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Change and continuation: masculinity, driving and disability in the lives of “young problem drivers” in the aftermath of severe road traffic accidents

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Abstract

In research on traffic injury prevention, young male drivers willing to take risks are known as “young problem drivers” and have been identified as the greatest road safety challenge. This intersectional study draws on interviews and participant observation, and employs a masculinity perspective to explore how 12 young, male drivers who were injured in severe accidents assess driving after their accidents and ways in which they construct their identities as disabled men. While the participants cited their accidents as a turning point that prompted a change in their attitudes and practices regarding driving, they often continued to engage in deviant driving practices, especially speeding. In addition, the men tended to distance themselves from the social category of disability. We propose that the field of traffic injury prevention would benefit from supplementing the biological approach in the research literature with cultural perspectives on the internal logics and prevailing masculinity discourses that guide the choices of young, male drivers. Also, we argue that the men’s negotiation of disability illustrates the stigma still attached to the social category of disability.

Keywords

Disabled masculinities, young problem drivers, traffic accidents, driving, traffic safety

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Introduction

Internationally, “young problem drivers” have been identified as the greatest road safety challenge. This group consists of young male drivers who are particularly resistant to safety intervention measures and willing to engage in driving practices that are considered to be risky (Scott-Parker, Watson, King, & Hyde, 2013; Senserrick, 2006). Due to their overrepresentation in road traffic injury and fatality statistics, much attention in the field of traffic injury prevention has been directed at the role of young drivers, particularly men, and ways to reduce the number of motor vehicle crashes among them (Engström, Gregersen, Hernetkoski, Keskinen, & Nyberg, 2003; Moe, 2012; Senserrick, 2006). However, young (male) drivers continue to be strikingly overrepresented in these statistics, and finding ways to reduce their involvement in crashes is a continuing challenge. We seek to contribute to the literature with an analysis of the driving practices of a group of young men who have survived a severe road traffic accident.

While gender has traditionally been taken into account in statistics, rarely has it been treated as an entry point for analytical problematisation. Moreover, in the literature on traffic injury prevention, young men’s risky driving practices are commonly linked to their biology, including biological immaturity and pathology such as “social deviance”, “hostility”, “aggression”, “impulsiveness”, “normlessness”, “emotional liability”, “anxiety”, and “antisocial tendencies” (see e.g. Iversen & Rundmo, 2002; Jonah, 1997; Moe, 2012; Oltedal & Rundmo, 2006; Scott-Parker, Hyde, Watson, & King, 2012; Ulleberg, 2001). What appears

to be glossed over in such approaches is that young men's actions can rarely be understood as being determined by biology alone because acts occur in specific contexts and prevailing discourses matter as well.

Previously, masculinity researchers have taken an interest in the construction of gender in the context of driving, exploring, for example, car racers, car modifiers and greasers (Balkmar, 2014; Hatton, 2007; Joelsson, 2013). Eschewing the traditional framing of risk as negative and dangerous (Austen, 2009; Douglas, 1992), these scholars explore the drivers' practices as context-bound. Risky driving practices are understood as ways in which young men display and negotiate masculinity. The studies establish that young men take more risks in traffic than young women as part of their masculinity constructions. Moreover, the studies take into account that risky driving is a social activity that is meaningful to the individuals because their practices are rooted in and informed by prevailing cultural discourses. For example, advertising and popular media form part of the broader cultural framework by which young men are encouraged to drive in ways that expose them to greater risk of injury and accidents than other groups because risk-taking with cars is associated with masculinity (Balkmar, 2014; Redshaw, 2018). Culturally, cars and driving are part of the identity formation and the expression of aggression and competitiveness in young men (Redshaw, 2006; Joelsson 2013). Thus, young men's risky driving might be considered a cultural practice, a response to dominant discourses.

In this paper, we contribute to the research dialogue by exploring the worldview of a group of "young problem drivers" who have *already* been drivers in an accident and who became disabled as a result. The aim is to gain an understanding of the young men's own views and practices regarding driving, safety and disability after an accident in a masculinity

perspective. In line with the above-mentioned literature, we acknowledge deviant driving practices as a violation while simultaneously approaching the participants' lived realities from their own point of view. We ask: Which masculine characteristics did the men idealise and how did it affect their driving practices? Did their accident have an impact on their understanding of driving and safety? Have their driving practices changed since their accident? How do they construct their identities as disabled men? What impact do cultural masculinity discourses have in the lives of disabled men in relation to their construction of driving and disability?

