METHODS WHICH ENHANCED THE REPRESENTATION OF EXPERIENCES OF RECOVERY AND ADDICTION IN ANIMATION

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ABSTRACT:

This article reflects on qualitative and practice methodology used during a PhD study on addiction and recovery representations in animation. It outlines the data collection, analysis and the development of the themes in the production of two animated short films. It considers the benefits of multi-method research in production. Collaborating with Aiséirí, a long-established addiction treatment service in Ireland, three focus groups with recoverees provided various Irish perspectives. The addition of arts-based tools within these sessions provided supplementary insights: accentuating journey points to recovery, demonstrating common representations of addiction and recovery, providing a cultural window to the relationship and perception of addiction and recovery in Ireland, and supported visualisation in the development of animations. The thematic analysis worked in an iterative process through film development. This article proposes that a deeper understanding of the topic occurred through the process of production of the first film which led to the production of a second.

KEYWORDS: Animation; Addiction; Recovery; Narrative; Journey; Arts-based tools; Thematic Analysis.

1. Introduction

As part of my practice-based doctoral study, I examined the representation of addiction and recovery experiences through animation and explored depicting these experiences first-hand through creating two short animated films. This research has an interdisciplinary approach and positions itself at the cross-section of social science (with a focus on addiction and recovery experience in Ireland) and film (specifically animation). In this article, I expand on the methodologies of this study which developed insights into this experience. This included conducting focus groups with individuals in recovery which were enhanced with the use of art-based tools in the sessions which contributed further colour to this complex subject matter and to the narratives shared by a vulnerable population. The emphasis the participants' placed on path points along their recovery journey influenced the narrative structure of the first film produced for the project, *The Click* (2021). This film focused on the voyage of living with addiction and working through recovery. Outlining the analysis and production of this first film will illustrate a portion of the findings and their development and final representation within it. Beyond this, I suggest that animation, and the production of this first animation, contributed not solely to the dissemination of the research insights but became a further part of the analysis and research methodology allowing a better understanding of the experiences shared by the participants. This facilitated the development of an additional film, *Components of Recovery* (2022). This demonstrates a journey for the animator who engages in a practice-based way to depict research insights and contribute to audience interpretations as it develops their own research understandings.

Part of this research involved embarking on a wide-scoping review of short animations depicting addiction and recovery over a century period to establish portrayal trends, which the following section will outline.

2. Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery in Animation

A key sector of film studies examines the relationship between film and society. Animation is impacted by, and impacts, changing societal and cultural learnings and in this way, it plays a significant role within the fields of addiction and recovery. Historically, there has been a practical link between the animation discipline and addiction and recovery. Animation was often, and still is, utilised to communicate and endorse messages of safety or warnings against substance use. The 1960s through to the 1980s saw the rise of animated public service announcement (PSA) segments which have clear preventative influence from cultural events such as the American 'War on Drugs' and 'Say No to Drugs Campaign'. Influential animation companies such as Hanna-Barbera, Warner Bros, Walt Disney and DC Comics contributed to these segments, and they were often child-centred or aimed at young adults departing from the previous adult-focused shows (Lawrence 2020). This suggests that the animations were prevention, targeting youth and aimed to warn on the negative physical and life effects of substance abuse (on predominantly the effects of smoking).

A closer inspection of the quantity of published media in the review revealed a stark jump specifically occurred in 2017, with the largest rise in animations which depicted solely active addiction. Opioid overdoses caused more than 42,000 deaths in the US in 2016, more than any previous year on record, and by 2017 the department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US) and Office of the Surgeon General (US) 2016). A slight increase in active addiction animations again in 2020 perhaps reflects another jump in opioid overdoses in the US from 2019 to 2020 (National Institute on Drug Abuse 2022). This illustrates how the social landscape is reflected in themes produced in animations of that period. Societal events and issues can impact representation. It also demonstrates how, in response to these issues, filmmakers contribute to society's understanding by reflecting these issues back for audiences to engage with.

