

**“Down with the kids”? Reconceptualising the youth work relationship:
How do professional relationships between male youth workers and young men
involved in violence operate to promote desistance?**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the desistance promoting potential of professional relationships between male youth workers and young men involved in violence. It adopts a psychosocial methodological and analytic frame to examine a common-sense proposition: that male workers who are colloquially described as ‘down with the kids’ are especially well suited to engage and mentor young men involved in violence. Five intensely observed longitudinal case studies follow the trajectories of young men and their youth workers over six years.

Each case utilises different conceptual tools to offer different insights into their relationships, including: the presence of *gendered, generational and unconscious* dynamics between young men and male workers; how *reciprocal identification* can lead to male youth workers not seeing how young men neutralise their violent offending; worker reflexivity as a pre-requisite of the youth work role in late modernity and how this can be fractured by the biographical experiences of *too-wounded healers*; the importance of male workers with resources of street-social and masculine capital creating a *third space* where they and young men can examine their own intersectional identities, and; how worker *self-disclosure* can shift doer done-to dynamics within professional relationships and organisations.

The thesis concludes that the male worker as mentor and role model discourse generates both assets and potential shortcomings in terms of desistance promotion. Embodying a ‘down with the kids’ worker subjectivity can provide a ready route into youthful, masculine subcultures and a means for male workers to meet their own need for generativity. But without proper training and supervision there is a risk that workers with their own history of offending can be ineffective at best, and at worst descend into professional burn-out. In this sense *being* down with the kids can lead inadvertently to workers *going* down with the kids. Reconceptualising youth work relationships incorporating psychodynamic and post structural perspectives (i.e. as psychosocial) offers a way to work through these issues productively and can usefully inform youth work practice and policy.

Declaration

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Preface

The form, content and structure of this thesis emerged in part from the relatively unconventional route I have navigated through my professional and academic career. Having spent 20 years as a street-based youth worker and then senior manager in a national children's charity, I entered Higher Education as a second career academic. Working as a senior lecturer on a Youth and Community Work undergraduate training programme, I applied for and secured a large research grant from an EU funding stream. The ambitious aim of the 'Touch' project that the grant funded was to explore youth work responses to youth violence across 3 countries – the UK, Germany and Austria. This was a large-scale piece of research that involved a colleague (Mike Seal) and I, and two peer researchers, employing participatory action research methods to gather data from young people and youth workers over a 2-year period. The findings were eventually to become a book published in 2016 by Policy Press "Responding to Youth Violence through Youth Work" and a documentary film (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olcJ6iWL3SA>). The remit of that project meant the book needed to cover a range of inter-related aspects of youth and community work responses to youth violence. These included a focus on how youth workers might respond to violence on a personal, individual level with young people, but also how violence was mediated within local communities. We also highlighted how violence was perpetrated by state bodies such as the police and the comparative impact of macro-level social policy across Europe on youth work practices and young people's presence in public space.

As the project developed I was simultaneously beginning to consider embarking on doctoral study. One theme emerged from the Touch project that seemed to underpin the whole rationale of the youth work enterprise – the relationship between young person and worker and how this did or did not operate to promote desistance. This coincided with a noticeable discursive shift in policy frameworks, especially in the UK, that bemoaned the lack of mentors for young men involved in violence and crime. As part of the Touch project, but also throughout my own career, I had met youth workers, often male, some of whom had experiences of violence or may have had their own brushes with the criminal justice

system who were positioning themselves (or being positioned by others) as potential role models for young men. I wanted to thoroughly examine this common-sense proposition - that the desistance promoting potential of youth work interventions lay in these male role model workers who were, in colloquial terms, 'down with the kids'. It became clear to me that this would need a significant re-focusing of attention towards the workers' own biographies as well as that of the young men, taking account of the journey they took together, and an evaluation of where that left both the worker and young person following their interaction. This would require a much more detailed and longitudinal examination of relationships than a project such as Touch was able to encompass. A part time doctoral thesis (six years) funded by the ESRC promised to provide the time to achieve this.

As I began to think through how to shape my research I realised that this would also require an alternative methodology better suited to the deep exploration of subjectivities and intersubjective dynamics within relationships. I started to gravitate away from my previous methodological considerations and principles. Until then these had been focused on equalizing the imbalance of power between researcher and participants through participatory and peer-based methods. My colleagues on the Touch project and I had also sought to generate a sample size that we believed would be adequate to make generalizable claims. We spoke to 170 young people (140 male and 30 female) and 50 workers, split evenly between male and female. The use of the youth workers as brokers and the involvement of peer researchers generated what we called proxy trust with the participants. The access this gave us to violent subcultures meant that we were able to gather extensive ethnographic observations, conduct over 40 focus group discussions and approximately 60 individual videoed interviews. We then tried to analyse these using qualitative data analysis software. We felt we were able to draw out some key themes and put forward a model that presented the causes of youth violence at four levels – the personal, community, structural and existential. We argued for the importance of workers responding to violence at all of these levels and not colluding with violence in all its forms.

However, the size of the sample and the extent of the data meant the interpretive task was huge. The international scope of the project and time limitations meant we could only spend a few days with the project participants and we were unable to follow the individual trajectories of worker/young person relationships. This left certain questions unanswered,

especially around the desistance promoting potential of those relationships and how this might be mediated through indices of social identity, especially gender. Discerning what factors were generalizable from such a large sample became an interpretive task that the book could not accommodate. Although I could see that there were some processes that were approximately verifiable within all the relationships we encountered, we also recognised that we had not fully captured how these processes transpired in each individual instance. And crucially, although we did engage in some critical discourse analysis of what we called youth worker *tales*, neither the peer researchers or Mike and I were able to give serious consideration to the extent to which participants meant what they said or fully understood their own accounts.