Theorising disability and masculinity ideals

This study is theoretically positioned at the intersection of disability studies and masculinity studies. In a review of Norwegian research on gender and disability, Kittelsaa, Kristensen, and Wik (2016) concluded that gender is undertheorised in the field of disability research and vice versa, and studies on disabled men are particularly scarce. While there are exceptions (e.g. Moser, 2006), disability studies that include gender are mostly concerned with the lives of women and tend to essentialise gender (Kittelsaa et al., 2016). Internationally as well, there has traditionally been a lack of research on disabled men compared with disabled women (Shakespeare, 1999; Sparkes & Smith, 2002), although the number of studies at the intersection of disability and masculinity has grown over the years. We aim to help fill the gap in the research literature with an intersectional study on disabled men in which gender is treated not as a biological given but rather as something one does (West & Zimmerman, 1991). By intersectional we mean that we take into consideration how a variety of categories – primarily gender and disability, but also age and class – are simultaneously at play and impact the lived experiences of the individuals (Kittelsaa et al., 2016). While we use these

categories in order to enable theorisation, we consider them not as fixed but as cultural constructs that are maintained by “doings” and that create (unequal) social realities.

In the analysis, we use the concepts “combustion” and “hydraulic” masculinities developed by Redshaw (2008). These are used as theoretical tools in order to conceptualise the different driving styles and discourses that the study participants produced. Combustion masculinity is “the bursting, spurting speed and power indicating high performance demonstrated and expressed in various media, including representations of cars and their use” (Redshaw, 2018, p. 89). Combustion power is “noisy, invasive, and a dominating force of great destruction” (Redshaw, 2018, p. 89) and represented in driving practices such as speeding, skidding, racing, and risky off-road driving. In contrast, hydraulic power is fluid and used for operations that are flexible, controlled and accurate. In relation to vehicles, hydraulic masculinity “requires skilful manoeuvring, patience, and careful, slow handling”. Thus, hydraulic masculinity represents an alternative that carefully takes into account its impact on the surroundings, unlike combustion masculinity.

Theorising constructions of masculinity means that we are concerned with gendered ideals articulated by the study participants and the masculinity discourses they rely on. We understand the term “discourse” as the production of texts in a broad sense. It refers to systems of meaning that are socially constructed (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010) and concerns practices of thinking, talking and writing and the production of particular understandings that make them come into being as “real”. In the field of men and masculinity studies, the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1995) describes dominant discourses at a given time and place of what a man ideally should be like. The term is dynamic and what it contains changes historically and geographically; the context is essential (Connell & Messerschmidt,

2005; Messerschmidt, 2012). The broad contextual terrain of this study is Norwegian society, a country in which institutional feminism has been established and has had an increased impact over the last three generations. While full equality has yet to be achieved, discourses of equality between the sexes as well as individual rights are hegemonic (Nielsen, 2004). The study participants are part of a culture where family bonds are weakened, individual freedom is emphasised, and girls occupy subject positions similar to that of boys (Nielsen, 2004). Hegemonic middle class ideals embrace a caring fatherhood, shared domestic responsibilities between the sexes, and willingness to live up to the ideal of gender equality, although middle class men's motives for living up to these ideals and the extent to which they do so in practice varies widely (Aarseth, 2013). However, traditional masculinity traits such as strength, independence and toughness are still prevalent and associated in particular with the working class segment. It is in this multidimensional discursive terrain that the study participants, most of whom identify as working class, construct their masculinities.