Collaborated animations, ones that have worked with addiction service providers or with recoverees, fell into three target aimed categories:

1. *Growing public understanding of addiction*

For example, *ADDICTION* (2018) by Addiction Policy Form, is a four-part series informing on the science of substance use disorders, and *Chloe's Story* (2019) is an

episode as part of *'My Troubled Mind'* series by Animated Mind and BBC Teach, which describes risk factors in her home which contributed to her own drug overuse.

2. *Showcasing recovery*

Such as *A Less Lonely Road* (2020) by Ariana Kam, which depicts individual treatment stories from an Australian rehabilitation centre, and *Tell Your Story* (2021) a series of first-hand accounts of smoking addiction where each promotes recovery is possible. A collaboration with the California Tobacco Control Program and Nexus studio.

3. *Promoting addiction services*

For example, *Start with connection* (2020) an advert outlining the importance of communication in recovery commissioned by the nonprofit Partnership to End Addiction with agency DiMassimo Goldstein as part of a larger campaign and *Doors* (2015) commissioned by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

An important comparison within the review was fewer animations showcased both addiction and recovery than works that focused solely on illustrating active addiction. Of the films that showed recovery, many used it as a conclusion device rather than showcasing elements of the recovery process. Recovery does not happen instantly; it can be a long journey. It can also be more a cyclical rather than a linear process so the roles it has been given in these storylines are noteworthy. A growing volume of documentary work depicting subjective experiences has granted viewers an opportunity for awareness and insight into various lived experiences, including trauma and addiction. Ehrlich (2021) maintains that animation broadens the concept of 'reality' by engaging in an original way with the diversity and complexity of realities, expanding the scope of what can be explored in visual documentary practices.

3. Portrayal of Mental Health in Popular Media

Within popular media forms there is still a gap in multifaceted representations of addiction and recovery. A study[1] undertaken to examine mental health portrayal in popular media concluded that there was a lack of lived experience of characters

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[1] The referenced study explored 8 categories of mental health conditions and their frequency and portrayals across film & TV between the years 2007-2019. It is part of the USC Annenberg Inclusion and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Initiative which studies diversity and inclusion in entertainment. See: https://annenberg.usc.edu/research/aii

with mental health conditions shown (1.7% of films and 7% of TV shows), a slanted stigmatised representation of mental illness, and narrow character demographics (Smith 2019, 1–3). Within the small fraction of media that included a mental health condition, addiction was the most showcased as a comorbidity accompanied by another mental health condition. Overall, the study noted that stories lacked portrayals of effective treatment and support onscreen (Smith 2019, 8). Evidence supports an association between alcohol marketing exposure and future youth alcohol consumption (WHO Regional Office for Europe 2020); Jernigan et al. 2017, 19). How media and marketing portray substance use is also indicated to have an influence on teenagers' and young adults' use, with it oftentimes being where they got a primary introduction to it (Jackson et al. 2018, 146–157). With the power of impact and influence on societal understanding, comes the responsibility to show diverse, rounded characters and balanced storylines to remove stereotypes and reduce future stigma.

4. Addiction and Recovery Narratives

Addiction organisations have continually used storytelling as a form of introspection and of encouraging recovery demonstrated by campaigns which highlight personal accounts of recovery. For example, the non-fiction series *IQuit* (2012) by the Health Promotion Board (combined live-action interviews with cuts to motion graphics), the 'Walk in My Shoes' campaign featuring the episode *#StillJustMe-Addiction* (2017) during International Recovery Month, Recovery in Ireland's *What Recovery Means to Me* (2019) and more recently the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) as part of their aim to reduce smoker numbers in the population to less than 5% by 2025 released a video series *HSE Quit* (2020) as part of their tobacco control campaign. Internationally the establishment of collectives such as *Sobriety Films* (a group of filmmakers with lived experience) who hold the *Recovery Street Film Festival*, and other recovery-focused film festivals such as the *UK Recovery Film Festival* and *REEL Recovery Film Festival and Symposium* illustrates the growing use of video media as a form to share this experience to wider audiences. Oftentimes these pieces are interview-style videos with voiced narration that frame the reality of the people they are representing. Within animation, some say voiceover permits animation a documentary status as it facilitates a level of trustworthiness for the viewer (Strøm, as cited in Moore 2014).

