

Consuming Media, Making Men: Using Collective Memory Work To Understand Leisure and the Construction of Masculinity

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Abstract

Parents, educators, researchers and policymakers have sought to identify the root causes of male youth violence by looking at media's influence on young people. Grounded in social constructionism, this study uses collective memory work to explore that relationship. The findings are presented in terms of two levels of analysis: individual/micro messages and societal/macro messages and revealed that through media consumption, men actively constructed and maintained impressions of masculinity based on notions of heroism, violence, and 'macho' images. This process gave participants an opportunity to both solidify and challenge their own thinking in relation to what it means to be a man and is a first step toward demonstrating some of the "problems" associated with leisure contexts, media consumption and hegemonic masculinity.

KEYWORDS: Masculinity, violence, media, collective memory work

Introduction

Despite an abundance of transdisciplinary research about adolescence and youth development, we seem no closer to understanding male youth violence such as the school shootings in Littleton, Colorado or the murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming than we did 10 years ago. Parents, educators, researchers and policymakers have sought to identify the root causes of this violence by looking at three separate, but overlapping areas: access to handguns, parental influence/authority, and the media's influence on young people. Given that leisure has been identified as a central developmental context for young men and since they consume large quantities of media in their free time, an investigation on how

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media consumption can influence the ways in which young people construct their identities vis-à-vis gender socialization processes seems warranted. Therefore, the central purpose of this study was to explore the media consumption of young men to understand how they create and maintain masculinity. Despite more than 30 years of feminist advocacy for the eradication and/or alteration of rigidly defined gender roles, participants in this research project indicated that narrow roles and expectations of what it means to be a “man” and of “manhood” are still firmly entrenched in U.S. society. Using collective memory work (Haug, 1992), participants agreed that their earliest, individual memories of what it means to be a man were steeped in violent media representations of men and maleness. Finally, their collective analysis and theorizing led them to conclude that through media consumption, men actively construct and maintain impressions of masculinity based on notions of heroism, violence, and ‘macho’ images. In short, participants believed that the media was critical in the production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity.

Theoretical Framework

Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell (2002, 1995) described “masculinity” as those practices in which men (and sometimes women) engage male social gender roles with the effects being expressed through the body, personality, and culture. Culture, then, serves as both a cause and effect of masculine behavior, and in our western society masculinity has taken shape in relation to securing and maintaining dominance. The masculine power is balanced by the general symbolism of difference whereby the masculine is valued over the feminine. While masculinity is grounded in difference, it is not a static characteristic or personal identity trait. Instead masculinity is a fluid construct that is organized within social relations and ultimately changes those social relations. According to Connell (2005), masculinity is not just an object of knowledge but the interplay between the agency of the individual and the structure of the social institution.

By placing masculinity in a historical moment and cultural context, researchers examine how, at that moment, in that culture, the framework of patriarchy emphasizes the control of emotions and denial of sexuality around the construction of masculinity. As Humphries (1985) suggested, researchers “cannot take seriously the staple references to masculinity and instead develop our own images of how we want to be.” (p. 77). This argument contends that while there could be a variety of ways to perform masculinity, men often feel obligated, consciously or unconsciously, to perform masculinity in specific ways that are dependent upon the current cultural climate. These dominant ideological norms of masculinity are referred to as hegemonic masculinity.

What is hegemonic masculinity? According to Connell (2002, 1995), hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practices that embody the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and subordination of women. He describes how “terms such as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations” (1995, p.196). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is enacted in individual social interactions as well as conveyed through institutional practices (Connell, 1998).

Although hegemonic masculinity is not itself fixed, it is possible to identify some of its critical components in a specific culture and time period such as post-industrial America. Elucidating the features of hegemonic masculinity is a necessary starting point for any cultural analysis. This is not to say that these are the only features of post-industrial hegemonic masculinity; rather, it merely serves as a point of departure for later arguments. Hegemonic masculinity in this context manifests itself in a variety of social practices. A central feature

of hegemonic masculinity is its definition of masculinity as being “not-female” (Bird, 1996, p. 125). This concern with avoiding femininity manifests itself into practices that objectify, control, and abuse women (Bird, 1996; McCreary, 1994; Schultz, 2001), a reluctance to express emotions and a privileging of rationality.

Hegemonic masculinity is also constructed through the physicality associated with the body (Gershick & Miller, 2001). Body performances associated with hegemonic masculinity include the exercise of physical violence and heterosexual sexual activity (Connell, 2005, 1995). These practices associated with the body, particularly for young men, are often socially constructed as markers of “true manhood.” For example, competitive sports represent a major arena in which masculinity is performed (Kimmel, 1996; Messner, 2002, 1992; Whitson, 1990). Analyses of masculinity and critical analyses of hegemonic masculinity located in the sports sociology in the United States and United Kingdom have devoted extensive attention to examining sports as a context for the construction and maintenance of masculinity and hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2005; Bryson, 1987; Messner, 2002, 1998; Pronger, 1999). These researchers have articulated connections between sports contexts, episodes of aggression, socialization processes and the ways in which sporting contexts serve as a fertile training ground for the construction of masculinity and the construction of violent masculinity (Bryson). In addition to analyses that examine the ways in which representations of male athletes normalize violent masculinity, sports sociologists have also attended to the ways in which media representations of males and females contribute to gendered binaries and oppressive ideologies (Anderson & Dill, 2000). We have some understanding of the role of *sports* in contributing to the construction of masculinity, but little empirical evidence can be found that helps us to understand the effects of media consumption within leisure contexts that may also contribute to the construction of hegemonic masculinity and/or the construction of a violent masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity by its very nature has social authority, and is not easy to challenge openly. Those men who choose separation, or otherwise find themselves separated, from hegemonic masculinity face negative consequences that result from defying social norms (McCreary, 1994). Given that hegemonic masculinity is constructed in individual and institutional practices, it is important to consider the cultural texts through which the gender order is constructed, reified, and negotiated. Indeed, Ging (2005) conducted a study on masculinity and mediated images and found that “mediated fictions are part of wider ‘gender scripts’ that both inform and are informed by the social structures within which (male) viewers are immersed” (p. 29).