To theorise change and continuation in the construction of masculinity, we take as our point of departure the “three R framework”, which is a typology developed by Gerschick and Miller (1994). Looking at how ten men with acquired impairments related to hegemonic masculinity ideals, Gerschick and Miller identified three patterns: first, *reformulation*, in which men redefine hegemonic characteristics on their own terms: “They respond to an ideal by reformulating it, shaping it along the lines of their own abilities, perceptions, and strengths, and they define their manhood along these new lines” (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, p. 37); second, *reliance*, in which men adopt particular predominant characteristics and constitute their identities in relation to them; and third, *rejection*, in which men renounce existing standards and create their own principles or deny the importance of masculinity in their lives. In this study we do not address the third pattern since *reformulation* involves

cases in which the participants created ideals based on their own principles and did not reject the importance of masculinity. The patterns of reliance and reformulation are used to analyse ways in which the participants in our study articulated change and continuation related to their constructions of idealised masculinity. Gerschick and Miller (1994) emphasised that these patterns overlap – one man might use a complex combination of strategies – and this is pertinent in our analysis as well. Also, while the framework initially was used in relation to men with physical disabilities, we extend the analysis to include disabilities that are not necessarily visible to others.

In their model, Gerschick and Miller describe particular traits that they associate with hegemonic masculinity. In this study, we approach emerging characteristics as masculinity *ideals* as they are constructed as meaningful to the individuals according to the particular context in which they manoeuvre. Notably, we do not suggest that these traits necessarily represent hegemonic masculinity ideals in the broader context of Norwegian society. However, the particular characteristics highlighted by the participants are not figments of their individual imaginations. They are produced in relation to culturally constructed, normative ideas about men and masculinities in the terrain in which the subjects act.

The study, participants and methods: an interplay of class, age and gender

The complex interplay of class, age and gender are part of the context in which this qualitative study was conducted. Our analysis draws on interviews with and participant observation of 12 men who had been drivers in severe traffic accidents when they were between 16 and 24 years of age. Most were in their twenties at the outset of fieldwork, and they had sustained a variety of injuries, including moderate traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury. Ten out of the 12 men were back behind the wheel.

All participants were part of the white ethnic Norwegian population and had grown up in the Norwegian welfare state. This context entailed that the participants in this study had been provided with health care and financial support from the state after their accidents. They came from various parts of Norway. Most had grown up in rural parts of the country, and associated themselves with the working class segment. Their class positioning is contextually relevant because although the pressure on men to engage in risky activities crosses class and cultural boundaries (Redshaw, 2006), young men who construct a working-class masculinity in particular tend to rely on a discourse in which cars and driving are used as a means to express appropriate forms of the male gender display (Balkmar, 2014). The driving practices and values articulated by the men in this study may therefore be understood as shaped in part by masculine norms in the rural working class where the socialisation processes of young men and their construction of class often involve the cultivation of an interest in cars, and where risky driving practices are tolerated or even encouraged (Joelsson, 2013).

Constructions of age also play into this context. Youth is commonly associated with a “wild” period that involves “fun, experimentation and trying out borders before continuing with the serious business of one’s career” (Nielsen, 2004, p. 18). To young men, the “wildness” may involve the car, which becomes a tool to experiment and have fun with in the search for an authentic self and suitable constructions of masculinity (Joelsson, 2013). While the participants were young when their accidents occurred, and thus more likely to take part in the enactment of the “wildness” of risky driving that is associated with youth at the time, between 2 and 15 years had passed since the accidents occurred when the fieldwork took place. Their situations had changed in several ways other than the accident that had occurred. For example, some got an education, started to work and/or extended their focus to involve a

new role as providers for their own families. Two were married, one was separated, three were in long-term relationships, and six were single. Three were fathers.

While some study participants were recruited after having heard about the study in their social surroundings and contacting the first writer, the majority were recruited through the hospital in which they received rehabilitation services. Potential study participants received a written letter about the study from hospital personnel, and those interested in participating contacted the first author. The letter was written in accordance with guidelines for research ethics developed by the hospital's Data Protection Official for Research and NSD – Norwegian Social Science Data Services (<http://www.nsd.uib.no/nsd/english/index.html>), which acknowledged the implementation of this study. All names used in this article are pseudonyms. The data were produced in Norwegian and later translated into English.