Narrative identity theory suggests that in order to make sense of life people construct stories of their experiences (McAdams and McLean 2013). There is a correlation between how someone constructs their own life narrative and the directional path of their mental health over time (Adler et al. 2015). Specifically to AA, it was found that individuals who told their recovery story with a theme of redemption were positively correlated with successfully remaining abstinent four months after writing the story than others who had not included it in theirs (Dunlop and Tracy 2013). The negative event, or aspects of the experience, must be narrated in some positive form to have led to a kind of valued result, for it to be deemed redemptive (Adler et al. 2015). This redemption narrative must also be considered by media produced about people with addiction. It has also been found that scare campaigns against substance use can be counterproductive, often having little influence on changing behaviour (Department of Health 2017, 21).

Storytelling can facilitate learning (Wettlaufer-Adcock 2004) and re-creating narratives can help people understand parts of themselves and in turn can educate and bring awareness of situations and experiences to wider audiences.

5. Addiction in Ireland

The definition of addiction is broad and is constantly revisited by addiction organisations, illustrating the complexity of categorising and the variables of this phenomenon. The disease model refers to it as:

> a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences. (The American Society of Addictive Medicine 2019)

In 2018, around 35.6 million people globally were suffering from drug use disorders (World Drug Report 2021, 20). and only 12.5% of people who needed treatment received it (World Drug Report 2020, 14–15). Approximately one billion drinkers are heavy episodic drinkers worldwide (World Health Organization 2018, 4). In Irish society in the 19th century, cultural trauma from occupation and famine contributed to a heavy drinking culture which in response Ireland emphasised an abstinent approach to addiction, primarily influenced by the Catholic Church who gave abstinence spiritual meaning (O'Dwyer 2001, 4). Currently, a recent poll by

Merchants Quay Ireland indicated that six in ten people (59%) have had direct experience with addiction (Merchants Quay Ireland 2020). This indicates the prevalence of people affected (self-use, family, friends) by addiction in Ireland. Common features of people with addictions and who seek treatment in Ireland (regardless of where in society they are from) are unmet mental health needs, trauma, and intergenerational patterns (Mongan et al. 2020, 2). Drug use disorders and harmful drinking patterns can fuel a brutal cycle of disadvantages for users, their family and those directly around them.

Within my own project, to contribute to recovery media and create animations on the experience of addiction and recovery an understanding of this lived experience had to be attained. The following is an outline of this project's study design and methodology.

6. Methodology

Qualitative research was applied to gain an understanding of these concepts from the participant's own perspectives. This project included a varied range of lived experiences and perspectives in Ireland. It included an age range between 19 – 55 years old, people with various education levels, from urban and rural areas, in recent recovery (secondary care) and from longer recovery (independent living) and included people with addiction associated social factors (such as criminality, homelessness and unemployment). Collaborating with an Irish recovery centre called Aiséirí, focus groups were undertaken with recoverees who had, or were still using, their services. This allowed discussions on the addiction phenomenon with people from various perspectives who had an insight into the experience: "The process of the interview allows both the emergence of the individual experience and the creation of a combined understanding of the phenomenon" (Darlaston-Jones 2007, 24). Focus groups consisted of a series of planned open-ended questions to facilitate and initiate conversations. During therapy the participants would have experience with group therapy, and this was hoped to make the experience more comfortable. Zaltman and Zaltman (2008) believe typical surveys and focus groups alone do not provide the space for individuals to readily share complex thoughts and feelings (cited in Richards 2012, 794). Meyer (1991) noted that visual data suits research that explores human meaning because it does not '… force informants into his or her [the researcher's] cognitive framework prematurely' (Meyer 1991, 232).