Mass Media as Leisure

Cultural texts such as television, film, books, magazines, music and video games not only exist for the purposes of providing pleasure in the context of leisure, but also have the capacity to impart information and understanding in relation to our gender identities through the transmission of cultural values and social norms. Johnson, Richmond & Kivel (2008) found that leisure is a site for the consumption of media by males that provides pleasure and at the same times serves as a site that reproduces masculinity. In an effort to be more critical of these meaning-making texts, feminist cultural scholars have scrutinized how they convey normative gender expectations (Dow, 1996; Walters, 1995). In particular, feminist cultural critics have explored the relationship women have to society as material, historical, and imaged beings; emphasizing how that relationship continues to reinforce patriarchal social relations and encourage domination and marginalization (c.f. Brunsdon, D’Acci, & Spigel, 1997). Stemming from this foundational work, many scholars have also begun to question how intertextual and sociological products offer opportunities for men to con-

struct meaning about masculinity in their lives (Clatterbaugh, 1998). According to a recent national poll, boys, are “active users of media, watching hours of television, movies, music videos, and sports, listening to radio and CDs, surfing the internet and playing computer and video games. Researchers have suggested that the cumulative impact of these media may make them some of the most influential forces in their lives, especially during adolescence. Despite these powerful findings, there is remarkably little research on media’s influence on boys” (Children Now, 1999, p. 4).

Violence, Mass Media & Masculinity

In April 2002, a 19-year old male, recently expelled from school, opened fire on teachers and students in his school, killing 18 people before killing himself. One spectator, who joined others in public mourning, was heard to say, “. . . Germany is America now” (Hooper, 2002, para. 23). Such a comment underscores the prevalence of violence generally and the proliferation of school-based youth on youth violence that has emerged in the past decade. Apart from school killings, there has also been an increase in murders committed by people who explicitly acknowledge the influence of media. In the same year of the school shooting addressed above, a 17-year-old French male stabbed a female while wearing a mask from the popular movie “Scream.” [In addition, more than 10 male teenagers have murdered friends and family members in North America and in Europe while wearing “Scream” masks or because of having watched the film numerous times (Webster, 2002).]

Parents, educators, researchers and policymakers have sought to identify the root causes of this violence by looking at three separate, but overlapping areas: access to handguns, parental influence and/or the lack of parental influence and authority; and the media’s influence on young people. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2002) noted that media violence can often lead to aggressive behavior in children. Over 1,000 studies confirm this link and one study indicates that “by the age of 18, the average American child will have viewed about 200,000 acts of violence on television alone” (Media Violence AAP Committee on Communications in Pediatrics, 1995, p.6). And though that is staggering, Anderson and Dill (2000) argued that the increasing construction of an active aggressive script in video games is more powerful at perpetuating violence than the passive violence experienced in viewing television or movies.

The causes and explanations of violence are complex and multi-layered and though various interests groups (e.g., National Rifle Association) have clung to their respective explanations for the violence, researchers and activists have articulated the link between the consumption of media products by young people and their attitudes toward issues such as sex and violence (c.f. American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995). Indeed, media analyst Jackson Katz (1995) argued that “increasingly, academics, community activists and politicians have been paying attention to the role of the mass media in producing, reproducing and legitimating this violence” (p. 133). And it is perhaps no surprise to learn that males are the primary consumers of these violent images (Children Now, 1999). “From rock and rap music and videos, Hollywood action films, professional and college sports, the culture produces a stream of images of violent, abusive men and promotes characteristics such as dominance, power and control as a means of establishing or maintaining manhood” (Katz & Jhally, 1999, p. E1).

Katz and Jhally (1999) made explicit the connection between school violence, the representation of violence in the media and the consumption of media as a mechanism for normalizing violence when they suggested that what the “school shootings reveal is not a crisis in youth culture, but a crisis in masculinity . . . the issue is not just violence in the media but the construction of violent masculinity as a cultural norm” (p. E1). So what role does the consumption of mass media play in creating a hegemonic violent masculinity?

Although the bulk of research on youth and adolescence in North America has focused on factors (e.g., biology, cognitive, social, affective) that contribute to development and identity formation, there has been a shift toward examining the contexts (e.g., family, school, peers, leisure) that contribute to identity development. In recent years, leisure has been identified as one of the central developmental contexts for young people and a central context for young people's socialization into various role identities (Caldwell, Kivel, Smith, & Hayes, 1998; Kivel, 1996; Kivel & Klieber, 2000; Johnson, 2000). Within the research literature about adolescent development and leisure, there are very few empirical investigations that explicitly address socialization processes around gender and none (apart from sport investigations) that exclusively examine masculinity.

While there has been an important shift in the research literature from viewing young people as a "problem" toward seeing young people as an "asset," the leisure research agenda still seems to focus on describing and explaining *individual* young people and their behaviors. Beginning in 1989, the Search Institute, a think tank focused on youth development, helped to make this conceptual research shift by identifying assets that youth possess and that can be supported by adults to help young people become resilient and to aid in their emotional development. In 1993, Heath & McLaughlin's groundbreaking work on identity and inner-city youth provided ethnographic data about the ways in which young people, especially those labeled "troubled youth" (i.e., those living in troubled communities and troubled families), can be engaged in processes that promote youth development.

Prior to this time, research on young people and adolescents had a decidedly pathological bent to it—focusing on the deficits of youth, "problem" youth and those who did not easily fit into societal expectations of how young people should be and behave (Griffin, 1997).

Even cohort analyses that describe, explain and attempt to predict individual behavior do little to help us understand how young people's identities are constructed ideologically through a variety of social contexts. Indeed, the events in Littleton, Colorado and Conyers, Georgia encourage us to "examine individual pathologies," but such an approach still "ignores larger social and historical forces" (Katz & Jhally, 1999, E1) that might help us to account for explaining *why* white young males are largely responsible for these episodes of violence. Michael Kimmel (2000) makes the problem clear when he stated, "we call it 'teen violence,' 'youth violence.' Just who do we think is doing it – girls? Imagine if the killers in schools in Littleton and Jonesboro were all black girls from poor families. The entire focus would be on race, class and gender. Yet the obvious fact that these school killers were all middle-class white boys seems to have escaped everyone's notice" (p. 7).

The literature in North American leisure sciences reveals very little in terms of identifying and understanding the role of leisure in producing and reinforcing masculinity, and does even less in terms of providing a critical lens for the examination of ideologies of masculinity and the violent manifestations of these ideologies. In leisure studies research we need to begin to, as Kimmel suggests, "find ways to reveal and challenge this ideology of masculinity, to disrupt the facile 'boys will be boys' model, and to erode boys' sense of entitlement. Because the reality is that this ideology of masculinity is the problem for both girls and boys" (2000, p. 7). Kimmel makes clear "why" we need to examine the connection between violence, the consumption of mass media and the construction of masculinity.

