and psychological (Wong, Ho, Wang & Miller, 2016). The internalised demands to conform to these norms can cause anxiety in men, and the emotional detachment inherent in the gender role makes them less prone to talk about problems, admit they are struggling, and thereby making it less likely that they will seek help (Wong, et al., 2016). Secondly: a greater insight into the dynamics between the hierarchical layout of masculinity gives a greater understanding how men, although privileged and in position of social power, can still feel powerless and disadvantaged in patriarchal society (Kaufman, 1999).

This study will focus on the experiences of men whose masculinities are not striving towards the hegemonic ideal, i.e. non-hegemonic. They have chosen to not adhere to the norms and standards set by the hegemonic ideal. This study aims to explore their experiences of homosocial environments, especially environments wherein the hegemonic ideal is the norm, and in large part, striven towards by other members of the group. While there have been several studies of masculinity in homosocial environments, these have been primarily focused on adolescents who are still in the process of creating their identity (e.g. Bird, 1996; Reigeluth & Addis, 2015; Vandello et al., 2008). This study however hopes to explore how the masculine discourse in homosocial environments is experienced by men whose identity is more stable.

The qualitative approach was chosen for this study because of the intricacies of the subject matter. Men and masculinity in a homosocial environment touches on many different fields of psychology including, but not limited to; identity, group dynamics, and gender. An interview study was therefore undertaken in the hope to delve deeper into the complexity and interconnectedness of the subject matter.

Method

Participants

The participants were in the age range of 26 and 45 years of age, and all identified their gender as male, when given the options of male, female, or other. They were all heterosexual and they had all studied at university level or equivalent further education. All of the participants were Swedish, and residents of major Swedish cities. Half of them were brought up elsewhere, in smaller towns and cities, and came to reside in a major city as adults.

In order to better understand the experiences of men with non-hegemonic masculinities, the recruitment of the participants was made through personal contacts. Six men were chosen specifically for their low adherence to the hegemonic masculinity, as perceived by themselves, or those close to them. The interviewees were also chosen because of their bisociality which, opposed to homosociality or heterosociality, includes non-sexual friendships with both men and women.

Procedure

An interview guide was constructed with aim of exploring four primary fields of inquiry. The four main questions were: “What does being a man mean to you?”, “Are there occasions

when you feel your masculinity has been brought into question?”, “How is the gender balance in your social circle?”, and “How do you view relations and interactions with other men?”. The questions spanned a wide field so several follow-up questions pertaining to the main question were added to focus and delineate the answers toward the subject of this study. The follow-up questions always included an element of time in order to better understand how participants’ attitudes, and behaviours had changed during the course of their lives. The interview guide was followed for the most part. There were however occasions when the participant forewent the guide in their statements, and the questions were therefore asked in a different order or omitted entirely.

The interviews were conducted either in the Department of Psychology at the University of Gothenburg or at the participants’ workplace. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner and were between 35 and 75 minutes in duration. They were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. A few inaudible words or phrases was marked as inaudible in the transcripts. Sentences containing inaudible words or phrases, were avoided in the analysis, to avoid misrepresentation of the participant’s statement. Both the interviews and the subsequent analysis were conducted in Swedish and all quotes appearing in this thesis have been translated into English. Great care was taken in the translation with an emphasis on staying true to their original statements. One of the participants was contacted after the interviews for a clarification of one statement. The clarification did however not change the initial understanding of the statement. All names attached to quotes have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Prior to the interview the participants were informed of their rights as participants in the study. A written consent form outlined the content of the questions, their right to abort the interview at any time or retract their participation even after the interview had been concluded, as well as a promise of confidentiality and anonymity. All of the participants consented to being interviewed, an audio-recording being made of it, and its use in this thesis. None have chosen to retract their participation nor been in contact to offer additional material to their participation.

Thematic analysis

There have been previous studies about masculinity and its expression in a homosocial environment, therefore a thematic analysis was undertaken to ascertain how the participants’ experiences corresponds with the current theories (Bird, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Reigeluth & Addis, 2015), as well as searching the data for new insights.