They suggest that "… informants often possess more copious and meaningful information than they can communicate verbally" (Meyer 1991, 220). Therefore creating the space for freedom of expression can allow the formulation of additional information. Kearney and Hyle (2004) agreed with Meyer in their study noting that a lack of structure in a visual activity allows participants to focus on the significant aspects of their own experience without influence.

Further methods in this study utilised two arts-based tools in the form of a life-graph and character-design, clay activity. My background is animation. These two interactive activities evolved and were influenced by my prior experience as a practitioner and group facilitator, and were informed by arts-based research. Arts-based tools within the focus group sessions could encourage and stimulate participants' responses to questions. Gray and Malins (2004) state that using practice in a research methodology *is* qualitative as the: "methodology is responsive, driven by the requirements of practice and its creative dynamic. It is essentially qualitative and naturalistic".

The first activity involved the use of the life-graph rating well-being from 1 (meaning low or unhappy points) to 5 (meaning high or happy points) through their journey, i.e., their addiction experience over time. Not all journeys started at the same age, and everyone has their own story to tell, so the beginning and end of the line were unspecified. This activity also acted as an icebreaker, easing participants into the session, facilitating insights into the person's experience from the session start and encouraging reflective thinking which would support the upcoming questions. A timeline used in this project could help participants navigate and outline their addiction and recovery story. It forms a brainstorming of sequential events which is an important part in the creation of a narrative. Yakura (2002) believes that timelines act as temporal boundary objects, allowing a concrete visualisation of time whilst also providing the freedom and flexibility for individuals to arrange their own purpose onto the timeline.

The second activity involved participants creating a visual representation of their personal addiction in plasticine clay. It has also been found that mentalisation can be enhanced by clay sculpting processes (Bat Or 2010, 325) and I have observed first-hand clay's success in group sessions. By using a detachment technique from their addiction, it was also considered that it may encourage participants to discuss their experience. The process of tangibly creating something formed another means

8. The Recovery Journey

While in recovery, the participants are learning to recreate their story. During analysis, there were five key stages on the journey from addiction to recovery in the participants' stories. These journey points findings are:

1. The beginning – Illusion of Control

2. Losing control

3. Loss

4. Decision to change – The Click

5. Ask for Help and giving help - Recovery

The beginning marks the point on someone's journey when there is a struggle between perceiving issues, denial, and admittance. This leads towards the second and third stages which is a process of admitting to oneself and acknowledging that there is a problem as the issues oftentimes increase. The depths of darkness and isolation that can come from within the active addiction experience were stressed amongst the groups and this led to feelings of loss, fear and shame and for some a lowest point on their journey. This is encompassed within Stage 3. Stage 4 marks a critical point for a recoveree and they make the decision for change. The findings suggest recovery from addiction is a journey involving hope for a changed future, belief in oneself, the struggle of control, decisive and active decision-making, and behavioural changes. 'The Click' therefore represents a critical point for the recoveree on their journey involving an array of elements. It emphasises hope and marks a newfound motivation and self-belief where someone actively decides to work through change to conquer their addiction. As this journey continues, recovery is a long and difficult process which includes asking, getting, and giving help to others. It is a hard process but emphasised by the participants as a possible one.

The following is a summary of the film's storyline before discussing how the key stages are illustrated within the animation.

9. The Click (2021)

9.1 Story Outline

The story follows a person through their personal struggle with addiction. The beginning opens with a wide shot of the protagonist rowing a boat on their own in a large, dreamlike landscape, see Figure 1. The smoke dissipates, and the boat is revealed to be directed not by the rowing of the character but by a large snake (addiction) under the lava surface. They are not in control. The snake crashes the boat into a mountain, and the character falls out. It surrounds the character, and it seems there is no way out. Within this dark tunnel, hope is represented by the light which weaves in and out of the story, giving the character direction. The character reaches the mountain summit and finds the flare gun. This scares them, but they must make a decision as the snake approaches threateningly. The character reaches forward and shoots the flare into the sky, calling for help. The sky opens, and light fills the scene. Help from the unknown is found by a rope dropping from above, and when the character grabs it, it pulls them up out of the dark mental-scape and the shrinking snake merges into a small tattoo on the character's forearm. The snake is a part of the character but not in control anymore. The story ends with the character sitting in a room where time has passed. The room lights and a flare can be seen through the window, someone else is asking for help. The character reaches for a rope and walks out the door to continue the cycle.