Fieldwork was conducted by the first author in 2013 and 2014 and consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews and participant observation. In the interviews, the researcher both asked questions (such as “How did you drive before the accident?”, and “How do you drive today?”) and invited the participants to introduce topics of conversation. Most were interviewed twice or more, as this allowed for extended reflections on the issues raised. At least one interview with each study participant dealt with how they understood their own driving practices before and after their accident. While the interviews concerned their past experiences and masculinity constructions, the data are treated as reconstructions in which the participants made meaning of their past and present in the particular moment when it was produced. Through participant observation, during which the researcher takes part in the study participants' lives and observes them in interaction with others, it is possible to gain a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of people's experiences, and of the meaning

of their words and actions, than from interviewing alone (Glesne, 2006). In this study, participant observation supplemented the study participants' descriptions of e.g. their driving styles. For instance, the first author was occasionally a passenger when the young men were driving and got to observe their choices in traffic.

Social positions impact the production of knowledge in qualitative research. For example, the researcher in this study was a non-disabled female interacting with disabled men. Disabled bodies are culturally constructed as inferior to non-disabled bodies (Garland-Thomson, 2005). This as well as gender positioning might have influenced the interactions in the field. For instance, the men tended to emphasise their physical strength and achievements. This may be understood as a way in which they vis-à-vis the non-disabled, female researcher negotiated power and constructed themselves as men who had managed well despite their functional challenges. An elaborate feminist analysis of power and the impact of gender, class and age in this study's knowledge production is available in Svendby (2019).

Data analysis was inspired by Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide to thematic analysis. Writing was an integral part of the analysis, which involved a process of becoming familiar with the data through reading and re-reading in order to identify patterns. Initial codes were manually generated and later sorted into themes. For example, the study participants' descriptions of driving, disability and work were sorted into separate sections. The themes and patterns that emerged, such as articulations of change, were broadly compared and reviewed to make sure they reflected the overall meaning in the empirical material. Thus, while we focus on the stories of two participants in the presentation, these cases and quotes were chosen because they illustrate general tendencies in the data. In this sense, the discussion draws on the interviews with all 12 participants. The two subjects' stories are unique to them.

In this paper, we assume that the study participants may be considered part of the group referred to in the literature as “young problem drivers”. We are hesitant to associate the study participants with the “problem” label since we would then participate in the same discourse that we seek to problematise. Nevertheless, we chose to do so in order to enable theorisation about this particular group, which is constructed in the research literature. Scott-Parker et al. (2013) emphasised that although there is consensus that this group “exists”, there is not (yet) any agreement on how to identify those who comprise it. As a result, different researchers have used different criteria. In search of a definition, Scott-Parker et al. (2013) identified what they considered to be particularly risky behaviours, including speeding, pre-licence driving, unsupervised learner driving and involvement in crashes and offences, as characteristics of the group. All of these characteristics were common among most of the participants in our study as well, so it is likely that the majority would fall into the category of “young problem drivers”. It is important to emphasise that not all of our study participants engaged in these behaviours, and if they did, the degree to which they did so varied among them. In this paper, we understand normative driving practices as driving according to traffic regulations and laws.

Change and continuation of masculinity ideals in the aftermath of an accident

In this section, we present in-depth analysis of two of the study participants, Hans and Glenn. Their stories are used as examples that highlight the main findings of the study. These findings include, first, that the participants in this study articulated a partial change in their attitudes and practices regarding driving, as well as in how they wanted to live their lives. This change was attributed to the experience of having survived a severe road traffic accident. Second, although some changes were implemented by the men, they still continued to construct a combustion masculinity (Redshaw, 2018), especially in relation to the practice

of speeding. Third, the men tended to distance themselves from the social category of disability.

The construction of masculinity in relation to driving

Hans' daughter jumped into the back seat of the car. Hans did not start driving right away, but remained patiently parked along the roadside until the young girl was settled in her seat. From the passenger seat I saw Hans looking in the rear-view mirror, watching his daughter attentively while she fastened her seat belt. She did so with quick, automatic hand movements that gave away how much of a routine this was for her. 'Ready?' asked her father from the front seat. 'Ready!' she responded. The turning signal ticked rhythmically. Hans checked the mirror and manoeuvred the car onto the road again.