Given that leisure has been identified as a central developmental context for young people, and since they consume large quantities of media in their free time, an argument can be made that media consumption can influence the ways in which young people construct their identities vis-à-vis gender socialization processes. This is consistent with Katz' argument that "at any given time, individual as well as groups of men are engaged in an ongoing

process of creating and maintaining their own masculine identities" (1995, p. 135). Examining the relationship between leisure consumption and violence perpetrated by men is an issue that needs attention. This study is a first step toward understanding the role that media consumption as leisure plays in constructing masculinity for men.

Collective Memory Work

Grounded in social constructionism, we used collective memory work to explore the relationship between leisure, media consumption, and masculinity in young men. For purposes of this study we also chose to use a method that is consistent with the aims of participatory action research (cf. Kidd & Kral, 2005). Participatory Action Research (PAR) is used when researchers want to diminish the gap between the researcher and the researched and when the researchers want to invoke a method that relies on a "... worldview [that] sees human beings as co-creating their reality through participation: through their experience, their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action" (Reason, 1994, p. 324). According to Reason, PAR also emphasizes the "political aspects of knowledge production" and the primary task is "enlightenment and awakening" (p. 328).

Collective memory work allows participants to recall, examine and analyze their earliest memories and experiences within a broader, cultural context to see how their individual experiences link to collective, shared experiences of similar and/or different groups in society (Haug, 1992). Collective memory work is unique in that participants are involved in both the generation and analysis of data which is useful to the community knowledge-base and as a form of conscious raising for themselves as they engage in the process (Kidd & Kral, 2005).

Using semi-structured informal interviews within a focus group setting, the assumption of this method is that individual experiences are steeped in social and cultural ideologies that can only be processed and understood by closely examining individual experience within a collective context. This form of discourse analyses reveals how language is used to construct memories, experiences and identities (Haug, 1992). In fact, Lupton (1994) suggested that "memory is regarded as a cultural construction which operates beyond the individual level...[and] individual memories, drawn from everyday experiences rather than the 'significant social events' recorded by history, share similarities" (p. 668).

The process of involving participants in the collection and analysis of data is consistent with Participatory-Action Research, where "you get people affected by a problem together, figure out what is going on as a group, and then do something about it" (Kidd & Kral, 2005, p. 187.) In Collective Memory Work the *participants* use early memories to make sense of how, unconsciously and through the internalization of take-for-granted beliefs, they have created social and ideological dimensions of identity, including gender, race, sexual orientation and other socially relevant categories. Though Bilken (2004) cautions us that memory is a complex and problematic phenomenon that must not be taken for granted, we support Glover's (2004) assertion that "when talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they *are* revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past as it actually was, aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truth of our experiences" (p. 261), which can then be collectively analyzed.

Kivel & Pearce (1998) explained that participants serve as co-researchers and write stories about a specific issue or topic. Then, they participate in a process of collectively analyzing and constructing their interpretations of the stories which are based on their own personal memories and experiences. According to Haug (1992), a process of collective theorizing occurs through discussion and debate about individual memories and this process takes into account that memories will often be contested and contradicted.

Collective Memory Work differs from interviews, case-studies and focus groups because the process “allows people to evoke experiences and feelings without being specifically directed by an interviewer. The effect of some experiences may be at the level of the subconscious so that individuals would find it difficult to articulate them in a different interviewing situation” (Lupton, 1994, p. 682). Since participants are actively engaged in the process of providing, as well as analyzing the data, the conventional chasm between “researcher” and “researched” is diminished (Kidd & Kral, 2005).

As the data are generated, two levels of analysis take place; the collective analysis within the group and the systematic analysis with the author. The objective of both levels of analysis within collective memory work is to trace the socially generated modes of thinking and writing. For example, Oinas (1999) had her participants write about and discuss the menstruation process and how it was connected to realizing their individual womanhood. Consequently, collective memory work allows individuals to theorize about their own experiences and explore the “construction of identity using experience as the empirical basis for their [analysis]” (Ingleton, 1995, p. 323). Collective memory work demonstrates how “individual experience is in itself made possible through collective living, [as] groups rather than individuals discuss and write about their memories of experience” (Ingleton, 1995, p. 324).

Simultaneous Data Collection & Analysis

During the summer of 2001, a trained (male) facilitator conducted semi-structured, informal, focus group sessions with a sample of two African-American and 11 European-American men between 19 and 24 years old with an average age of 20. Participants were recruited via signs across campus, fliers distributed in classes and word of mouth. They were offered free pizza for each focus group session they attended. Eight of the men were students, two were secondary education teachers, one was a computer systems manager, one a caterer, and one a small business owner. The group of 13 men was divided into three smaller groups, two groups had four men and one group had five men. All of the participants attended the two sessions in their respective groups and each group met for approximately two hours on each occasion.

Prior to the first meeting, the men were asked to write a short story about their earliest memory of a media experience. The men were told to write their stories in the third person and to provide as much detail about their early memories as possible. The use of third person allows for more description and more detail and provides the author with some distance from the actual experience. This distance typically allows the author to construct the story more clearly and succinctly. The men were also instructed to keep the stories short, no more than one page, double spaced. No names were used in the stories and the authors had the choice whether or not to later reveal themselves to the group. Everyone wrote and brought a story to the meetings, but because the groups were time limited, each group had to decide which of the two stories would be analyzed and discussed within the group. Consensus was used for determining which stories would be read and discussed within each of the three groups.

At the group meeting the facilitator, using a theoretical guide, directed the men to explore the substance and the structure of each story (Haug, 1992). First the facilitator asked the group to come to a mutual agreement about the overall meaning of the story. Next, he led the group through a process of discourse analysis where the participants deconstructed the structure and content of the story. This process of deconstruction included underlining verbs, which represent the action of the story and circling adjectives, which represent the emotions of the narrator and others in the story (see Table 1 for an example). After the discourse analysis of the story was complete, the facilitator asked the group to once again

TABLE 1

Memory Work Facilitation Sheet

- 1. What is this story about—what does it mean?
- 2. What is the author’s theory on what it means to be a man? (Theory should be explained as a way of explaining a phenomenon)
- 3. After gaining consensus from the group on these two questions, the facilitator moves on to the literal interpretation of the text. Participants are now asked to underline verbs (actions) and circle adjectives (emotions).

Activity of the author (Verbs)	Emotions of the author (Adjectives)	Interests/Wishes of the author	Activity of others	Emotions of others	Interests/Wishes of others	Contradictions	Empty spaces/silences	Observations about the use of language

Once the group completes this list, the facilitator then asks these questions:

- 4. How has the author/narrator been created in the story?
- 5. How have others in the text been created in the story?
- 6. What does the story mean?
- 7. How can the author’s understanding of what it means to be a man through what he has learned from the media be applied to how boys are taught to be men in our society? What’s the larger message of the story beyond the author’s individual experience?

come to agreement about the meaning of the story. This means all members of the group are involved in the process of data construction and data analysis by taking apart the stories and reconstructing them.