Figure 1: Screenshot of animation – The beginning, Illusion of Control Part 1.

9.2 Key Stages as Structure to Story

In animation there is management of every aspect of the artefact. Creative decisions influence the viewer and contribute to their understanding of what is presented. This

presents a broad spectrum of areas for intentional methodology within production. In *The Click* (2021), the use of camera angle contributes to one of the major theme representations. Likewise, colour played a significant role in translating the tone of each stage of someone's journey. 'Chief motifs' throughout the story, such as cherry blossom trees, the snake and a flare gun, become mechanisms to understand key main themes (Wells 1998, 94) allowing a wider interpretation so it can resonate more broadly with audiences. A combination of physical and digital assets also contributed as a tool to showcase theme traits. The narrative structure for the film follows that of the group's common journey points from the findings. Table 1 outlines how each journey point is reflected within the film and includes a screenshot from that section of the animation.

Table 1: Recovery Journey Steps as depicted in The Click (2021).

STAGE	Description of stage as depicted in animation
Stage 1	The **illusion of control** is depicted with the use of the camera angle and a changing perspective to reveal a hidden power dynamic between the protagonist and the snake Part 1 Part 2
Stage 2	**Losing control** is shown by the protagonist thrown from their boat and the looming destructive snake towering above them.
Stage 3	The protagonist becomes **lost** within the snake as it creates a dark tunnel around them. Criss-crossing by the screen as if the character was locked away.
Stage 4	**The Click** is illustrated by the protagonist actively clicking the flare gun trigger, making the decision for change.
Stage 5	**Asking for help** is represented by the lighting of the flare, **getting help** is demonstrated with the use of dropped rope from an unknown helper and later in long term recovery the character is the one to bring and drop the rope to someone else to help.

10. Use of Narrative for Sense-making and to Strengthen Autonomy

The participants are in treatment and so are recreating the way they view their narrative, incorporating the Minnesota model 12 steps[2] on their recovery journey. They cannot change the past, but are owning it, recognising similarities in each other, and learning tools to help themselves individually live productive lives, in line with constructivist, narrative therapeutic models that believe this empowers and allows for growth. The hope that drives a newfound motivation for a changed future is consistent with Wong (2013) which emphasises purpose and meaning in life satisfaction. The focus surrounding "self-transcendence" is reminiscent to the inner change experience of the AA concept of "spiritual awakening" as referred in the Big Book by Bill W:

> Quite often friends of the newcomer are aware of the difference long before he is himself. He finally realizes that he has undergone a profound alteration in his reaction to life; that such a change could hardly have been brought about by himself alone… (Alcoholic Anonymous World Services Inc. 2001, 567–568)

Evident from the above quote, someone's adjusted outlook and personality are processes that are developed as someone moves through their recovery journey. There is also an emphasis on personal responsibility which is in line with Yalom's (1974) beliefs that the person with an addiction taking responsibility for their personal role in facilitating the addiction was a key step to enable people the power to change their living situation. With its emphasis on finding purpose and self-belief through a series of points on a journey, it is easy to link parallels between someone's addiction recovery journey story and Vogler's (2007) adapted 12 stages of the Hero's Journey. Within these 12 stages there are 3 major phases: departure, initiation, and return. In this study, while telling their story the participants are the protagonists of the narrative, restructuring their recovery stories in the form of a

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[2] The Minnesota Model is an abstinence oriented approach to the treatment of addictions, based upon the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. The centre in which the participants were receiving treatment from would use an adapted Minnesota approach.