By the time I came to consider how to approach my doctoral study I had concluded that it was only through compiling highly-focused, close readings of a small number of selected dyadic cases of male workers and young men that I could fully exemplify the relational and gendered processes that I had only begun to discern in my large cross section of workers and young people in the Touch project. As my field work progressed and the complexities of the cases began to emerge I came to the conclusion that to analyse the data meaningfully and to avoid de-contextualisation, my sample size would need to remain even smaller than I first anticipated. I have therefore selected only five cases out of a larger pool of participants I observed and interviewed over the six-year period. These five taken together do though, I believe, serve to offer meaningful, new insights into the desistance promoting potential of professional relationships between male youth workers and young people who are involved in violence.

I did, however retain some other important principles from the Touch project. I wanted to contribute to the debate around the relative merits of risk management and programmed interventions versus relationship and worker skills that had come to dominate youth justice policy during the 1990's in the UK. I wanted to think about youth violence in wider terms than the narrower and contestable phenomenon of gang violence. There is a considerable existing body of research that seeks to understand criminal gangs and possible interventions to violence that occurs in the street such as knife and gun attacks. Despite drastic cuts in youth services in the UK in recent years, youth workers are still seen as a potential resource in the search for answers. For example, in the UK projects have emerged

that place youth workers in hospital Accident and Emergency departments to enable them to make contact with those who have suffered knife or gun attacks at a time when they may be most open to intervention (Centre for Social Justice, 2014). Routinely though youth workers working in universal services are more likely to encounter young people who resort to instrumental (aimed at accomplishing something) or expressive (in order to communicate something) violence to meet their underlying needs, but who may not be directly gang involved. So, in this sense, this thesis is not presented as gang research and I would not claim to be a gang researcher, although I would hope many of its findings might be of use to workers engaged with young people who are struggling to extricate themselves from violent subcultures. Although youth workers in parts of the country continue to engage with young people who are gang involved and affiliated, I wanted my research to speak to many (even the majority) of youth workers who, as I had during my career, were encountering youth violence more commonly in its everyday manifestation; fights and physical confrontations, bullying, and verbal aggression (sometimes directed at workers) as well as violence as part of low-level criminal activity. I wanted to recognise that these young people (and especially young men) can be perpetrators, witnesses and victims of a range of types of violence, (physical, psychological, material, sexual and social) sometimes simultaneously. I knew also that some workers had been involved in violence in their youth and I wanted to explore how this had lingered on into their adult and professional identities.

The decision to focus exclusively on male workers and young men was rooted in my aim to explore the dynamics of male to male violence specifically and its relation to masculine subjectivities. This inevitably meant that the voices of women in my research would be filtered through the voices of the male participants. I have tried throughout to critically engage with the subjective images of women the male participants create, drawing on insights from psychosocial and critical gender theory to remain sensitive to the multiple structures of inequality and imbalances of power that shape these men's relationships with women. However, exploring the perspectives of the men's partners, mothers, and female colleagues was not practically feasible within the remit of the thesis and would have required an equally sustained focus. I wanted to focus specifically on the way adult male youth workers and young men negotiated power within their personal relationships in

order to understand how they might become complicit with, and/or resist, oppressive gendered practices.

The male workers depicted in my case studies were often working in projects with restricted and dwindling financial resources and were trying valiantly to support young men who were embroiled in intensely difficult personal circumstances. I hoped to capture how the workers and young men were heavily determined by the psychic and social barriers they faced, but also how and why they were able to overcome those barriers too. I would like to thank all the participants for sharing their stories so openly with me, and even though there may be inevitable differences in how I and they may have interpreted them, I hope that my critical analysis can be read in the spirit in which it was intended – to improve how a profession to which I belonged for most of my working life can respond to a pressing social issue and help some of the most vulnerable young people in society. At the launch of the book based on the Touch project (Harris and Seal, 2016), Professor John Pitts remarked that in our introduction to the book Mike and I had implied that to “distil out the specific impact of a youth worker would be a fruitless and meaningless task” (p4). He felt that statement was selling our research short and that we had gone some way to demonstrating how youth work can be a meaningful response to youth violence. He and I agreed that there was still more to distance to be travelled before we could justifiably say we fully understood the intersubjective dynamics of the distinctive and complex nature of professional youth work relationships. This thesis is an attempt to travel a little further along that path.

Introduction

This thesis is structured so as to facilitate the exploration of qualitative data gathered over six years in the field spent observing and talking to young men involved in violence and their male youth workers. It seeks to illuminate the nature of male-to-male relationship-based youth work, specifically that which seeks to bring about desistance from violent crime. It is also an attempt at a critical analysis of what has become a somewhat idealised rhetorical trope within youth work - the male youth worker as a mentor, role model and frontline practitioner with perceived resources of street social capital; or, as might be expressed more colloquially, is 'down with the kids'. As will become clear as the results unfold, I am using the term 'down with the kids' as a deliberately ambiguous euphemism to capture a paradigmatic youth worker identity which, I argue, is in need of some critical analysis. This strong conceptual current running through contemporary youth work practice is subjected to a critical examination through an interpretive analysis of the personal and professional identity development of: three male qualified youth workers (Steve, Chris and Jim) and their respective relationships with four young men (Germaine, Leon, Darren and Daniel). I also one follow one youth work student in training (Mark) who failed to find employment post qualification. I observe and follow Mark for three years, and the relationships between the qualified workers and young people for between six and 18 months. Whilst wishing to keep to the forefront the overarching goal of youth work in this context (that is, to offer help and support to young people who find themselves embroiled in violence) the thesis seeks to redirect the more customary focus on outcomes for the young person towards the professional formation of the worker and the intersubjective processes between both parties. The study also seeks to complement, but also address the limitations of, existing large scale meta studies that focus more on the *ingredients* of worker interventions – *what* works – rather than on the centrality of intersubjective processes between worker and young person - *who* works best and *with whom*.