The excerpt above is from the first author's field diary. It describes a moment when the study participant Hans – a man from a working-class background who since the accident had married and become a father – picked up his daughter during a ride in which the first author was his passenger. The moment of interaction between father and daughter revealed that patience, attentiveness and the use of seat belts was manifest in the daily driving routine of the study participant and his child. This driving style, which is characteristic of hydraulic masculinity, stood in stark contrast to the combustion masculinity (Redshaw, 2018) that Hans had acted out before the accident. When Hans turned 18, he got his driving license and immediately started to drive "full speed" and without a seat belt. He said that he was like "Superman" on the road. Speeding was part of the enactment of his "toughness":

At the time I thought it made you tough – to drive fast and not think at all about the consequences. You drive and you don't think about the risks at all.

Hans explained that the accident and its consequences had a great impact on his life and constituted a turning point. He was in his late teens at the time, and sustained severe trauma, including broken ribs, punctured lungs and internal bleeding. He also sustained traumatic brain injury that still affected him at the time of the fieldwork when he was in his late 20s in terms of concentration problems, memory loss and fatigue. Hans nearly killed himself and three passengers in the accident when he drove off the road at high speed. It bothered him that he had caused his friends harm in the event. In the aftermath of the accident, he had found it necessary to rethink and “rebuild” his identity, and get a fresh start:

You can change those things you don't want to carry with you into the future. You can set them aside and only take the positive things with you. (...) To be honest, I started with a clean slate. That's how I felt. The best explanation could be to see it as a game of Tetris, starting by just placing things back where they belong, building a new personality and a new way of behaving. (...) I was the type you'd call a troublemaker. Someone I wouldn't have liked today. Not a good guy. I don't want to be like that anymore. (...) I was the sort who likes to be tough with others. I was like that – fighting and stuff. I wanted people to be afraid of me, sort of. It was a completely wrong mindset. (...) Each time I went out to party before the accident, there was trouble.

For Hans, the accident led to a *reformulation* in which he redefined characteristics that he had previously idealised (Gerschick & Miller, 1994), starting anew “as a game of Tetris”.

Masculine characteristics and activities that he had idealised pre-disability – being tough, gaining respect through fear, fighting and driving illegally – were replaced by other ideals and actions. In particular, Hans emphasised that his current ideals involved “being compassionate” and “caring for others”, particularly for his family, but for others as well. As an example, one of his passengers injured her back in the accident and struggled with pain, and for this he tried to make amends:

It’s at the back of my mind. I’m thinking of it. I try to help her as much as I can with my knowledge about training.

In terms of driving, Hans emphasised that in contrast to his driving practices prior to the accident, where “full speed without a seat belt” was the norm, he now always used a seat belt and almost always followed the traffic regulations. However, he admitted to speeding on some occasions when he was alone in the car and assessed it as safe to speed according to his own standards, which demonstrates his tendency to continue to enact a combustion masculinity (Redshaw 2018).

Another study participant, Glenn, a single working-class man without children, had sustained spinal cord injuries in his accident, which occurred when he was a teenager. At the time of the fieldwork, he was in his mid-20s and permanently paralysed from the waist down. Glenn emphasised that prior to the accident it had been important to him that his body was “fit” and “strong”, and he worked out five days a week to build such a body. Thus, he had idealised a strong, capable body in his construction of masculinity. In terms of driving practices, Glenn constructed a combustion masculinity (Redshaw, 2018) from an early age. He had started driving at the age of 10 and used to speed, drive under the influence of hard drugs and

alcohol, and generally “drive [like an] idiot” with little concern about the impact of his actions on his surroundings. He explained,

The rest of society didn’t exist, when I was out on the road it was only me. Then it was no problem, it was full throttle through housing estates and full throttle ... well, all the time. I was the worst of the worst.

Glenn explained that prior to his accident, he frequently partied, used “all kinds” of drugs, “drank heavily” and fought. He did not get a driving licence until after the accident. Like all the participants in the study, however, Glenn found that the accident represented a turning point in his life. He said,

I was no angel before the accident. I and my closest family have seen the accident as a positive event in my life, because before the accident I was on a completely wrong track. There were a lot of drugs and crime, and a lot of driving (...) When I was in hospital after the accident I tried to set new goals for myself. That when I reached the age of 25 I should be self-reliant, mobile and law-abiding, and simply grow up. I have worked hard to reach that goal, too. I got off drugs last year, put it all away. After that it was only medical drugs I purchased for myself and smoking a little hash and marijuana.