beginning - addiction, middle - rehabilitation and end – recovery. They are having conflict, going through challenges in these stages through recovery, surviving and with a resolution of long-term recovery. This narrative structure can be easier for someone to understand and is in parallel with studies applying the Hero Journey structure to other psychological issues such as trauma recovery (Keck et al. 2017). In psychology, there are established stages of behavioural change for recovery called the Transtheoretical Model. In this model the stages are outlined as: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination (Prochaska and Velicer 1997). By understanding behaviour, a person's recovery stage can be established, and the relevant treatment provided for them. Recovery is not a conclusion to a story but a continuation of a process.

Social identity model of recovery and the creative value of Frankl's (1985) sources of objective value, discusses giving back, which connects to work that is productive to society (i.e., helping others), contributing to meaning in life for an individual as their perspective shifts (Frankl 1985, 169). Within this shifting perspective they regain the power that they felt they had lost. Within the study and within the animation, getting help and giving help are key to long term recovery. Negative feelings, such as stigma and shame from experiences were shown to be hindrances to recovery. These became issues which prevented individuals seeking help, or early interventions. This is consistent with other studies which indicated shame as a contributing factor that prevents people getting support even if they are ready to stop using (Cook 1988, 743). According to McAdams et al (1996), the theme of communion (social connection) found in a life narrative is needed to heal. Isolation and loneliness are risk factors for addiction.

11. The Protagonist and the Archetypes

Story themes and the type of protagonist someone portrayed themselves as within their story was found to predict someone's category of recovery (Rowlands et al. 2021, 18–22). This section references participants and pseudonyms are used. Participants of the study who created themselves in the clay activity often created themselves as people but when creating addiction characterised it as a monster or as something impacting the person such as consequences of the addiction path (eg. jail bars or a coffin). V. Propp's (1928) character archetypes "Dramatis Personae" can link to a recoveree. The hero is the person telling the new version of their story,

the villain is addiction, and a helper character is included for the journey (Propp 1928). These archetypes are consistent with some of Jung's (1968) collective unconscious archetypes. Walsh (2008) describes the Irish identity in animation as one of 'in betweenness', proposing that a trend by Irish animators to depict human characters rather than anthropomorphising may be a form of demetaphorisation of postcolonial[3] representations (Walsh 2008). Meaning in response to experiences of subordination due to imperialism this choice of representation could be a form of reclamation of an Irish cultural identity and to assert agency of these experiences. In the case of this study, representing addiction as a monster or a snake could signify the opposite - a metaphorisation or anthropomorphisation of 'addiction' allowing someone to take control of this character and thus this experience.

The snake was the only repeated symbol to appear in the three groups. In the female group, participant Fiona metaphorically replied that addiction was a snake when I asked what impact addiction had on their lives. Participant Abbie then elaborated saying that it causes "total destruction" to your life. Participants Nathan (Figure 2) and Steve (Figure 3) who were from separate male groups responded to the second activity, personification of addiction, by creating a snake. Nathan who was in long term recovery referred to the snake as something that he must remind himself to stay away from, a separate entity to himself but which could still cause him pain:

> "...They're good to like look at from a distance but I wouldn't be getting too close to them yano [do you know] what I mean. ... otherwise, you'll be bitten."

Steve, who was much earlier in his treatment journey, referred to himself as having snake-like qualities:

> "... and it still tries to sneak up and tries to getcha [get you], to go back."
>
> "...I was a bit of a snake. ..."
>
> "The sneaky was more compared, to me it's sort of, made me untrustworthy ..."

