

**Research question 1 = *why did you join your men's group?***

**→ Analysis ↓**

**→ *What caused/ causes participants to join/ attend their men's group?***

### **Final and Original Cause: IRISH CULTURE**

Irish culture emerged clearly at the end of the causal chain in respect of the decision for men to attend men's groups. There are two aspects to this concept and the relevance of its emergence: the 'nature' of participants and the culture they were born, raised and developed in:

1. Reflective generally of the overall membership of participating men's groups, research participants are overwhelmingly Irish 'born and bred' as also are their parents, grandparents etc. This is significant since participants conceptualise their attendance at men's groups as something of an intergenerational endeavour (see below).
2. Without exception, elements conceptualised as particular to – or closely connected to - Irish cultural life, emerged through analysis at the end of the causal chain leading to participants joining one of the featured men's groups. Many of these elements interact and merge with each other - and participants - in complex ways and so for coherence they will be described and illustrated with reference to figure 1 and the provision of supporting data. Fleshing out of this complex concept – and others – with respect to relevant aspects of this research will take place in further chapters.

Sub concept 1, *The land*. Although this study is based in the city of Dublin (as are research participants and participating groups), a minority of participants originate from rural parts of the island, invariable poorer areas in terms of soil quality and land ownership (midlands and

western areas). Poor land was associated with various physical and psychological challenges that impacted on participants. John (aged 44) states:

*[we lived by] a philosophy of survival..we did whatever it took..whatever needed..whatever needed to be done, I was capable of doin it.....so....and that carries me today..that fear or survival instinct is..is embedded in me*

Larry's father was (and is) similarly driven by a fear of weakness and an obsession for physical survival. Larry (aged 43) connects this attitude to 'the land', on the one hand, and on the other, to aspects of his development:

*my parents both came from farming backgrounds in, yeknow..back in those days..like, yeknow..certainly a generation beforehand..like, unless you were physically fairly sturdy, there was a fair chance you'd come a cropper at some stage*

As a young boy Larry learned quickly that his father "put a person's physical attributes above any other aspect of the person" and that "sporting achievement and physical perfection was the big value thing..up there for him". Such an attitude resulted in survival and 'success' for Larry's father – ultimately in the form of an All-Ireland medal – but similar success eluded Larry, at least in his younger years. To this day Larry feels a failure 'in his father's eyes', and it is largely for this reason that he is a regular attender at a men's group.

An inordinate focus on 'survival' similarly impacted Andrew (aged 38) as a young boy and adolescent. Andrew's parents took over the farm of his maternal grandmother when she became unwell. Andrew describes the predominant features of his early childhood:

*they [his parents] really worked unbelievably hard like, fucking ridiculous hours an it was all te build a life..for us..but..when I look back on it, ye never really..there was never any time..there was no nurture really (laughs) it was survivin, like..fuckin (laughs) just surviving*

Sub concept 2, *Housing*. Among participants with deep roots in the city, the historic Dublin tenements emerged as relevant to – and a root cause of - their attendance at men's groups. Similar to the cultural element discussed above, the tenements were of poor quality,

impacting directly and indirectly on the physical and emotional development of families.

Noel states:

*my mother was from the tenements..really fuckin dirt poor but my mother is fix..she had a shame about being poor*

When Noel's mother was young, she experienced the death of her father and her mother suffering a serious stroke. Despite moving out of the tenements later when she got married, poverty, shame, and fear, followed Noel's mother and were dominant themes in the home that Noel grew up in:

*I always remember eh..kindef feelin this shame about not havin money, right..and also feeling ashamed about not being entitled te anything*

In time, these early experiences impacted Noel (aged 48) and relationships with others, causing tension and stress. As example of this is how, although in a secure and well paid job today - in one of Irelands most respected companies - he nevertheless experiences anxiety and insecurity over money:

*an I still have that shame about, eh..not havin..not havin enough..now, it's not te do with money because I'm not inte stuff..right..but even when I get paid now..I'm workin out how much we have each day te spend on groceries..and..will we have enough..and..it's in my head all the time*

Padraig's father was also born in the tenements and similarly exhibited a fear, shame and preoccupation with poverty and finance that seemed more of a legacy issue than one justified by an objective view of reality – Padraig's father was employed by the civil service from an early age. Padraig (49) remembers a childhood dominated by a controlling and vigilant father, punishing his children severely for mistakes, especially when these led to 'waste' or a financial cost. He also put enormous pressure on his children to succeed academically and to be 'self-sufficient' in all matters for fear of "ending up on the scrapheap". Padraig completed some research into his father's background which further reinforced the tenements – and tenement life - as a source of serious family distress.