As illustrated by this quote, Glenn *reformulated* (Gerschick & Miller, 1994) some of the characteristics and practices he had previously idealised by setting new goals for himself. The changes he made were that he got a driving licence, he was lawfully hired in a job, and he stopped misusing hard drugs and alcohol. According to Glenn, facing the outside world in a

wheelchair was so difficult for him the first years after the accident that he did not manage to do so except under the influence. His continued use of medical drugs, hash and marijuana may be interpreted as part of his struggle to come to terms with his identity as a disabled man. This excerpt from the field diary illustrates the effort and emotions he put into the changes he made:

When Glenn talked about the driving licence and the job he had got, he became very emotional. His eyes got wet. He said that he had never passed an exam in his life, never managed any school. Getting the licence and the job made him feel that his family could finally be proud of him, that he had managed to do something right. In a ceremonial manner, he showed me the licence, eagerly pointing at the details printed on it and what it meant that he had achieved it. He talked passionately about the job and said that he would do everything to keep it; he would happily get up in the morning, work the hours – extra hours if they needed him to – and do whatever it took to manage it in the best way possible. (When I talked to him several months later, he had not skipped a day and was fully employed, thriving and still as passionately motivated as he had been at the outset.)

While Glenn had made some changes in his life, however, he was still enacting a combustion masculinity (Redshaw, 2018) in relation to driving. Although he had got a licence, never drove under the influence of hard drugs and alcohol, and avoided “driving like an idiot” through housing estates, he was still regularly speeding and sometimes driving under the influence of hash and marijuana. This illustrates his tendency to continue his past driving practices, which was common among the study participants.

The construction of masculinity in relation to disability

Hans explained that working and being self-sufficient had been “extremely important” to him before the accident, and still were – as was the case for all the study participants. In this respect, Hans *relied* on his previous masculinity ideals (Gerschick & Miller, 1994) in which independence was of paramount importance. However, because of the traumatic brain injury he sustained in the accident, he was intolerant to noise and frequently needed breaks to rest his head due to fatigue. Reluctantly, he realised that he was unable to return to his previous occupation, which was noisy and required rapidity. His desire to work was so strong, however, that despite considerable health challenges he had undergone re-education and was working full-time in a health-care oriented profession, in which he functioned well despite his disabilities. Thus, while drawing on a *reformulation* in which he shaped his new career along the line of his abilities and newfound care for others, he simultaneously fulfilled his ideals of independence and self-sufficiency.

Except for scars, Hans’ injuries were not physically visible on his body and he “passed” as “normal” (Goffman, 1990 [1963]). For Hans, it required a conscious effort to conceal that he was struggling with his health. He explained that building a new identity after the accident entailed,

playing Tetris without placing any pieces in the wrong place. Without anyone noticing that there’s something wrong with you. Being in such a way that nobody understands that something’s wrong.

Thus, he relied on and constructed a masculine standard of strength and physical capability by strategically concealing his disabilities and striving to keep up appearances by not

revealing vulnerability or “weakness”, which is often associated with disability (Gerschick & Miller, 1994; Shuttleworth, Wedgwood, & Wilson, 2012).

Glenn, too, struggled to come to terms with his identity as disabled. He explained that he was conscious of how other people perceived him. It was a problem for him to be in a position where other people thought of him as someone in need of help.

I have always wanted to be self-reliant. (...) If I need to go up an escalator and there's nobody there, people suddenly come running to hold me steady and help me. Such things are a drag. (...) In a wheelchair you are ... well, you are ... how should I say ... you're not doomed, but you are more frail in a way when you're in a wheelchair, like, I feel. It's so much cooler when I ... like yesterday, I was cruising along at 200 kilometres per hour nearly all the way to [location]. I overtook everybody, I did, all the cars I met, I just passed them right away. I had a blast, it was a riot. And when I came to [location], it was on the way out after I had been to the mall, some of the guys I had overtaken earlier that day drove into the car park. And then ... 'oh blimey, holy shit, are *you* in a wheelchair' and stuff, 'that's crazy' and they 'would never have thought it' and stuff. Why not? I can drive a car as well, can't I?