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[3] Postcolonialism is defined as the political or cultural condition of a former colony. Academic study often focuses on the impact of human control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands. British rule in Ireland spanned several centuries. The War of Independence lasted for several years and resulted in a peace treaty in 1921 which included a partition of Ireland and the creation of the Irish Free State, comprising 26 of 32 counties gaining independence.
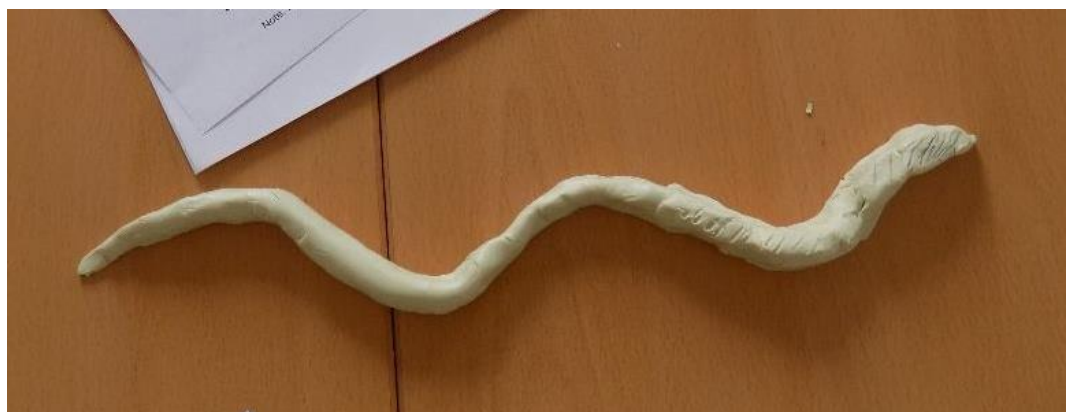
Figure 2: Nathan's Clay Response.

Figure 3: Steve's Clay Response.

As these examples are from separate groups, it is significant that the three participants used the snake as something to convey this concept of what their experience of living with an addiction was like to me. Wells' term "bestial ambivalence" describes the shifting representation of animals by humans to extend meaning through their metaphorical connotations:

> … animators do not merely imitate but interpret, and more-over, engage with the nature of the animal within this flux of meaning…The animal is not absented through the imposition of these elements, and in some senses is

foregrounded at moments when the primacy of the pure animal is required. (Wells 2009, 67)

This 'flux of meaning' extends the decision of the snake as a symbol for addiction in *The Click* (2021). The difference in how Nathan and Steve apply this symbol to their addiction could be viewed as reflecting their current position on the recovery journey. In the animation, the person and addiction are antagonist and protagonist, as clearly illustrated by the looming snake and small, scared character in Figure 4, but are revealed as connected in the next shot, see Figure 5 where the shot transition seemingly merges both character and snake together. Later, through the metamorphosis of the destructive snake character into a small tattoo on the protagonist's arm at the end of the film, see Figure 6, with this shift of control the snake becomes not simply a monster but a reminder and a representation of the journey the protagonist has undergone with their addiction. The snake's mouth and tail barely touch hinting to the ouroboros[4] symbol reflecting the cyclical element of recovery.

Figure 4: Screenshot of animation - Large snake looms over protagonist.

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[4] The *Ouroboros* is an alchemy symbol of a sideways snake biting its tail in a shape of 8.
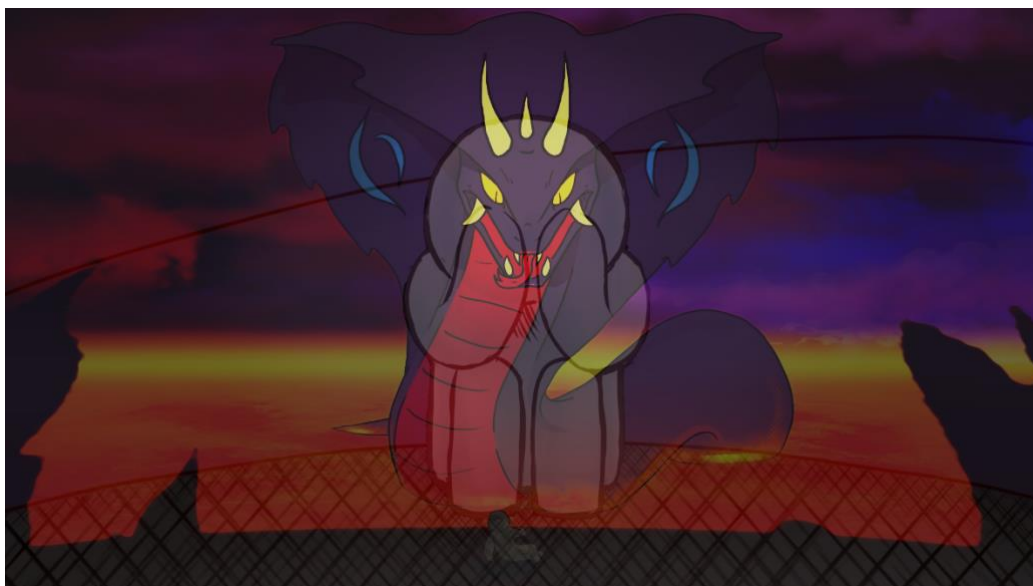
Figure 5: Screenshot of animation - Transition between Illusion of Control section and Loss section.