The results of my longitudinal fieldwork are therefore presented as five case studies (one single and four dyadic) all of which incorporate selected conceptual tools, detailed pen portraits of the research participants and an in-depth analysis rooted in a psychosocial

methodological and theoretical framework. Rather than prefacing the empirical results of the study with the customary discursive literature review touring around theoretical material of possible relevance to all the cases, I have atypically opted to place the conceptual tools at the beginning of each chapter, in close proximity to the data. This is so the reader has less conceptual material to hold in mind in each case. As we move through the case studies it is intended that this conceptual material accumulates into a de facto expansive review (and then development of) existing theory and literature relevant to the consideration of masculine subjectivities, professional youth work relationships, desistance pathways, and intersubjectivity.

However, before presenting the cases, they do need to be set in a broader context, especially for those readers who may be unfamiliar with the youth work profession and how it is currently conceptualised and positioned in relation to the youth justice system and other professions in the UK. Chapter one therefore sets out how youth work has come to be conceived in the UK and how recent social policy has come to bear on the profession. I argue that the policy and practice terrain that youth workers operate within has shifted so that youth workers are increasingly expected to respond to the social problem of youth crime and violence. This, and cuts to Local Authority funded youth services, means that youth workers now increasingly find themselves positioned on ground occupied by other youth professionals such as those operating within the youth justice sector. To highlight the specific challenges, issues and opportunities this presents for youth workers, I outline some points of convergence between youth justice and youth work methods but also identify some divergences too, such as the *voluntary* nature of the relationship between youth workers and young people. I suggest some aspects of youth justice practice, such as the focus on programmed activities and risk management, although demonstrably effective when delivered by suitably qualified professionals, are too antithetical to the principles of youth work and ultimately unworkable in practice to provide a basis for the youth work offer moving forward. The chapter concludes that the youth work community of practice needs therefore to articulate how retaining its distinctive practice features can form part of a meaningful response to youth violence. I posit that one way to achieve this would be through reconceptualising youth work in these new contexts as psychosocial.

Chapter two outlines some of the methodological and ethical challenges that arose as a result of my attempt to fuse a psychosocial theoretical frame with my commitment to democratic, participatory practice as a former youth work practitioner and second career researcher. I explain why I felt the focus and aim of the study required a move away from participatory approaches towards a psychosocial standpoint, primarily because I came to the view that the research participants were likely to present as *defended* subjects. I defend my decision to keep the sample size to male workers and young men only and small on the basis that understanding the mechanisms at work required longitudinal, in-depth case studies that could drill down into the male workers' and young men's biographies *and* the social worlds they inhabit over time. The chapter explores the methodological questions this epistemic shift generated, including generalisability, representativeness and how to account for intersectional indices of power within such a small sample. The chapter also rationalises the thesis' specific focus on how social constructions of masculinities merge with personal and professional identities and explains how the cases were selected purposively in order to examine where the relationships did *and* did not seem to promote desistance.

Turning that focus on masculine identity inwards, I then outline how I approached issues of my own power. I review how I considered my own social and professional identity as a white, male ex-youth worker, and my own psychic baggage, as part of a commitment to maintaining researcher reflexivity and a psychosocial, critical approach to gender. I describe how employing the notion of gestalt to interpret rather than fragment the data reduced the possible effects of applying a partial, top-down epistemology during data analysis. Some idiosyncratic, taxing ethical dilemmas that arose are then discussed, including how to balance a duty of care to participants whilst also generating meaningful data that could contribute to socially worthy objectives. I show how the professional context in which the study was conducted (youth and community work) afforded the opportunity to work more dialogically, relationally and in partnership *with* participants than I initially anticipated. This leads me to conclude that psychosocial research methods can be balanced with participatory principles, even if the two approaches are likely to remain uneasy bedfellows.

The presentation of my results data begins with chapter three that presents a case study

of a relationship between a young black man involved in violence, Germaine, and his older white youth worker, Steve. The case seeks to illuminate how their relationship does seem to be pivotal in Germaine's eventual desistance, whilst also uncovering some key aspects of it that might have relevance for wider debates about youth work with young people involved in violence. I first discuss how the professional subject positions of worker-as-male-role-model and surrogate father are often offered as self-evident solutions to youth violence and that this obscures important generational and psychodynamic factors at play within youth work relationships. After setting out contrasting perspectives on the construction of masculine subjectivities, I argue that academic analyses may be struggling to keep pace with how these subjectivities materialise in contemporary youth subcultures, especially when discourses of black masculinity and father absence add further complexity. I then present a pen portrait of Germaine and analyse how he perceives his developing relationship with Steve. The case shows how Steve's use of humour and steadfast offer of support to Germaine and his mother leads to Germaine foregoing his racialised perception of Steve. Germaine chooses to embark on a different road set out for him by Steve. A psychosocial analysis then explores to what extent Steve's persona and humour was reflexively constructed and how and why this influenced Germaine to choose this road, in part through epiphanal moments and a psychic investment in a gendered discourse of father absence. I show how this gendered discourse was an active ingredient in his desistance trajectory. I conclude that in order to promote desistance, youth workers, like Steve, will need to develop a high level of reflexive awareness of how their own gendered and racialized performative identity constructions materialise within the subcultural spaces occupied by the young people they work with.