Finally, the participants used the thinking and writing from all the stories analyzed to trace how, as men, they have been unknowingly influenced by the messages conveyed through various media. Due to time constraints, each group only accomplished the collective analysis of two stories in each group for a total analysis of six stories. Because all of the participants engaged in analysis and discussion of two stories in each of their groups and because the stories became collective interpretations, stories were not identified with individual men.

In an effort to capture this collective analysis, the male facilitator took fieldnotes during each focus group session. The fieldnotes served to document his observations, encounters, feelings, reactions, reflections and interactions in a rigorous and systematic way. In addition, following the advice of experienced fieldworkers (cf. Emmerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Spradley, 1980) the facilitator augmented his fieldnotes by maintaining a reflective journal after each focus group session. This journal interrogates the theoretical and methodological issues encountered in each session and provided examples and rationales for the decisions he made. The facilitator's written records served as an important source of data for advancing the men's analysis. Finally, a participant from each group was contacted following the study to verify the accuracy of the fieldnotes and to respond to the trustworthiness of his theoretical insights based on the session. The three participants who were interviewed were given pseudonyms: Charlie, Brian and Robert.

Findings and Discussion

Participants in this project were involved in a process of understanding the ways in which their experiences of an early memory of a media experience influenced how they came to understand themselves in terms of their gendered identities. The findings of memory work research are typically presented in terms of the narratives constructed by participants (Lupton, 1994; Mulvey, et al., 2000); and this study is no different. Participants were not interviewed separately, but the field researcher did contact one person from each of the three groups to see if they had any follow-up thoughts and/or comments following the focus group discussion. Three participants gave feedback and it is included in this section. In addition to what participants wrote and what the group collectively analyzed (every participant wrote a story, but each group could only analyze two stories due to time constraints); the only written data are the stories they wrote, what they spoke about during their group discussion, and the field researcher's notes. These notes provide a meta-analysis of the process of data collection and are extremely instructive in terms of contextualizing and better understanding the fuller meaning of the stories. The findings from the study are discussed in terms of the media that was consumed and the participants' analysis of the meaning of that media, vis-à-vis individual and social levels of analysis.

The media that were analyzed within the three groups included two popular films: "Willow" and "Top Gun;" one cartoon, "GI Joe;" one television sitcom, "Tour of Duty;" one sports show, the "World Wrestling Federation;" and two magazines, Penthouse and Playboy. What all but two of the media products have in common is that they are all centered on "male characters" and though most were fictional, one was not. However, the one that was not fictional centered on a fictionalized representation of hypermasculine "men" (World Wrestling Federation). And although the print media, Playboy and Penthouse, focused on the objectification of women, it also focused on advertising that targets men and articles that are primarily of interest to men.

When asked about the meaning of the stories, the participants concluded that their stories taught them that: a) men are conveyed as being the hero; b) men are capable of physical violence for noble reasons; c) men protect America; d) men want to be accepted as part of a gang (e.g. military personnel); e) the journey of adolescence to manhood is sex because sex is what adult men do; f) men fight each other over girls. The findings are presented in terms of the media products that participants consumed.

Willow and Acts of Heroism

The media Willow, GI Joe, Top Gun, Tour of Duty and the World Wrestling Federation were all constructed around “battles” and around villains and heroes; some of the shows focused on other issues as well, but essentially one of the main messages of these media, according to participants, was that men are heroes, that violence is acceptable if it is for a noble cause and being a hero and being strong will get you the “girl” in the end.

Bob’s memory of seeing the film “Willow” captured this sentiment. He wrote:

After his first day of seeing ‘Willow’ Bob continued to fantasize about being a hero, particularly a hero in medieval times. He would go outside and run through the yard, broom handle in hand, swinging at the air. He would pretend he was Mad Mardigan (the hero). He would fight all the bad guys and monsters outside then run into the house, up the stairs and into his room where he would save the girl and carry her back outside.

After reading this narrative, participants spent a great deal of time discussing the fact that men are portrayed as heroes and that men can be capable of physical violence for noble reasons. In their discussion of the film, “Willow,” participants spoke in great detail about what it means to be a hero and the role that men play in society in terms of being and becoming heroes. Table 2 outlines some of the collective responses of the group with regard to questions about the meaning of the story, the author’s theory about what it means to be a man, contradictions in the story, and the meaning of the story beyond the individual’s experience.

In terms of his notes on this memory work experience, the field researcher wrote:

One point that was never really discussed in great detail was whether or not being a hero is the best choice for men. They discussed a lot about the characteristics of a hero, the problems with it, but at the end, they affirmed that heroes are still present and desirable even though the roles have changed slightly (e.g. to be more responsible). This lack of consideration leads into a whole other debate on how this hero role portrayed by the media affects men views and treatment of women (Moore, 2001).

His comments seem to echo the participants’ discussion about the contradictions associated with being a hero. The “hero” is never really stable or secure, much like hegemonic masculinity, and men are expected “to do” more and more to secure their heroic status.

“Knowing is Half the Battle” – the GI Joe Cartoon

For another participant, GI Joe was the hero character with whom he identified. While GI Joe is referenced as a “hero,” the message of this memory and of the collective discussion focused on a different issue. The author of the story recalled with great detail that at the end of each GI Joe cartoon:

... there was a 30-second spot that showed young American males (read white) doing incredibly stupid things like hiding in old refrigerators, swimming during thunderstorms and playing in construction sites. The various GI Joe heroes would appear out of nowhere to very

TABLE 2—Willow

What is this story about?	What is the author's theory on what it means to be a man?	What are the contradictions?	What's the larger message of the story beyond the author's individual experience?
Being the good guy/hero	Men are dominant, women need to be rescued	Fantasizes about being loved for actions instead of performing actions to be loved	Kids wanting attention/role models and love
Attraction from opposite sex	Being a man means being a strong and valiant hero	Wants to be good for doing bad things	Fantasies aren't always attainable because of their inherent contradictions
Gender roles—for men (and women/damsel in distress)	Men are good looking	Wants to be hero without responsibility- This creates an endless cycle that always requires a new situation to still be viewed as a hero	Movie industry perpetuates the male ideal (of being heroic) by influencing boys to live up to that ideal
Women can't be the hero? (My note- the group agreed that women could be heroes, but in this movie, the hero was a male)	Being a man means being a hero; this includes being strong, brave, valiant, good looking, sexually virile, rebellious, independent, intellectual	Definition of hero is contradictory role- the endless cycle cancels out the possibility of being a hero to one person or cause always. (My note- The point the group was driving at seemed to be that a hero must continually perform extraordinary or heroic acts to continue to be viewed as a hero. This makes it difficult to maintain commitments or act with stability. A mention was made here by Ned about the trouble Odysseus had ruling the kingdom after returning from his epic battles and voyages.)	A hero must be willing to exhibit violence for a cause
Ideal man as strong/heroic/hero	Men are self-interested? (My note- The group pointed out the lead character from this movie was a thief at first, more interested in money than nobility)		
"Playing," being a kid, creative dramatic expression			
Man capable of physical violence, but only for noble reasons			
Frustration at not being hero			
Lasting impression of hero and violence			
Everyone desires to be Mad Mardigan (lead male role in movie), but no one wants to be bad guy			