In undertaking the thematic analysis, a step-by-step guide on doing thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. The collected data was read, and reread numerous occasions in preparation for the thematic analysis. Extensive notes were taken, and the initial codes were created. The coding was targeted towards finding support for the previous research, with an openness towards finding new codes and themes. This was then broadened to a more inclusive coding. After the data had been coded and categorized, tentative themes were identified. The themes were then reviewed and organized. This led to some themes being absorbed into each other, or taking a place as a sub-theme.

Results

The thematic analysis resulted in two main themes regarding the non-hegemonic men's experiences of masculinity and the homosocial environment. The two main themes also contained subthemes (Table 1). The first main theme was Configurations of the laddish culture. This theme had three subthemes: Creating masculine homogeneity and consensus, Competition, Emotional restriction. The second main theme was Coping with the Laddish environment, which had three subthemes; Changing definitions of masculinity, Avoidance of the laddish environment, and Dynamic expression of masculinity.

Table 1.

Main theme	Subtheme
Configurations of the Laddish Culture	Creating masculine homogeneity and consensus
	Competition
	Emotional restriction
Coping with the Laddish Environment	Changing definitions of masculinity
	Avoidance of the laddish environment
	Dynamic expression of masculinity

Configurations of the Laddish Culture

All of the men have close friendships with other men and felt there was nothing necessarily negative about homosocial environments per se. There was however a specific kind of male homosocial interaction which five of the six men spoke of with dislike. This culture, as well as the behaviour within it, was described as "laddish", and was spoken of as something they all disliked and chose to avoid as often as they could. One of the men, reflected upon the dynamics of the Laddish homosocial environment, in which he found himself in his late teens, during his mandatory military service: "put only men together, make them socialise for a long time, then men will become what the children become on an island." (James, 45 yrs.). The quote is referring to the William Golding novel 'Lord of the flies', a story of how civility descends into savagery.

Creating masculine homogeneity and consensus. Most of the participants spoke of their adolescence, ages between 13-18 years of age, when they felt they had to be very aware of how they appeared to their peers. They felt the pressure to be like the others. All of the men spoke of being in a predominantly male social circle during this time. The interviews painted a picture of the laddish homosocial environment as place of a created consensus: all the boys were expected to adhere to the same norms and standards, and behave accordingly. "I'm aware that norms and standards, so to speak, even those I don't like, can sometimes be crucial to adapt to, so as not, at worst, get you into trouble" (Richard, 29 yrs.). The hegemonic ideals and the

expectations of masculine behaviour worked upon the adolescent boys and led them to internalise those expectations. One respondent spoke of never really feeling masculine enough, therefore increased the amount of his explicit masculinity, and thereby furthering the laddishness of the situation: “you create this thing but in fact everyone is walking around feeling the same thing: ‘Damn, I need to be more laddish, than I would like to be’, and the whole thing spirals” (James, 45 yrs.)

A majority of the respondents spoke of laddish culture that was strictly internally regulated. It was described as a culture of never showing any weakness, and therefore a culture of constant attack and defence. The men were wary of expressing any kind of weakness, as it would be capitalised upon by the other members of the group, and made into a point of attack. One respondent described this kind of intra-group bullying as having the nature of mob mentality where an exposed weakness in one member was set upon by all the other members:

Yeah, it's kinda like, I notice that I gain social respect in this group by throwing in a comment as well... but next time it falls on me instead. And that's like the way it works in a typically laddish group. - Edward, 26 yrs.

The maintenance of the discourse within the laddish homosocial group was also described as being derogatory of subordinate masculinities, women, and members of the LGBT-community. One respondent exemplified how his non-hegemonic behaviour was noted and questioned by other more laddish men: “Why are you like this?”, ‘Are you a feminist?’ It’s like a term of abuse, you know? Or perhaps. ‘Are you gay’, or whatever, ‘Are you a sissy?’” (Edward, 26 yrs.). What these other groups all have in common is that they are not masculine, and therefore break the homogeneity within the group.