Chapter four charts the evolving relationship between the same worker, Steve, and another young black man (Leon). Leon, who has been convicted of a violent attack against an elderly white male and a range of other criminal offences, meets Steve and begins to show signs of desisting, but over time more permanent desistance becomes more elusive. The chapter begins by setting out two conceptual tools: the psychodynamic notion of reciprocal identification and neutralisation theory. I then recount Leon's story in his own words. I show how structural barriers, combined with dis-identification with his mother's male

partner and rejection and abandonment within his family form part of the aetiology of his violent behaviour. Having rejected the programmed and risk-based interventions of his youth justice worker, Leon meets Steve and they form an empathic relationship rooted in processes of reciprocal identification. Despite Steve generating some momentum in Leon's desistance journey, their relationship begins to falter and Steve's efforts at desistance seem to misfire. In order to understand why, I then redirect the focus of the case onto Steve's biography. His life story shows how he also felt the force of emotional deprivation and labelling growing up in the same geographical locality as Leon. Following painful familial rejection and involvement in petty crime he joined the army, where he experienced further brutality and trauma, both in training and during active service in war zones. After returning home, he gravitates towards a career in youth work and enrolls on a training course. He manages to find employment and quickly builds rapport with local young men, including Leon, drawing on an embodied masculinity infused with toughness, street contacts and local knowledge. However, at times he struggles to see how Leon continues to neutralise his offending behaviour and Leon seems reluctant to be fully open with Steve. I argue that Steve's over identification with Leon hampers his reflexivity and leads him to not want to challenge Leon's choice to continue engaging in low level violence. Meanwhile, Steve's struggle to cope with traumatic events in his past and move away his former squaddie identity takes an increasing toll on his own mental well-being.

In chapter five I try to unpick how biographical factors can become imbricated with processes of building worker identities, and especially reflexivity, within professional training. I present a single case study of a man in his 20's (Mark) training to be a youth worker following several years of involvement in serious football-related violence. The case allows me to introduce and review psychosocial explanations of masculine violence and its unconscious drivers, as well as desistance theory and the Jungian notion of the wounded healer. A detailed pen portrait of Mark describes his childhood experiences at home and school, and a long period as an active member of a football hooligan firm. It then charts his pathway towards primary and secondary desistance and his struggle to cope with the demands of a youth work training course, especially the demand for reflexivity. I suggest Mark's ability to be reflexive is fractured as a result of his biographical experiences, principally traumatic violence he witnessed in the family home. This hampers his ability to

mentalise, i.e. make use of an awareness of his own and others' thoughts and feelings. Even though he manages to recalibrate his hooligan identity to some extent, the allure of football violence persists and he fails to engage meaningfully with young people whilst in training, and then struggles to find permanent employment in the youth work field post qualification. The case sheds light on why many ex-offenders gravitate towards roles such as youth work as part of their own desistance process but how some may be "too wounded" to effectively promote the desistance of others. It raises the question as to how best to train and support wounded healers or fractured reflexives such as Mark as they seek to accomplish an identity which is both psychically acceptable to themselves and socially acceptable to others.

Chapter six extends the consideration of worker-young person inter-subjectivity and its psychodynamic topography into a more fully social (racialised, classed and gendered) context. The case focuses on a black, muscular male worker (Chris) with a strong local reputation for intervention work with young people and his relationship with a young black man (Darren) – a victim of violence at the hands of his peers. Here I choose to emphasise how intersectional aspects of social identity (race and class as well as gender) figure within relationship-based youth work. I utilise Bourdieu's field theory to conceptualise the street environment as a field where resources of street social and masculine capital are competed over by young men, many of whom embody forms of marginalised masculinity (Connell, 1995). In line with my psychosocial frame I fuse this sociological perspective with the psychoanalytic notion of recognition (Benjamin, 2007). I argue that Chris and Darren, despite sharing a racial identity, represent two very differently positioned masculine subjectivities in that field. Chris, a tall, muscular revert to Islam has discernible success engaging with local young black men, many of whom are gang affiliated or involved. However, when it comes to reach out to the more vulnerable Darren, I show how Chris might have needed to be more open about his own vulnerability and reflexively engaged with his own masculine privilege and power. He also needed to come to terms with his own violent behaviour towards women in his past and the conscious guilt (as well as unconscious, bypassed shame) this engendered. I suggest this openness might have created a *third space* – a vantage point from which both he and Darren could view each other and the task of masculinity construction in the street field. I argue this might have

opened up new ways for them both out of their respective gendered identity constructions that leave Darren retreating into isolation from his peers and Chris towards conflict with his female managers and at risk of professional burn-out.