TABLE 3—GI Joe

What is this story about?	What is the author's theory on what it means to be a man?	What are the contradictions?	What's the larger message of the story beyond the author's individual experience?
Guys fighting over girls Protecting America War where no one dies Learning a lesson (my note—The group then went on to discuss several of the lessons taught by GI Joe (not to play with downed wires, not to ingest rat poison) in a 30 second segment at the end of each show which ended with, “and now you know, and knowing is half the battle.”)	Men are tough, and sometimes obnoxious They carry weapons “Dominant” males (My note— the group discussed this as males being very controlling and in power because of their toughness and weapons) Men are rebellious and heroic Won't take no for an answer Guys are supposed to be macho, violent, and street-smart. Americans have bought into this as the ideal for masculinity.	GI Joe men are not like real men (macho, carry guns, never die) Not all kids are that dumb (referring to lessons at the end) Show is all males, no women involved (except Scarlet or Lady Jay)	Media portrays men as strong Evil characters are more interesting/cooler Cool to be “bad” Men like to display toughness Bad guys always fail/good always wins Guys create cool masculine nicknames

nicely and gently point out the mistakes being made. They always forgave the stupid youths immediately and the youth would always say, "Now we know, and the GI Joe character would inevitably reply, 'And knowing is half the battle."

Although the actual narrative noted above focuses on the lessons (the moral of the story) about being a "man" that are included at the end of each episode, Table 3 reveals that the collective analysis of this cartoon, much like the analysis of "Willow," focuses on the stereotypical messages associated with being a man (i.e., that men must be tough and heroic and macho and masculine).

Of all of the stories that were analyzed, the field researcher noted that this discussion was the most difficult. A few "Beavis and Butthead" jokes preceded discussion of this story and the field researcher, in his notes, wrote:

I did what I could to keep the group on track, but once they lost the ability to focus seriously on the topic, they didn't seem to really want to analyze the story deeply. Granted, some of the members of the group were giving thoughtful answers and a lot of what they discussed was interesting. I agree with some of this groups (sic) discussion on how men are taught to be resourceful, knowledgeable, and to impress women. Again, the theme of a hero was touched on, but not deeply explored. No discussion on how men are supposed to interact with or treat women, only that women are there and that we, as men, desire them or are for some reason supposed to impress them. Along with this, the authors (sic) interest of not being a "sissy" is taken into account. Something I observed from this session was that in order to be cool, liked by women, and to win, you have to exhibit the "macho" male characteristics (e.g. be tough, be rowdy/rebellious, fight a lot, etc.). Even though this group had a hard time taking the process seriously, they managed to hit on a few interesting subjects.

Using jokes and humor was a way to break the ice with one another. Perhaps the humor was also a mechanism for distancing themselves from the material they were discussing and from the narrow "scripts" and "expectations" of what it means to be a man in U.S. culture/society. To deviate from those scripts and expectations has the potential to threaten one's masculine identity, to lead one to being labeled a "sissy" and/or to position one for being targeted for other harassment, including violence.

Tour of Duty and Being a Member of the "Gang"

In their discussion and analysis of another military-based program, the television show, "Tour of Duty," the field researcher noted that this session was also characterized by a lot of joking and horsing around and that these participants were focused less on discussing and more on "getting through the process." The brevity of their analysis as seen in Table 4 is consistent with the field researcher's observation. Yet, what was a bit unique about this narrative and its author was that although it was the media product the author chose, he did not grow up with a television or newspapers in his home. Thus he only watched T.V. occasionally and only when at a friend's home. In this show, like GI Joe and Willow, a battle was the context and it involved heroes and villains. Unlike the analyses of other shows, participants focused their discussion on how this program helped the author/narrator learn how to "play." The narrator/author wrote:

He occasionally watched a television show about the Vietnam war called Tour of Duty, and this affected how he perceived the war experience. His group of friends had a neighborhood gang that modeled itself after a platoon. The "gang" built a fort in the woods and would run military maneuvers against the local high school featuring camouflage uniforms, water guns and radios. Everyone in the group had a specific role and the group worked as a team to

complete the “missions.” The fictionalized television account of the war affected his view of how the group should function and what a person’s role in a group should be. Each character on the show was important, but expendable. People on the show were often being killed or wounded in an accurate representation of the reality of war.

The collective analysis focused on the notion of being in a “gang” – that the platoon provided a model for how the narrator began to think about and construct his personal friendships and his understanding about the different roles that people “play” in war and in life. The participants articulated an awareness of the difference between “dying” in real war and “dying” in pretend war (See Table 4).

TABLE 4—Tour of Duty

What is this story about?	What is the author’s theory on what it means to be a man?	What are the contradictions?	What’s the larger message of the story beyond the author’s individual experience?
War/military Lack of television Person’s place in an army/team Desire to be accepted, “the gang”	It’s good to have a role within “the gang,” based on what he’s seen on TV	At the beginning of the story, says there is only a minor affect of the media, but actually there was a great deal of affect “Playing” at war: In war, you die; in “play” war, you don’t die	The author grew socially through interaction with friends (through play) who are all affected by the media No escape from the media

The field researcher’s notes for this narrative reveal a bit of frustration and disappointment. He wrote:

This session went all right, but again, a lot of joking and horsing around. I tried to keep it in check, but this group could just not take the process too seriously and seemed more interested in keeping it moving than discussing. I was disappointed because this story, about a boy with no TV or newspapers, offered a lot of room for discussion. Even though they could not take it seriously, this group did manage a few good points.

I think the points about wanting to belong to a group or be accepted are common to many young boys. Being without TV probably made it difficult for this boy to relate to his peers or teachers at times. No mention was ever made as to why he had no TV, but it seems like it used to cause him some anxiety. He would try to watch some TV at friends’ houses, but it seems he spent more time being imaginative. I think the point of how even though he didn’t have a TV, his play time revolved around acting out scenes from TV is a good indicator of the powerful affect the media has on influencing behaviors (Moore, 2001).