*my grandmother was a child of the tenements..she was three when her mother died and they were all put in the orphanage..her youngest brother is down as 'suffering*

*from neglect'..they were split up and she never had a relationship with her siblings again*

*note: Appendix 6.7 contains a copy of the Padraig's grandmother's Orphanage admittance form that provides additional information relevant to 'culture'*

Following the collapse of some tenement buildings in the 1950s, the newly born Irish state began building alternative, mostly on the outskirts of the city, but also within the city boundaries. However, tenement culture – or perceived culture – meant that these changes did not always signal a marked improvement for residents. Consequently, Freddie's parents moved from the tenements to one of these new 'flats' developments and raised a family of nine children. Freddie (aged 49) recounts how

*I came from a flats complex, right and there was a..there was a wall around it..that separated it from the houses..it would've been probably..probably a good seven or eight foot..when these places were..were created, I would think they were created out of an oppression, em..model*

Growing up Freddie perceived that those within the walls were inferior to those beyond the walls: a perception that he believes existed generally. Most significantly for him, this perception manifested itself in terms of employment and employability:

*there was always that level of..us and them, yeknow..there was always that level that, yeknow..people came from a house..they were more wealthier and..and they were in a better position than us in regards te jobs because they didn't come from flats..they came from a house..so..so, you're more likely te get a job because of that basis.*

Freddie experienced prolonged periods of unemployment, drug abuse and incarceration during his adolescence and adulthood. His recovery from drug abuse eventually included attending one of the groups involved in this research as well as a 12 step programme and participation in yoga. While he has largely come to terms with being at the receiving end of a housing 'oppression model' in his formative years, a recent experience during Ireland's

latest period of 'austerity', has awoken a subjective sense of oppression, powerlessness and rage:

*my experience over the last few months, is that if I hadn't got yoga, meditation and a programme, I would..I would nearly be committing murder..that's like..I know there's a rage in me, right..that, I can understand why people do it..yeknowhaimean and that's horrific on some level, yeknowhaimean*

Sub concept 3, *Education*. Many participants identified the educational system they encountered as young boys and adolescents as central to their later decision to enter men's groups. Derek feels that in terms of preparing him for life, he was let down by this system:

*I had a terrible time when I was young with the Christian Brothers..now, yesee, that's my pain in there yeknowhaimean..that's my..that was my harshness, if you..if you're lookin for the harsh side of my life that..that comes from there deknowhaimean..and the loss of an education in there..because I wasn't educated by them..like, they spent most of their day verbally abusing ye..because ye weren't on the pickup..maybe..quickly..deknowhaimean..my anger comes from there..a lot of that yeknowhaimean..yeknow..I mean..you're..you're given responsibility te educate kids and..yeknow, kids are hard te educate sometimes..they can be little fuckers deknowhaimean..but..it's a huge responsibility..and you've got to do the best ye can wit..wit yeknow..but te just go straight in there and not even try yeknow..yeknow..it's..it's a fuckin crime like*

This loss resulted in Derek (aged 50) leaving school early with little qualifications and low self-esteem, as well as low confidence in his abilities. He ended up in a low grade job that he hated and eventually suffered periods of depression and suicidal ideation. These periods were the catalyst for his discovering and joining a men's group and a determination to regain what was lost all those years ago.

Gerry (aged 60) also described being failed – and harmed – by his educational experience, particularly by the level of violence he endured in a Christian Brothers school:

*ye could see it..the viciousness in them..when they were hittin ye..they didn't hit ye..they bleedin walloped ye..if he thought [a smack of a leather] didn't hurt ye , you'd get a smack of a fuckin hurl*

Gerry also experienced psychological violence:

*ye were told you were..stupid,..thick..everything and you'd never amount te anythin..the only thing you'll ever do', he said, 'is sweep streets' ye were actually told that every day*

Sub concept 4, *War*. The historic (or cultural) conflict on – or between these islands - emerged as relevant to this research and its quest to understand participants and their decision to attend men's groups. Initially this relevance came from those who were born and raised in the north eastern part of the island (Northern Ireland) but it subsequently emerged as relevant to others without these connections.

Thus Richard (aged 65), working in Dublin for many years was born and raised in West Belfast. During visits back to Belfast during the 1980's and 1990's he was conscious of an atmosphere of violence, when, for example, he felt the need to have his car minded whenever he returned home for a visit:

*there was bombs goin off..somebody had te stay in the car, ye see..in case they would..eh, somebody was plantin a bomb on an untended vehicle*

However Richard also identified a more pernicious form of violence that had an enduring impact on the psychological health of his community, his family and himself:

*we grew up in an environment where in fact we were..the community was discriminated against..so that there was no..you were excluded because of your religion or where ye came from..the schools and all that kindef stuff..eh, so there's a big message*

Other participants discussed related, thought more distant experiences that they nonetheless felt impacted significantly on them. Some of these are bullet pointed below:

- Padraig's grandfather, a member of the IRA, was beaten and interned while fighting against British forces in Dublin circa 1919. Padraig's father – intently anti-English to this day - provided a 'safe house' for IRA men on the run during the 1970s and 1980's.
- Eddie's father, born and reared in what was then King's County (now County Offaly), fought in France during World War 1 for four years. He returned, spending the remainder of his life working for the British Legion in his home town.
- Derek grew up in working-class housing estate in Dublin. His mother was a protestant who married a catholic. Such 'mixed marriages' were the focus of much attention by many, not least by the catholic church. Derek stated that the Catholic Church put enormous pressure on his family and recounted how his sisters were often told by the nuns in their school that their mother would be going to hell upon her death, simply because she was protestant.
- Séan's father and his father's siblings served in World War 2 with the British Army. One of these siblings died in battle and the other (Séan's aunt) contracted an illness: one that destroyed her fertility. A least one repercussion of this, was the fact that he grew up without cousins on his father's side.