Chapter seven reiterates and refines this notion of psychic recognition within intersubjectivity by charting the relationship between a care-leaver (Daniel) and his worker (Jim). Both Daniel and Jim are haunted by events in their past; Daniel by a history of severe familial neglect, maltreatment and abuse, and Jim by his own offending, alcohol addiction and depression. I propose object relations theory as a conceptual tool to understand Daniel's violent behaviour and then follow his experience of the professionals he encounters in the care system and psychiatric services. I characterise these relationships as framed by a dialectic that casts the professionals, and at first Jim too, as the doer and Daniel as the done to. I show how inexperienced, unqualified staff in the homeless hostel where Daniel lives slip into poor, impersonal and indefensible practice as a result of their own anxieties and fears. I then recount Jim's own story and follow Daniel and Jim's experience of each-other in the hostel over five months. This includes Jim's attempts to engender shifts in Daniel's perception of himself and others around him via a decision to disclose an aspect of his own biography that renders him more fallible in Daniel's eyes. I try to show how that begins to shift the asymmetry within the dynamic of their relationship, generating an opportunity for Daniel to construct an alternative, less pervasively violent subjectivity. However, as the case ultimately unfolds and reveals, this opportunity is quashed by endemic organisational failures within the hostel where Daniel was living. I argue that these systemic failings and limited practice repertoire of Jim's co-workers represents (if replicated elsewhere) a serious shortcoming in services that purport to look after and rehabilitate young people like Daniel, many of whom are in dire need of professional adult support.

The final chapter, in concluding the thesis, seeks to draw together some emergent themes, highlighting their relevance to youth work's place within the criminal justice arena. I suggest that the cases illuminate the generational, intersectional and psychosocial complexity of relationships between male workers and young men involved in violence. I argue that, when robustly conceptualised and delivered by reflexive workers, relationship-

based, improvised youth work practice can complement and even strengthen the more programmed, cognitive and risk management approaches which have come to dominate criminal and youth justice. However, youth work's reliance on the orthodox Rogerian and Freirean model of relationships needs reconceptualising to incorporate psychosocial (i.e. psychodynamic and post structural) perspectives on subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

I argue that male youth workers' personal and professional personas can generate the opportunity to access young men who are either perpetrators or victims of violence in some of the most socially and economically deprived communities in the UK. The relationships they build can provide a basis for empathy, reciprocal identification and for workers to shift doer-done to dialectics through, for example, the use of reflexive self-disclosure. This can be a potential asset in efforts to promote desistance. However, this potential leverage can be limited by a number of practice shortcomings: Limited worker reflexivity around their own wounds and gendered identities; resistance to challenge and surface young men's neutralisation techniques due to over identification and projection; insufficient recognition of the psychic and generational differences within social identities (especially constructions of masculinity); psychic investments in discourses that either idealise or demonise women; and missed opportunities to create a third reflexive space within their relationships with young men. I argue this third space should be one where both male workers and young men can examine their own gendered identity constructions and involvement as victims and perpetrators of violence.

I posit that these shortcomings are not always sufficiently anticipated within the 'down with the kids' discourse and the social policies that emerge from it. Without sufficient support and supervision, some male youth workers, rather than *being* down with the kids, can end up *going* down with them as they struggle to surmount the trials and tribulations they have encountered on their own desistance pathways. This possibility is exacerbated by the under resourcing of youth services, moves towards de-professionalisation in the youth work sector and ongoing structural issues of poverty, lack of opportunities in communities, and the persistence of patriarchal values at the heart of both hegemonic (including political responses to crime) and subordinated masculinities (marginalised young men involved in crime). Finally, the thesis concludes that in order to establish how male youth workers can counter the damaging effects of male to male violence in these

communities it is necessary to continue to determinedly drill down in to the detail of what the 'down with the kids' discourse really looks like in practice on the ground and how it does or does not collude with these political and subcultural discourses. I suggest that this might lead youth workers, male and female, towards a new formulation of their practice as psychosocial, gender-critical youth work and call for more research to explore how this might enhance current professional youth work approaches to youth violence.

Chapter 1: Mapping the professional and policy terrain

Introduction

In the UK a wide range of welfare-oriented professionals (social workers, psychotherapists, probation officers, youth mentors, youth offending team workers and youth workers) have long been engaged with young people who are involved in violent, criminal activity. The way in which each of these have articulated their primary aims has varied over time but all have, as part of their endeavours, a desire to create lasting change in young people's criminal and violent behaviour (i.e. desistance) and a relationship between the young person, client, mentee or offender and the worker, supervisor, or officer. Within the chosen field of study here – that of youth work - this relationship between worker and young person continues to be identified as one of the profession's central, distinctive features. It is also seen as the primary vehicle through which change in violent or criminal behaviour is assumed to be brought about. One feature of professional youth work relationships has recently come to the fore in political discourse: the valorisation of the ideal youth worker as a role model, often male, who is able to connect with young men involved with violence and promote their desistance. This thesis seeks to examine these relationships and argues that *how* they promote desistance could be more rigorously conceptualised and better understood.

As a foreword, this chapter outlines the underlying philosophical and theoretical precepts of youth work, charting how it has come to be conceived in the UK and identifying some its most distinctive features. I foreground three features as hallmarks: the importance placed on the voluntary nature of the relationship between worker and young person, the use of recreational activities and an emphasis on an improvisatory, critical worker disposition. These features are then located within the profession's broader ideological commitment to dialogical and democratic practice and adherence to a Rogerian and Freirean view of professional relationships. I then assess the current positioning of the profession within the UK, arguing that recent years have seen it impacted by a shift in youth social policy towards New Public Management and economic austerity and in youth justice policy towards risk management and programmed, cognitive behavioural interventions. This has meant the

youth work profession has come under pressure to show how it might respond to the most pressing social problems perceived to be associated with young people, such as gang violence and knife crime. Employment opportunities for youth workers in open, universal services such as youth clubs have reduced significantly. Workers have increasingly found themselves working in mentoring schemes, Targeted Youth Support teams, in gang intervention projects, and also alternative sister services such as hostels for homeless young people. Here they are tasked with engaging with young people with multiple support needs and who are often engaged in offending behaviour, including violence. I then highlight how these policy shifts also coincided with the intensification of longstanding concerns about young *men's* offending behaviour in particular, especially following the riots in English cities in 2011. I show how this focused attention on issues such as father absence and led to calls for more male role models for young (especially black, working class) men, and the extension of youth mentoring programmes for young men.