The field researcher’s observations about this particular narrator/author and the potential for his story to reveal more than it did captures some of the difficulty of relying solely on memory work narratives as the main source of data for a research study.

World Wrestling Federation – Learning How to Fight

While “Tour of Duty” was a source of role modeling for participants, so too, was their discussion and analysis of a story about two brothers watching an episode of the “World Wrestling Federation,” a show they were explicitly told to “not watch.”

He sat down on the couch opposite of his life-long hero. The older brother he'd always looked up to held the remote to the TV. He turned the channels so fast it was a wonder he could even tell which station was playing which program. There. The younger one took a moment to let his brain catch up with his eyes. What was this? Grown men jumping off of turnbuckles in their underwear and elbowing each other in the face? “Is this why he always wants to wrestle?” the little one thought to himself. He watched as his hero chanted and cheered for the man holding up the 2x4 and screaming “Hoooooooooooo!” “Who is that?” asked the younger one. “That’s Hacksaw Jim Duggan and he just pinned the Million Dollar Man.” Why these pompous names? Why does everyone have to refer to himself as the Million Dollar Man or as the Ravishing Rick Rude, or the Giant? Are these characteristics that only real men possess? Why do they have to fight all the time? He had seen the same thing in Bambi when the two bucks bout (sic) it out over the female. Then the stairs started creaking. He knew they were in trouble. Mom was coming down from the laundry room and she hated violence on TV. She came into the room and asked what they were watching. The younger one noticed his brother hesitating and preparing himself for an argument. “I told you not to watch the WWF. “Turn off that trash,” she said. The older one protested that it was his favorite show. “It shouldn’t even be on TV. You know that, especially with your little brother here. “Why don’t you go outside,” she said. After his final protest, he looked at the younger one and angrily called him outside. The younger one ran into the garage to get a 2 x 4 just in case.

In their discussion and analysis of this story, the participants focused on two primary aspects: the role modeling of the older brother and the importance of knowing how to “fight” well. Yet, they also note the irony of this show – it is a “real show” with “real men” who are “pretending” to fight and to be able to win you have to pretend to fight better than anyone. Table 5 captures some of the participants’ thoughts on this show.

The field researcher included a note in the research data section that participants also spoke a great deal about the idea of being a “real man” involved being handsome, having a “cool” name and being confident. In his field notes, he wrote:

This session went very well, even though I was nervous. . . By far the most diverse group, and the youngest. A couple of the guys were quieter but everyone spoke at some point. There was a definite point tonight, close to the end, when the group began to see the process unfold, that I could see understanding on their faces. It was a definite “a-ha!” moment.

The group’s discussion was also good, but limited. . . Their results tend[ed] to reflect a lot of the same things said in previous groups about what it means to be a man. [Essentially, they said] that men are strong, good looking, athletic, confident, fighters, the best at what they do, and have big egos. A good point was made about TV being a source for male role models, good or bad, that influences how boys learn to behave. I am definitely beginning to see a pattern developing here in relation to the way men perceive themselves and the way the media portrays men. A question that arose in my mind to clarify this relationship would have been to ask these men how they perceived themselves as men, or what being a man meant to them. Overall, there is a connection in how men draw meaning of what it means to be a man at a young age from what they experience in the media.

There is a pattern in terms of the media that participants viewed. The bulk of the media that they consumed focused on violence, battles, heroes and war. The last “watchable” media product was the film, “Top Gun.”

TABLE 5—World Wrestling Federation

What is this story about?	What is the author's theory on what it means to be a man?	What are the contradictions?	What's the larger message of the story beyond the author's individual experience?
<p>A brother doing something with older brother he looks up to and gets caught by mom</p> <p>Learning something new (wrestling)</p> <p>A model of how he's supposed to act when he gets older</p>	<p>The author is looking up to his older brother, have to do what he does (role model) which is watch wrestling</p> <p>To be a real/ideal man, you have to be able to fight well</p> <p>You have to have the whole package to be a man (flashy names of the wrestlers) (Researcher's note: Here the group discussed the whole package to be strong, good looking, confident, cocky, have a cool name, just like the wrestlers on TV)</p> <p>Men must be confident</p> <p>Men almost have to be egotistical</p>	<p>The author doesn't understand why you have to fight, doesn't want to fight either, but then gets a 2 x 4 just in case</p> <p>Instead of watching WWF (because of mom) they will go outside and act it out</p> <p>Wrestling is not real</p>	<p>When people are younger, look at everything and try to find meaning. The author looked at his brother and wrestlers trying to learn how to act, but when he looks back on it, realizes it was just entertainment</p> <p>Manhood created by culture. Our concept of manhood is influenced by role models, good or bad (especially wrestlers- author wanted to be strong)</p> <p>This concept gives us the impression of what it means to be the ideal man (strong, athletic, good looking)</p>

Negotiating Emotion Through “Top Gun”

This film, a film which focuses on a friendship between two fighter pilots, one of whom dies, elicited mixed feelings from the narrator/author as he used this memory to understand how a man should negotiate the emotions of grief and sadness in the context of violence. He wrote,

A father and his son were watching a movie on television. The movie was Top Gun. The son had never seen this movie before. He was excited to watch the movie with his father. The son frequently asked his father questions throughout the movie because he was a curious kid and often just asked questions for the sake of asking them. The son remembered his dad telling him to just watch the movie and he will see what was going to happen. The son remembered feeling excited as he watched the planes being flown in the movie. He had some model planes of his own in his room that he had put together with his father. The movie created both exciting feelings and sad feelings for the son. He remembered feeling really sad when the main actor's friend died in one of the planes when he was unsuccessful in ejecting out of the plane. The son didn't want the friend to die and felt the sadness that the main character felt. The son remembered the need for the main character to get over his sadness and loss of his friend in order to continue on. The main character's friends and flying partners needed him to overcome his grief and complete a task. The task was to fight against the enemy in his fighter jet. The son desperately wanted the main character to overcome his grief and get back into the state that he had appeared at the beginning of the movie. The son was finally relieved when the main character became the hero of the movie. He was glad to see that the good guys won the battle in the sky. The son was so happy to see that the main character and the lady he was seeing got back together at the end of the movie. Finally, the son felt that he could relate to the very end of the movie when the main character expressed his way of getting past his friend's death.

Collectively, the group focused less on earlier themes of “heroism” and physical violence and more on issues related to feeling and emotion; and how men are taught to negotiate feelings around loss. Table 6 includes participants' thoughts about the meaning of this story.