To Glenn, being associated with dependency was problematic. He used driving as a means to attain independence and to distance himself from the notions of dependency and “frailty” associated with disability (Gerschick & Miller, 1994; Shuttleworth et al., 2012). He used several techniques. For example, he explained that he found it absolutely unacceptable to drive a car that was recognisable as the typical “disability van”. Instead, he wanted a “cool” car. Thus, he had bought a BMW, which he enthusiastically showed to the first author while

explaining how he had rebuilt it all by himself – thereby demonstrating his masculine self-sufficiency – so that it was now possible for him to drive it (using only his arms). He said,

The best thing I know about driving a car is that nobody can see that I'm in a wheelchair. So I'm treated like everybody else. I participate in competitions, because I'm very competitive. When we're driving cars or go-carts, for example, I just hit it and drive faster than anybody else. It's so cool, really, when I've won I just leave the car and throw myself into the wheelchair. People just go 'what, are *you* in a wheelchair?? But how can you drive then? What car did you drive, was it *that* car?' Because when I'm driving I compete with them on equal terms even though I'm in a wheelchair, and I'm a better driver than they are. It feels good.

Glenn used the appearance of the cool car and driving it and other vehicles as a means both to conceal his disability and to fulfil his ideals of independence and competitiveness. Revealing his disability after winning a race was a part of his identity work. He was the fastest and most able driver on the track *in spite of* his disabled body. Thus, the cultural idea that disabled bodies are less capable than non-disabled bodies (Svendby, Romsland & Moen, 2018) was one he joyfully countered.

Glenn emphasised that it was extremely important to him to work full time and to be financially independent. During the fieldwork, he got a position that allowed him to achieve this goal while *also* concealing his disabilities, which was valuable to him:

Well, I could probably get a job in a garage where I could sit behind the customer service counter, or I could have taken certain kinds of jobs there. But I'm not

interested in being able to take certain kinds of jobs, because I feel that my disability would get in my way there, and I don't want it to. When I'm sitting in the [name of the vehicle], nobody can see the wheelchair, nobody knows that I'm paralysed even.

Thus, while *reformulating* the masculine ideals of independence and bodily functionality in line with his own abilities and strengths – achieving mobility through driving and non-disability by extending his body to include cool motor vehicles – Glenn continued to *rely* on these ideals to the extent that he preferred to “pass” as non-disabled when possible.

Discussion: the impact of masculinity discourses in the lives of disabled men

Findings in this study suggest that the young drivers we encountered made partial changes in their lives in the aftermath of severe road traffic accidents. For example, the construction of hydraulic masculinity (Redshaw, 2018) – characterised by skilful manoeuvring, patience, and careful, slow handling in which the effect of their actions on their surroundings is taken into account – was observed in the field, such as in the safety routine employed in the interaction between Hans and his daughter. However, the study also establishes that the young men – regularly or occasionally – continued to drive in ways that were risky and could have fatal consequences to themselves and others, especially by continuing to speed. In relation to driving, most still relied on and enacted a combustion masculinity, an aggressive driving style characterised by speed and power, where the impact on the environment is invasive (Redshaw, 2018), but the extent to which they did so varied. Hans had only sped on a few occasions since the accident. However, it was a daily routine in the life of Glenn. While the driving practices of the men in the study were deviant from normative standards of road traffic safety after their accidents, and far from ideal, we acknowledge the changes that had taken place. For example, Hans had gone from excessive speeding without a seat belt as the

norm, to always using a seat belt, making sure that others did as well, and only speeding occasionally. Glenn had gone from regularly driving while intoxicated on hard drugs and alcohol to occasionally driving under the influence of hash and marijuana. Taking the partial changes into account, we interpret the men's change of driving style in general as a move from a combustion masculinity to a somewhat more moderate version within the realms of this very same category.