Figure 6: Screenshot of animation - Tattoo on arm.

12. Conclusion

Addiction and recovery are multi-layered, complex phenomena. They are difficult concepts to describe even for individuals who are living with or have lived through it. Just as people use narrative to understand their own experiences, it can also be used as a tool to decode their experience to others. Such as the case in this study where recoveree narratives provided a structural insight into the lived journey to recovery. One of the key findings is a series of five journey points which were established on the path to recovery: 1. the beginning, 2. losing control, 3. loss, 4. decision to change leading to 5. recovery. With its emphasis on finding purpose and self-belief through a series of points on a journey, parallels can be drawn between someone's addiction recovery journey story and Vogler's (2007) 12 stages of the Hero's Journey. Within these 12 stages there are 3 major phases: departure, initiation, and return as is reflected through a recoverees journey in the form of addiction, decision for change, recovery. Within these stories, how someone represents themselves also reflects additional insights into someone's perception of themselves and of their personal experience with addiction.

What emerged from reviewing the portrayal of addiction and recovery in short animations is that the majority of films concentrate on the losses and destruction within active addiction. Addiction organisations frequently promote aspects of hope and encourage recovery which is reflective in the animations produced in collaboration with them. Though in media which showcases recovery, there is a trend to use recovery as a conclusive device rather than discuss the process of this experience. Recovery was outlined as a challenging process and the information that needs to be shared in animation from this topic is thoughtful, influenced and collaborated stories showcasing aspects of the recovery experience and the progression of recovery.

Further insights into addiction in Irish culture were supported through a multi-method approach in the study allowing for visual and metaphorical representations of addiction and recovery. Arts-based tools provided invaluable assets and a meaningful way to influence the animation. Both interactive activities were influenced by animation practice and facilitated a beyond studio collaboration allowing the participant group further influence on the representation of their experience in the animation. These tools proved successful and could be utilised in

future projects as methods of inquiry to support data collection for animations, especially in situations where meeting participants again can be more difficult.

When depicting people and their experiences, varied methods in the data collection, including allowing for visual data, can reveal more about the people and the world they live in. This highlights the importance of a multimethod approach when engaging with the experience of others. Drawing information from different angles encourages a layered representation of the stories. Restructuring recovery narratives helped people understand what they endured and allowed them to regain power over their future. Both the stories people tell themselves and stories people tell of others have consequences including hindering accessing treatment. Narratives have impacts which can directly affect viewer perspectives and marginalised groups. Redemption narratives can facilitate change.

The Click (2021) outlines common stages on this journey to recovery as told through the focus group participants of this study, but it also became its own journey for the animator contributing to a more nuanced interpretation of the themes. Through production a second script and method developed resulting in the second film *Components of Recovery* (2022). In this way the animation process through producing an animation became part of the study analysis. Both animations are now publically available on Aiséirí's channels and my own as cultural tools which can encourage discussions on addiction and recovery and facilitate understanding of the various themes within this specific experience.

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