Competition. One of the follow-up questions in the interview guide, regarding interactions between men, was if they felt there was a competitive element in the homosocial environment. Most of the men said that there was, and when asked what they competed about, one of the respondent replied: “Just everything. Just everything.” (William, 39 yrs.). The element of competition in the culture can be seen as an expression of the hierarchical nature of the hegemonic masculinity itself. A hierarchy is a relational construct, meaning that a high status is only possible by standing above those with lower status. The adolescent boys weighed their value against their peers in the group: “growing up as a guy, you know, it’s a competition from a very young age.” (Thomas, 26 yrs.). This sizing up other men in a competitive way, becomes a part of the masculine make-up and is still experienced today, by some of the participants.

As long as there is a ball somewhere, someone is going to try and see how many times they can kick the ball without it touching the ground, for some reason. Then and all of a sudden: everyone is supposed to see how many they can do – James, 45 yrs.

Emotional restriction. Most of the men spoke of the homosocial environment as being emotionally restrictive. They felt the homosocial discourse contained an expectation to adhere to a “strong and silent” archetype. One respondent felt, during his teenage years, that he was expected to bottle his emotions: “Until you explode: The classic.” (Thomas, 26 yrs.). Showing emotions was showing weakness, and showing weakness is not masculine and therefore

frowned upon. Talking about feelings or how one actually was feeling, and other emotionally charged topics were avoided. The men felt that those feelings were to be ignored, suppressed, and simply not spoken about. They had internalised the idea that emotional topics were more feminine, as most of the men mentioned how women, or girls, were raised to allow themselves to feel.

I think there is a difference in conditions: you're raised to where you, as a man, is expected to put aside feelings, or at least not showing them. And that leads to suppressing yourself a lot, while women are raised to 'Whoa! You're supposed to feel a lot, and that's okay: you're a girl.' – William, 39 yrs.

The emotional restriction also carried over into other types of emotionally charged behaviours. Caring and nurturing was also mentioned as effeminate and not a part of the male homosocial environment.

Coping with the Laddish Environment

Some of the men admitted to having been a part of the culture and engaged in creating the homogeneity and consensus regarding masculinity, as well as the competitive elements and emotional restriction, during their adolescence. In lack of any alternatives they took part in varying amounts of the so called laddish behaviour. One respondent noted “When I was growing up I bought into it, because it was all one knew. They were like my closest childhood friends. So I went along with it” (John, 29 yrs.). It was a culture and a discourse that the men were socialised into. It was, as he put it, “all one knew”. But as the men grew older, the perception towards the homosocial context changed. The reasons for this change in perception differed between the respondents, some cited a change of environment, such as leaving school, moving away from home, leaving their teenage social environment and in creating a new social sphere. The same respondent noted: “that went away with moving away. The laddish context” (John, 29 yrs.). Others credited romantic and/or non-romantic attachment to women, or an increased exposure to feminism and the LGBT-community, in which the content of gender roles are less traditional. One respondent described the cultural influence upon his view of masculinity, which showed him: “a different picture of a society where there isn't such a clear divide of what is masculine or feminine.” (James, 45 yrs.). The common ground between all the reasons the respondents gave implies that there was proliferation of alternative masculinities and environments to which the men's admittance and membership was not dependent on their masculine behaviour. The need to belong in the laddish environment, to engage in and maintain the laddish culture, seemed to lose its grip with the exposure to alternatives. In a sense, they felt more free to engage in, or create, a more hospitable homosocial context without destructive or excluding elements.

Changing Definitions of Masculinity. As boys and adolescents, the respondents held a more stereotypical view of masculinity and what they regarded as masculine, and/or manly. Included in the stereotype was being emotionally restricted, strong, physically as well as mentally, confident, and engaging in typically masculine behaviours such as football or tinkering with cars. Even though all of the respondents identified as men, they all said that they currently have little interest in living up to the norms and stereotypical behaviours associated

with masculinity. The respondents noted a change in their perception of and attitudes towards the contents of the masculine gender role during their adolescence and years of early adulthood.