TABLE 6—Top Gun

What is this story about?	What is the author's theory on what it means to be a man?	What are the contradictions?	What's the larger message of the story beyond the author's individual experience?
How you can indirectly overcome grief through watching the actions of the characters. Quality time of father and son Learning that there are rough times in life and learning how to deal with it. Good guys win over bad	Men have to roll with the punches, can't let things get you down. Men have certain responsibilities that have to be accomplished no matter what you're feeling. Responsibility to overcome obstacles Spend time with your kids Having grief/crying is acceptable	Says he can relate to grief, but author doesn't mention personal grief/losses	In order to be a better man/grow up/be successful, you have to experience grief and overcome struggle Death is a part of life Learning from other people's experience to create your own meanings and apply them.

In his notes, the field researcher noted that although participants spoke about how they felt, they also believed that they needed to “get on with life and get on with work”—a dominant message in U.S. culture about what it means to be a man. In his notes, he wrote:

Good session tonight...I thought this was a good story to examine and since everyone in the room had seen the movie, I think they had an easier time conceptualizing what the movie said about what it means to be a man.

...The role of the media in addressing issues of grief was new, and I thought it was interesting that the group thought the media teaches us to get over it and get on with life. They mentioned that men have responsibility and that even though it's all right to express grief/cry, men have jobs to do. Also, the theme of television providing role models for children arose again (from first meeting with this group, wrestlers as role models). This suggests that kids are curious and impressionable and that the media offers a place to find appropriate role models. It's become quite clear that the media affects how men come to view themselves and what it means to be a man.

Awakening Sexuality Through Penthouse and Playboy

Five of the six stories identified, discussed and analyzed focused on physical violence, heroism, noble acts of violence to get the “girl” and the ongoing battle between good and evil. Only one of the stories focused on the narrator/author's sexual awakening. One author wrote a story that seemed to resonate with all of the men in his group. He wrote,

The house was rumored to be haunted. It was the middle of summer and newspapers from the 1940's littered the floor like yellowed tile. A dense mat of ivy blocked most of the sunlight that found its way to the windows and the boy sweated profusely. Somewhere around the age of ten, bravado did not yet fit him and he made slow going of the walk from the entrance hall into the darker recesses of the house, thrashing about while every time a fly so much as grazed his sweaty neck. He came into the kitchen and stopped upon seeing the brown paper bag. Almost overflowing with no less than 57 issues of Playboy and Penthouse, the bag was the stuff of neighborhood legend, a treasure and a jackpot for the anatomically ignorant. The boy and his friends spent the afternoon unsheltered from the glaring late-July sun and stifling humidity. They sat happily on the ground in the old house's backyard swapping issue after issue until they had each flipped through all 57 [issues]. The articles were not read. By dinnertime they divided the booty and agreed to trade issues every couple weeks. The boy headed home and stashed his mags in the woods alongside his house. That night he brought them in and, although he had yet to produce any of his own seed, discovered masturbation nonetheless. Over the next few months he became so familiar with the shapes and features of the women in the pictures that they remained fixed in his memory for years, and after that their presence remained as sensual abstractions and *deja-vu*. The boy had never given any thought to the distinction between what he was and what he would become. Even in the months and years after his discovery, his perspective remained firmly fixed in the present and harbored only the vaguest notions of exactly why he wasn't supposed see the things he was seeing.

For this narrator/author, the earliest memory of seeing a media product that influenced his understanding of what it meant to become a man was connected to issues of sex and sexuality—with oneself and with others. The collective discussed an important contradiction in his story, namely that one “can't have sex without being a man, [and one] can't be a man without having sex.” Table 7 includes other key points of their discussion, most of which focus on the link between sexuality and manhood:

TABLE 7—Penthouse and Playboy

What is this story about?	What is the author's theory on what it means to be a man?	What are the contradictions?	What's the larger message of the story beyond the author's individual experience?
Sex is the underlying pillar that supports author's conception of manhood. Journey of adolescence to manhood- sex Sex is what adults (men) do	Can't have sex without being a man, can't be a man without having sex	Becoming a man is an individual phenomenon in this society, no one else can give it to you, but another person is needed (sex), in the individualization of becoming a man. Researcher's note: I think what they're saying is that no one gives you much guidance about sex and the differences between men and women when you're young, therefore it is individualized. Boys are left to draw meanings from their surroundings, even if this includes magazines such as Playboy and Penthouse. But part of becoming a man is reaching the point where you engage in sexual relationships, where another person is needed. I would say that becoming a man is individualized until you engage in sexual relationships with another person and then have them to share knowledge with.	As you grow, physically and mentally, from adolescence, you begin to change your view: 1. Adolescence- physical (desire big breasts), 2. Early Adult- emotional connection, 3. Middle Age- stability, 4. Old age- physical again

The field researcher noted that this particular session went very well. He wrote:

This group went extremely well, I really enjoyed the story they chose. Although some of the language used in this story is analytical, I was glad someone chose to write so candidly about their early experiences with sex/masturbation. Similarly, I'm glad the group was able to discuss such issues maturely. I agree with the point raised that becoming a man is individualized for every man. We are products of our environments and the many different things influencing our conceptions of what it means to be a man are different for everyone. . . . What was not discussed in this session was how the author came to view women. Are they simply objects of desire that support his sense of "sex operating like a pillar to support his conceptions of manhood," or does he attribute more to women than sexual interest?

The field researcher makes an important point—in this story as well as in the others, the memories of the media products are devoid of the presence of women except as an "object" to be rescued and/or as an "object" to be desired. The participants' earliest memories of what it means to be a man are framed largely in terms of men "doing" something—fighting, saving the day, being heroic, etc.

Societal/Macro-Analysis

After analyzing the individual meanings of their stories, the analysis moved on to link the themes of individual experiences to the broader social/cultural issues of gender socialization. In this case, participants began to analyze *across* stories to develop theoretical explanations of the relationship between media and masculinity. The men's conclusions reflected broader theories that: a) movies perpetuate ideals of heroism and that men are strong (physically and emotionally); b) heroes can legitimately use violence for a cause; c) men define themselves in terms of sexual relationships; d) heroes are sexually desired by women; e) boys are taught to be resourceful, impress women, be knowledgeable and merciless in activities such as sports; f) boys look to media and friends as role models; g) to be a real/ideal man you have to be able to fight well; h) manhood is created by culture, and influenced by role models; i) Hollywood creates roles for women and men; j) in order to be a better man/grow up/be successful, you have to experience grief and overcome struggle and even while experiencing grief, one must maintain a macho image. Table 8 illustrates the messages that boys are taught about what it means to be a man across all of the media consumed by the narrators/authors.