As youth workers tentatively move to inhabit this new professional terrain, questions arise as to how their approaches might fit with, or differ from, that of professionals already working with young offenders, such as youth justice workers. To provide some context for these questions, I set out the current shape of youth justice practice, highlighting for example how the notion of a *working alliance* between worker and young person also sits central to the modus operandi of that profession. However, I suggest other key aspects of youth justice practice - the mandatory requirement for young people to engage with youth justice interventions, standardised assessment processes and intervention methods drawn from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – although able to demonstrate some desistance promoting potential, are too antithetical to the principles of youth work to provide a workable basis for youth work practice moving forward. I argue that the youth work community of practice needs therefore to articulate how its distinctive practice features can respond to the complex issues raised when working with young people who are victims and/or perpetrators of violence and who may resist the efforts of professionals to intervene. This is not only of import to the development of specialist youth work programmes that target gang members, but also to those engaged with young people engaged in violence who are not gang involved or affiliated.

I argue that the hallmarks of youth work practice, especially the voluntary relationship

between worker and young person, should remain central to the youth work offer. The chapter concludes that this orthodox Rogerian and Freirean conceptualisation of youth work relationships would benefit from an openness to theoretical paradigms drawn from other professions and academic disciplines. I suggest the emerging field of psychosocial studies, with its fusion of contemporary psychodynamic psychology and post-structural perspectives on identity construction might provide an apposite framework for such a re-conceptualisation.

Orthodox conceptualisations of youth work

A well-established body of literature, from both the UK and abroad, has attempted to identify what is distinct about youth work as compared to other professions that seek to educate and engage with young people, such as social work, youth justice and teaching in schools (Batsleer and Davies, 2010; Jeffs and Smith, 2008). In Europe, for instance, holistic, community-oriented work with young people falls under the umbrella of social pedagogy (Petrie et al, 2006) whereas in the UK, an understanding of youth work as *informal* as opposed to formal education (Richardson and Wolfe, 2006) has emerged. This conceptualisation draws heavily on an eclectic (possibly even contradictory) mix of underlying philosophical and theoretical discourses, primarily: existentialist ontology and humanistic psychology, a broadly romantic and progressive educational philosophy and a critical perspective on education, society and power. This leads to an accent on some key defining components to youth work, the most central of which being the *voluntary* participation of young people in a relationship with the youth worker (Jeffs and Smith, 2008; Huskins, 1996; Merton et al, 2004); that is, the engagement, and the features within it, are not imposed upon young people but freely chosen and negotiated. This principle is illustrated with this opening statement taken from a youth work-oriented crime prevention project in Lambeth, London:

The principle of voluntary engagement...forms the shape and nature of the relationship between the youth worker and the young person. It means that young people are enabled to retain power. This process, by its very nature, has to be one of mutual negotiation involving much 'give and take'. If a programme doesn't meet the

aspirations of the young person, he or she always has the power to walk away from it. (Home Office, 2006, p3).

This voluntary engagement, youth workers argue, means they are able to quickly develop rapport with young people who are often sensitised and resistant to adults seeking to impose their own agenda. Power differentials between worker and young person are brought into sharp focus. Within street-based youth work for example, workers seek to be invited by young people into their geographical and social territory, rather than operating in worker-controlled premises. Youth workers maintain that this element of choice creates a distinctive mediation of authority within the relationship, opening up the possibility of a relationship between worker and young person in which the young person is more invested as an active agent.

Traditionally, youth workers use a range of themed, *recreational activities* (such as art, music, sport, or outdoor pursuits) that are open to all, enjoyable and attractive to strengthen these relationships and create space for critical reflection and experiential learning to occur. Crucially, these activities are not viewed as not simply diversionary – neither are they an end product, but the means by which workers hope to engage young people in conversation, and in which support and challenge can then flourish. In this way, activities and free association in groups act as vehicles to raise young people’s awareness of alternative options in terms of their values, behaviour and identity construction. In essence:

Youth work is a process through which young people come to increasingly understand their values and integrate those values with their sense of identity and their actions in the world. (Young, 1999, p4).

The physical and social context of youth work practice (in youth clubs, on the street, in public space, and in young people’s free time) means that opportunities for learning are necessarily negotiated, often occur during real time, and need to be drawn from the immediate environment, in the moment. Youth workers often cannot know who they shall meet and under what circumstances. Groups can be transient and particularly susceptible to interruption by random events (Harris, 2005). Often the work occurs in environments

where tension is high with young people who have previously rejected structured, formal education and may be involved (in that moment) in activities or behaviour that can be challenging to deal with. Therefore, workers often need to be able to rapidly recognise aspects of young people's everyday lives, within their immediate environment (events, images, and conversations, etc.) as potential stimuli for educative dialogue, rather than relying on structured lesson plans or preconceived programmes of activity. Youth work becomes, in part, an *improvised* process where the assessment of situations encountered needs to be constantly adjusted in an unfolding, emergent context. The particulars of that situation are crucial. The worker's emotions, skills, dispositions, their sense of self, the possibilities uncovered by their moment-to-moment action in that situation, fundamentally shape their perception of and response to a problem. Solutions, if they are to be found, lie at least in part within the relationship between them and the young person. Youth workers therefore need to be able to see and reflect upon how their own interactions are also shaping that relationship, situation and problem. In this very real sense it could be said that to change the youth worker is to also change the possibilities of how that problem may be mediated.