I think that I, sometime during my teenage years, had a, what do you call it, a narrower perspective. I probably hadn't seen as many different ways in which you could be a man, so to speak. That there might be more than two genders, or ways to express one's gender. - Richard, 29 yrs.

Avoidance of the Laddish environment: There seems to have been a trade-off between the costs of adhering, and the benefits of the feeling of social belonging to the group. Several of the participants spoke of this weighing of cost and benefits as still prevalent when they come into contact with male homosocial environments. Today however they felt more secure in themselves, and in choosing friends who do not exhibit this laddishness: they were able to leave the laddish environments whenever they came across it.

In laddish environments, I'd rather just walk away. I have even pointed out that I don't appreciate where it is heading. Sometimes the person you tell listens, sometimes they don't. But I have at least spoken my mind – John, 29 yrs.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the men reiterating that they do not experience this kind of hierarchic layout among men in their relationship with their friends today. After the masculine identity became more settled, they could actively avoid the laddish context and choose friends with whom they were able to be less of the strong, silent archetype, without the fear of it being used against them: "I think it's a combination of; you grow out of it, but also that you through life, choose your friends" (James, 45 yrs.)

Dynamic expression of masculinity. Several of the men occasionally felt the pressure to conform in some homosocial environments. One respondent spoke of using more stereotypically masculine clothes to gain a more favourable position in the hierarchy: "that's somewhat of a trick, on my part... because I use it to blend in, even in the most laddish environments imaginable. And because of it, I get accepted immediately." (William, 39 yrs.). In a sense, they moderated their explicit masculinity to better fit into the prevailing gender schemas. One participant described how he initially adapts his masculine behaviour by gauging the expectations of masculine behaviour in a new environment.

I might go in being a little more [masculine] in the beginning and after a while, when i'm more relaxed, I will hopefully be able to show who I truly am. It might sound a bit manipulative but I think a lot [of men] work that way. - Edward, 26 yrs.

This could for example entail enacting a more stereotypical masculinity when approaching a new group of men, or act less stereotypically masculine when approaching a group of women. In a sense, they exhibited more, or less, masculinity depending on what was expected of them. One respondent spoke of being able to tell when the masculine behaviour was expected and inclusion in the environment was predicated on his masculinity. "Sometimes it's not okay, so to speak. So you acquire a kind of social competence within masculinity. Like adapting." (William, 39 yrs.). This social flexibility, or adaptability, seems to be dependent on the respondents' social skills and their ability to gauge the level of required masculinity for

inclusion. A couple of the men also mentioned that adapting to the environment was draining. It seemed that keeping up appearances took energy.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how non-hegemonic men experience masculinity and the homosocial male environment. This was undertaken as a means to understand both how they related to homosocial environments in the past, and how they relate to them today.

The first main theme found in the thematic analysis was Configurations of the laddish culture, which had three subthemes; Creating masculine homogeneity and consensus, Competition, and Emotional restriction.

The configurations of the laddish culture mirror the results of both Bird's (1996), and Reigeluth and Addis' (2015) studies. In regards to Creating masculine homogeneity and consensus, the participants of this study spoke of having internalised the cultural norms of what they saw as being a part of being a man. Much like in Reigeluth and Addis' study (2015), adhering to the norms of the group was vital to gaining and maintaining membership. Homogeneity and consensus seem to be important parts to differentiate the group from other groups, as well as maintaining the power dynamic between the hegemonic and subordinate masculinities within the group.

Competition, the battle for higher intragroup status, is very much in keeping with how Connell (1995) describes the hegemonic hierarchy. This competition could be about anything and everything. The example used, was seeing who could kick a ball the most amount of times without it touching the ground. When the participants spoke of those who were at the top of the social ladder, it was rarely the same person all the time. In some cases, it is not important to be on top, as long as one is not at the bottom (Bird, 1996; Pacholok, 2009). This lends credibility to Connell's theory that hegemonic masculinity is a configuration of practice (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In a sense, those boys or men who could enact the correct hegemonic behaviour were given the highest position in the hierarchy. This place was however not won completely, because the position had to be defended (Vandello, et al., 2008). Other men enacting a stronger or a better iteration of hegemonic masculinity could take their place (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Vandello, et al., 2008).