While the study participants attributed their partial change of attitude and behaviour to the accident, it may also be understood as part of a maturation process that took place over time in the lives of the men involved in this study. For example, many had settled down and started their own families – in line with the culturally expected construction of age appropriate behaviour as one enters adulthood (Joelsson, 2013). To understand why the men continued their construction of a combustion masculinity (Redshaw, 2018), we turn to a discussion of the broader influence of masculinity discourses in the lives of young men with disabilities as our point of departure.

The participants in this study are positioned at the crossroads of two conflicting categories: they face both the demands associated with normative masculinity and the stigmatisation of disability (Shuttleworth et al., 2012). This tension is brought to life in the negotiation of their identities as disabled men. They relied on a masculine ideal of toughness, competitiveness, independence, self-reliance, and a strong, functional and capable body. The superior status of these characteristics emerged in contrast to characteristics that the participants positioned as inferior. Specifically, they devalued “frailty”, dependency, and lack of bodily functionality, all of which were associated with disability and understood as problematic in their worldviews.

Their ideals of masculinity are clearly constructed in response to and interaction with hegemonic cultural notions in which disabled bodies are subjected to severe stigmatisation and subordination and associated with “weakness” and incapacity (Garland-Thomson, 2005) while masculinity is associated with strength and functionality (Shuttleworth et al., 2012). Thus, the findings actualise the problem of stigmatisation still attached to the social category of disability as well as the power of normative masculinity in which the subjectivity of disabled men is undermined; it is rejected by a masculine ideology that negates vulnerability and weakness in the bodies of men (Shakespeare, 1999; hooks, 2005; Shuttleworth et al., 2012). The problematic experience of becoming disabled for men that have constructed their masculine senses in line with discourses focusing on traditional traits, such as independence, competitiveness and high performance, has been reported in studies from other contexts as well. For example, a study by Sparkes and Smith (2002) found that four men born in the UK who had suffered spinal cord injuries from playing rugby struggled with a loss of their masculine self; their bodies became alien to them. Choosing reliance over reformulation in relation to traditional masculinity ideals, the men suffered from a continuous devaluation of their own bodies. When the element of youth is taken into account, the pressure on disabled men intensifies because what is expected from young men is at odds with the realities of their lives. In a study of older men and sexuality, Sandgren (2015) finds that youth in men is often associated with a strong, functional, potent and, in relation to older men, more able body. In our study, the tension this may evoke in men is seen in their relationship to work. Their young age may increase the pressure on disabled men to (re)enter the labour market at all costs and make use of the functionality traditionally associated with young (male) bodies. We argue that the struggle to come across as non-disabled – illustrated by the variety of strategies used by the participants in order to “pass” as “normal” (Goffman, 1990 [1963]) – suggests a lack of alternative discursive resources available for disabled men with which they might

construct themselves as valuable human beings – and valuable *men* – while having a disabled body. The tendency to choose reliance over reformulation, in which one might access the transformative potential of disability (Sparkes & Smith, 2002), illustrates the severe impact and power of cultural discourses in the construction of masculinity.

In the introduction, we highlight that young men's risky driving behaviours have often been linked to biological factors and aberrant personality traits. In this conceptualisation, "young problem drivers" are constructed as men who cannot avoid coming across as irrational, dangerous individuals. This genetic determinism and widespread use of pathologising labels on (some) young men is problematic because it constructs the problem as one that is unavoidable; the urge to drive aggressively is located in the genes of the individual while the crucial influence of cultural and discursive factors is obscured. In order to promote change, it is vital to acknowledge that young men are part of a wider structural system that encourages the behaviour that is under scrutiny, the construction of a particular kind of masculinity that denies vulnerability and positive emotions in men, and encourages tough, invasive, dominating and risk-taking behaviour (hooks, 2005).

In conclusion, we propose that the field of traffic injury prevention would benefit from abandoning the hegemonic notion of 'young problem drivers' as irrational, pathological individuals. Approaching members of this group as rational subjects – and taking into consideration the internal logics and prevailing masculinity discourses that guide their choices – may prove beneficial in future efforts to develop safety measures that they are able and willing to adopt. Also, we propose that medical professionals should be aware of and address the role of masculinity in young men's lives – and the possibility that they might engage in strategies to conceal their disabilities, which may result from stigmatisation and

continue to harm their sense of self-worth – when they approach this group of patients in the rehabilitation process.

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