Furthermore, this improvised educative approach has been seen as pivotal not solely for instrumental reasons of necessity and efficacy. Youth workers argue that they work in this way not because that have no choice but to do so, or because it simply works. Rather the preference for improvised rather than routinized interventions is also based in ideological, value-driven reasons of purpose too. Youth work's purpose is centred on notions of democracy, the common good and social justice (Jefferies and Smith, 1988). I have argued previously that, through adopting an educative process that begins with their immediate, concrete reality, young people are then "more intrinsically motivated to examine how they are positioned within their social world" (Harris, 2014, p656). Engaging with young people in this way,

allows for both seemingly trivial and significant aspects of their life to be first discovered, named and then imbued with meaning. In turn this enables them to act more autonomously and in ways that precipitate their personal development and, crucially, discernible change within their social reality (ibid).

This improvised form of engagement has its foundations in the ideas of Paulo Freire (1972) who believed that dialogue was key to working with oppressed and disenfranchised groups. Dialogue, he insisted, is a process of two-way encounter and influence; a co-operative activity involving respect where people work with each other on themes generated together. The aim of dialogical practice is conscientisation, whereby young people develop an in-depth understanding of the social and political contradictions in their world. Through this raised awareness it is hoped they are then moved to take action against the oppressive elements in their lives, such as sexism, racism and class disadvantage. Rather than one person acting upon another (what Freire called a banking model of education) dialogic education seeks to develop this critical consciousness, whereby people begin to critically examine and learn from the past, leading to informed action in the present.

The influence of Freire has meant that the youth work professional community have traditionally resisted a characterisation of their practice with young people as problem-focused, where social issues such as crime or violence are abstracted from their social context and from young people themselves. Wishing to be perceived as agents of social change, youth workers, at least in theory, seek to work with young people to identify social issues and partner with them in collective community action to find, and then animate, solutions. This involves first problematizing social problems, i.e. to ask, whose interests does solving the problem serve and what has produced the 'problem' in the first place? The use of generative themes (Freire, 1976) that emerge from the young people's own reality is therefore both practically and ideologically wedded to a youth worker's professional identity.

Alongside this critical theoretical base, youth work training programmes, in common with many of the helping professions such as social work, often have as their starting point a basic introduction to humanistic psychology. This characterises the effective helping relationship as non-judgmental in nature. Based on an existential, phenomenological philosophy, and the work of Abraham Maslow (1962) and Carl Rogers (1961) within therapeutic settings, this entails: empathy, which requires the workers to enter the young person's subjective and individual life-world; congruence, or authenticity, or realness; and unconditional positive regard (care or warmth) for the individual who is actively listened to and fully accepted for who they are, irrespective of their behaviour. This person-centred

theoretical position maintains that when listening to young peoples' impressions, experiences and opinions, the professional should decide to "concede space for self-expression, regardless of whether we like it or not" (Krafeld, 1996, p17). For Rogers, it is the nature of the relationship formed between professional and client, more than what the worker does, that has transformational power. The worker's role is to facilitate personal growth towards what Maslow (1962) called self-actualisation or "the full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities" (p150) and meaningful connections to external reality.

It is, in part, this humanistic theoretical basis that has traditionally formed the bedrock of youth work's focus on relationships as the vehicle for behavioural change. Writers such as Smith and Smith (2008) draw heavily on these humanistic and spiritual (e.g. Buber, 1923) notions of being *with* young people. Showing care, understanding and wisdom is seen as the way to help them through the personal difficulties they face. Through nurture, reflection and conversation, youth workers hold out the hope that young people will come to the realization that their actions, especially those that are criminal and violent, harm themselves as well as others. These aspects of youth work relationships (empathy, unconditional positive regard and authenticity) are seen as active ingredients that promote desistance by prompting young people to make autonomous, unilateral decisions to change their behaviour.

A shifting policy context

Since the Albermarle Report (1960) established a strong basis for a youth service in England and Wales, youth work has steadily sought to establish itself as a profession akin to related helping professions such as social work and probation. The report led many Local Authorities to set up universal youth services including open access, neighbourhood-based youth clubs and detached (street-based) youth work. The New Labour government in 1997 increased funding to the youth work sector but this came with greater expectations of accountability as part of a New Public Management ethos. Open universal youth services were replaced with more short term, structured, targeted, even compulsory youth work interventions that sought to engage in crime prevention, risk management and control (Barry, 2005; Home Office, 2002, 2006; Merton et al, 2004). More and more youth projects

have found that pressure to find funding means they have had to dilute their commitment to the voluntary principle and some even have begun to question its sacred cow status (Ord, 2009). Targeted Youth Support teams were created and tasked with engaging those young people perceived to be most problematic. Rogerian and Freirean tenets such as unconditional positive regard and dialogical practice, much emphasised and heralded in Higher Education training programmes, are increasingly misunderstood or not valued in the field.