The norm to be emotionally restrictive has been found across many studies (e.g., Bird, 1996; Mahalik, et al. 2003) and is often cited as one of the primary differences between men and women. This study was no different and it offers a picture of how men suffer from it. The power dynamics within the male homosocial environment itself make the norms very hard to change. Non-hegemonic men are trapped in a kind of Catch 22. To change the discourse, one needs to talk about it. But to talk about it, is to break the rules, which diminishes one's social status and thereby damages one's chances to change the discourse. As Bird (1996) herself puts it: "Violations of the norms of hegemonic masculinity typically fail to produce alterations in the order; instead, they result in penalties to violators" (p. 130).

One possible reason for the configurations of the laddish culture could be that it is a result of gender role strain. Gender role strain was a theory put forth by Pleck (1995) to describe the stress individuals experience when they do not live up to the role requirements of their

gender. These requirements are what Pleck, Sonenstein and Hu (1993) referred to as the masculine ideology. The authors describes the masculine ideology as “beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behaviour” (Pleck et al. 1993, p. 12). The authors, much like Connell (1995) further adds that it is an ideal set incredibly high which men are unable to fulfill. Pleck argues that not living up to the ideal set, is a source of anxiety and has negative consequences on the individual's self-esteem (Pleck, et al., 1993; Pleck, 1995). This could be a reason why the participants “went along” with the laddishness during their adolescence, as adolescence has shown to be a time in life when self-esteem is relatively low (O’Malley & Bachman, 1983; Erol & Orth, 2011). When self-esteem is lacking, people can ease the stress of the gender role strain by being part of a high status social group, in this case, the male homosocial environment (Pleck, 1995, Reigeluth & Addis, 2015). This could also go some way to explain the precariousness of the male gender role. If we assume that the internal power dynamic within the group is a relational construct, and if one can not live up to the ideal, one can at least stand above someone else in the hierarchy, and by doing so, feel safer as a member.

The second theme was Coping with the laddish environment, with the subthemes of Changing definitions of masculinity, Avoiding the laddish environment, and Dynamic expression of masculinity.

The concept of Gender role strain (Pleck, 1995) is also applicable to the Changing definitions of masculinity. The hegemonic norm is, as mentioned previously, set incredibly high. According to Merriam Webster’s Dictionary (2016), a norm is “a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behaviour”. As men grow older they are exposed to more alternatives, both in terms of the contents of masculinity as a gender role, and environments in which they are more free to be less than the hegemonic ideal. In a sense, they have for themselves changed the norms by which the male homosocial environment is governed. In a study conducted on male cheerleaders, a classically feminine environment, the results showed that some men engaged in what the author calls Inclusive Masculinity (Anderson, 2005). This type of masculinity was less hierarchical, less homophobic, and less hostile towards non-masculine behaviours and traits. Anderson (2005) claims that inclusive masculinity is a result of the changing cultural perceptions of both women as well as members of the LGBT-community (Anderson, 2005; Anderson & McGuire, 2010). This is very much in keeping with the results of this study, where the non-hegemonic men described how perceptions of that which is not coded as traditionally masculine has changed. For example, through their relationships with women or the added exposure to the LGBT-community. Another qualitative study of masculinity lends some support that cultural and societal changes have lessened the precariousness of the male gender role (Dimuccio, Yost, Helweg-Larsen, 2016). This could be another sign that the old order of masculinity is beginning to change.