Memory work involves analysis of data created by participants and it also involves the process of collectively engaging in analysis and discussion of stories. The field researcher also had a chance to interview some of the participants about their experiences of being a member of the collective. Three men, one from each of the three groups, volunteered to be interviewed and their responses indicated that they believed the experience to be worthwhile and that they believed that their memories were influential in terms of their identity formation as young boys who became men. Memory work is about uncovering ideologies that influence how individuals see themselves, their relationship with others and the world. Charlie captured the sentiments of the three participants when he said that this method got him thinking differently about his memories: "I think it's a really interesting way to interpret memories, thoughts, and feelings. Once you got into the process it opened up new avenues and ways to think about the memories. And then at the end, you've completed this cycle and look at the memory in a whole new way." And Brian appreciated the "voice" that he had in the research process—"It was unlike any research I've been in before. I've participated in a couple of projects in the psychology department and it's nothing like that. I felt I had more of a say in what was going on. It was neat looking at people's memories and trying to figure out what they really meant."

TABLE 8—Collective Analysis

How can the authors' understanding of what it means to be a man through what he has learned from the media be applied to how boys are taught to be men in our society?	
Willow Boys are taught to get girl, have kids, live up to the ideal Boy are taught to be macho It is possible to communicate these ideals without the violence through actions that demonstrate the need for responsibility in a hero. If you want to be the hero without violence, be responsible You can communicate these ideals without media; better communicated person to person.	
GI Joe Boys are taught to be resourceful (e.g. boy scouts) Boy are taught to be merciless (sports_ Boys are taught to be organized Boys are taught to impress women Boys are taught to be knowledgeable	
Tour of Duty Television, as well as friends, has a major impact on how boys are taught to be men. Boys look to media and friends as role models	
World Wrestling Federation Sports in general teach men to strive to be the best, to be a team player, to be competitive; all things we carry through life we're taught at a young age Role models, good or bad, do create images that are glorified (either in sports, TV, movies); These images influence our concept of manhood, especially kids because kids are so impressionable (Researcher's note: Brent relayed the following recent experience to illustrate this point) Li'l Bow-wow (hip hop artist) sings a song from the current movie "Hardball." In the video for the song, Li'l Bow-wow has a black stripe of sun reflecting paint under just one eye. At the movie here in town, all the kids had one black stripe painted under an eye. Age of yourself or role model doesn't matter, you can have role models at any age Men are definitely impressionable; we think of women being impressionable (fashion magazines) and not us. Not true. We like to think of ourselves as independent, but the fact is we're not.	
Top Gun Boys are taught that even while experiencing grief, maintain a macho image and they are taught to roll with the punches; get over it Guys are taught too much to go and get it (either girls, the bad guys, whatever) while girls are not Good guys win Although not taught it, kids look to Hollywood (TV, movies) for examples on how to act.	
Penthouse and Playboy Men are taught to sow your oats. Having sex means being an adult, take on more responsibilities.	

Conclusions

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the media consumption of young men to understand how they create and maintain their masculinity. Ultimately, the findings from these stories confirm what researchers of masculinity and media consumption have argued—that there is a connection between media consumption and identity construction (Ging, 2005; Johnson, Richmond & Kivel, 2008).

Further, researchers such as Anderson (2005), Bryson (1987), Messner (1998), Pronger (1999), have argued the existence of a link between sports contexts, socialization processes and the construction of masculinity. Clearly, both sports and media contexts are fertile ground for not only constructing and maintaining masculinity, but are also critical contexts for reproducing hegemonic masculinity as well. What these stories collectively reveal is the power of media to influence how these young men have not only identified with characters and actions of the media they consumed, but also how this media helped to shape how they came to see themselves, their relationships with others and the world. They told their stories and articulated the ways in which they felt connected to other males who shared their experiences. The power of memory work rests with its ability to help individuals articulate how they have been constructed in terms of an ideological marker of identity, in this case the construction of gender, specifically, masculinity. Such findings also reveal the power of collective memory work as a tool for uncovering the ways in which people are individually and collectively constructed vis-à-vis powerful ideologies (Haug, 1992; Johnson, Richmond & Kivel, 2008; Lupton, 1994).

In the process of talking with other males about their experiences, the participants also gained awareness of the extent to which they have been influenced by a media product within a leisure context. Using collective memory work, the participants illustrated a distinct difference between the individual/micro-analysis and the societal/macro analysis of masculine gender socialization. What does the story mean (the first question posed to the groups) led participants to *merely describe* societal expectations of men and manhood. However, after a larger scope of analysis, their comments became more explanatory from a critical cultural perspective than the initial hegemonic descriptions that were offered in their micro-analysis. This process gave participants an opportunity to both solidify and challenge their own hegemonic thinking in relation to what it means to be a man. Recognizing and acknowledging that gender identity is socially constructed and facilitated through various leisure contexts, including the media, is a first step in demonstrating the problems with “traditional” notions of masculinity. The participants in this research were not passive recipients of these media messages but used them to negotiate their transition into adulthood and masculinity.

These findings are consistent with the research on hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2002, 1995) and hegemonic masculinity and media consumption (Ging, 2005; Johnson, Richmond & Kivel, 2008). The bulk of research literature on hegemonic masculinity suggests that hegemony is never secure and although sites such as sports (e.g., Messner, 1998; Pronger, 1999) and the media (Katz, 1995, Katz and Jhally, 1999) serve to produce and reproduce ideologies based on gender such sites are also used by young men to negotiate their identities.

Recognizing that the production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity is a process, albeit one that usually operates at a subconscious ideological level, is important especially as it is communicated vis-à-vis leisure. Ging (2005) found that although viewers and consumers of media bring “different sets of tools and value systems to the texts they consume, these are unlikely to produce liberating or empowering pleasures unless they enable audiences to recognize and deconstruct dominant ideologies of gender” (p. 48). In the

literature on masculinity and sports and masculinity and media consumption, it is clear that these leisure contexts are also important in terms of identity formation and clearly, and the process of deconstructing and reconstructing experience requires us to examine hegemonic discourses around essentialized categories of identity is pivotal. This idea that all identities are contingent and historically and socially produced may lead to destabilizing assumptions about the 'true nature' of identity. Traditionally (or historically), from a leisure studies perspective, individuals have been seen as having 'essential' aspects of identity and subsequently scholars pursue strategies that suggest we can uncover the elusive essence of individuals and their leisure experiences. Instead, similar to Johnson, Kivel, Richmond (2008), we have demonstrated that that vis-à-vis leisure the meanings of masculinity are both defined and contested throughout society in both collective action and personal practice.

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