The second subtheme was Avoiding the laddish environment. This environment was described as a context in which the masculine norms were strong. Although the participants felt a need to be a part of the laddish environment as adolescents, they choose to leave and avoid the context as adults. As adolescents they felt the pressure to live up to those high ideals. This could yet again be an effect of gender role strain (Pleck, 1995). Several studies have found that self-esteem increases with age, especially during late adolescence and early adulthood (O’Malley & Bachman, 1983; Erol & Orth, 2011). Increased self-esteem could also be a factor in how non-hegemonic men were able to leave the laddish context, when the benefits to their

self-esteem of group membership were no longer worth the cost of the negative aspects of the laddish environment.

The Dynamic expression of masculinity, the way in which non-hegemonic men adapt their explicit masculinity to better fit into the the expectations of their environment, could be connected to the concept of self-monitoring of expressive behaviour. According to Snyder (1974), self-monitoring is a concept which proposes that some people are more aware of how they present themselves, and how they appear, than others. The participants in this study moderated their explicit masculine behaviour depending on the context, which means that they are aware of how they were expected to behave. This was done to ease their admission into certain groups or environments. The concept of self-monitoring is however shown to be connected to a stronger adherence to norms, but the question is if adherence to norms is more dependent on the context than the individual. The participant's also said that they no longer feel the need to adhere to the norms, which is behaviour connected to low self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974). Possibly the self-monitoring is only a factor when the situation requires adherence; e.g. for gaining admission to groups or environments. Another possible reason for their lack of self-monitoring later in life, is that they no longer need to be members of new groups and new environments to the same extent. They have greater self-esteem, their identity is more stable, and they have safety nets in the form of other non-hegemonic contexts to fall back on outside of the laddish environments. The greater question might be if the non-hegemonic men using a more dynamic expression of masculinity were more prone to self-monitor by nature, or had to learn it as a coping strategy in the homosocial laddish environment. More research might be needed to ascertain which came first.

The limitations of this study are that the sample size is small and there is also a limitation in the homogeneity of the sample. All the participants were white, they had attended further education, and were residents of a major city. The participants were recruited through personal contacts, which makes the selection more prone to bias. A further possible bias is that the men were selected partly through their self-professed low adherence to the masculine norms. There could be a social desirability bias at work when claiming not to adhere to the masculine norms, or not being part of the laddish culture. This might affect the external validity of the findings. The findings can hopefully be applicable to a certain subset of men, if not perhaps of men as a whole. There is also an inherent subjectivity in the analysis of the data. Seen with other eyes, the themes might very well have been different.

It would seem that the negative elements of the male homosocial environment is a place where much work is still to be done. Many adolescent non-hegemonic boys are still walking the tightrope between being true to one's self, and being included among peers. The participants in this study choose to leave laddish environments, which in turn makes the laddish group more homogenous. These groups run the risk of consisting exclusively of men who enjoy and thrive in the laddishness environment. This would mean letting a homophobic, misogynist, and hierarchical discourse run unchecked, thereby putting the men within these groups at further risk of the stress of gender role strain and other destructive aspects of the masculine hegemony.

It would be interesting to see further studies made on how the discourse among men, and especially adolescent males, could be changed into something more inclusive and less hostile. Furthermore, more studies are needed on the men who are the top of the social ladders: how they wield their social power, and how they could be influenced to set a more inclusive tone for the discourse within the group. However, as Dalberg-Acton (1907) noted: "Power tends to corrupt." (p. 504), and it is not common for those in positions of power to surrender it willingly. A better course might be to keep adding nuances of what is regarded as masculine. If

we keep adding more nuances to the spectrum of masculinity, there will be more alternative masculinities available. With a proliferation of alternatives, perhaps the layout will become less hierarchical, whereby the destructive discourse will lose its power over adolescent males. A new discourse could evolve that would not be determined on positions in the hegemonic hierarchy or belittlement of peers and marginalisation of non-hegemonic masculinities. This is something that should be implemented as early as possible, because leaving many teenage boys, who are trying to forge their identity, out to the wolves of the current laddish discourse, will put them at risk of either getting eaten, or socialised into yet another wolf. It leaves one to wonder what, in the end, would be most harmful for the boys who walk the tightrope: the fall, or staying on the line.

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