Between 2007 and 2008 The National Youth Agency conducted an audit of youth work in the UK. This found that there were over 4000 professionally qualified youth workers employed in the UK and over 17,000 unqualified support workers. 900 of those qualified were employed in managerial positions. Numbers of volunteers were hard to identify but at that time the NYA estimated (NYA, 2009) there were in the region of 500,000 people involved as volunteer youth workers in Britain, mainly in the voluntary, community and faith sectors. In 2010, professional youth work qualification came at Honours Degree level, and 30 English Universities and Colleges offered accredited courses. According to the Community and Youth Workers Union, by 2010 the youth work profession in the UK had clear, established “academic benchmarks for training”, “robust validation systems over that training”, “national terms and conditions for all those working full and part time in the field”, and “strong occupational standards” (CYWU, 2010).

The financial crisis of 2012 culminated in cuts to public services in the UK as part of efforts to reduce the deficit in the national budget. Many Local Authorities, who were under no statutory obligation to provide youth services, chose to close their services altogether. Several Higher Education degree training courses were closed as student numbers fell, with job prospects so dim. These policy shifts coincided with perceived rises in gang violence amongst young people (Centre for Social Justice, 2009) and a series of riots in British cities. All those working directly with young people came under intense scrutiny to provide evidence of how they were having direct and measurable impact on levels of violence and crime, if at all. Youth work was singled out for criticism for failing to address the criminal behaviour of young people and struggling to provide any authoritative evidence of its ability to reduce reoffending levels (Mason and Prior, 2008). These broader currents of social policy found a focal point around issues of young working-class men especially.

Following the riots of 2011, young British men were increasingly seen as searching for a respectable identity amongst the pervasive negative influence of so called gangsta and grime culture. This was seen as a kind of self-imposed and therefore agentically-removable barrier to employability and social inclusion. David Cameron's rhetorical question in response to the riots - where are the parents? - was echoed by academics such as Tony Sewell who took to the media to call for the introduction of youth mentoring programmes and more role models for young men (see for example The Guardian March 15th 2010 'Black boys are too feminised').

The over representation of young black men in the criminal justice system continued to attract public and political attention. Concerns often focused on gendered and racialised aetiological factors and the notion of father deficit. A Home Affairs Select Committee report (2007) highlighted the lack of father involvement as having a negative impact on young black males, citing that black children overall were more likely to grow up in single parent households headed by mothers (59% of black Caribbean children compared with 22% of white children). The report was careful to state that the fact that a father did not live in the same household with his children was not, in itself, an indication of insufficient parental support, and cautioned against trying to impose a Eurocentric nuclear family model on other ethnic groupings. It stated that what mattered was not simply the presence or absence of a father in the child's home, but their availability, involvement and the quality of the father-child relationship. That said, many witnesses still insisted that an absent and disengaged father could have a negative impact on young men's development. In their joint submission, Barnardos and the Babyfather Alliance said boys and young men who lack father involvement can develop father hunger, a trauma which leaves them vulnerable to peer pressure and external influences. Camila Batmanghelidjh told the Committee that responsibility for father absence cannot be placed with the male partner alone and spoke of the rejection and cruelty of females who reject the adolescent, male, partner, preferring to cope alone. Following the riots, charities such as Addaction (2011) argued that father absence was an epidemic directly related to youth men's involvement in the riots and gangs, especially in the black community. According to Glynn, who conducted the research for the Addaction report, the absence of a father from a young man's life,

deeply affects their notion of self, and many develop a swaggering, intimidating persona in an attempt to disguise their underlying fears, resentments, anxieties and unhappiness (Glynn, 2011, p3).

The perceived need for father figures and respectable masculine role models for young men, from all ethnic backgrounds, gave rise to a number of direct policy descendants. Spread over a number of years, these initiatives adopted different trajectories but shared a similar objective of promoting character formation through programmed activities or relationships with adults conceived as potential role models: The National Citizen's Service (www.ncsyes.co.uk); the Challenge programme (www.the-challenge.org); the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme (with its accent on bushcraft and adventure) (www.dofe.org); joint initiatives such as Sport England/Police's Reducing Crime sport programme (www.sportengland.org/research/benefitsofsport/). More recently, there have been a number of regional initiatives in the UK such as the Mayor of London's plan to pair 100 black or dual heritage NEET young men with 100 black men (www.100bml.org). Batsleer (2015) shows how the same underlying presumptions about role models and masculinity have permeated the youth work offer over time, both within the voluntary, faith-based and state funded sectors. She utilises the notion of muscular and respectable masculinity to chart how the need for male role models, or more accurately the perceived paucity thereof, has now been revitalised as a mantra within certain policy making quarters, and how this come to bear on the youth work profession.

Youth workers on Youth Justice terrain

As a result of these changing policy imperatives and funding cuts, youth work graduates have struggled to find employment in traditional Local Authority run youth clubs and projects (NYA, 2015). Instead they have increasingly moved into more targeted roles with young people who have multiple needs, in voluntary sector managed mentoring schemes, housing projects and drug treatment agencies. This has brought youth workers onto terrain more customarily occupied by other services, most prominently in England and Wales, the statutory Youth Offending Service. A debate has emerged as to the extent to which the youth work profession can remain faithful to its established principles, but also respond to social realities such as violence, homelessness and drugs that damage some young people's

lives, especially in socially disadvantaged communities. In these new professional arenas in which youth workers find themselves, it may be that youth workers are still seeking to utilise their relationships with young people to enable young people to self-actualise (Maslow, 1962). Increasingly, however, it is also likely they will also be expected to somehow reboot young people's relationship with authority and the state. Workers on the ground face a struggle to meet the demands of their managers who are increasingly driven by the imperatives of their political paymasters, who in turn wish to target public resources in areas of most concern to their electorates. Where youth workers come into contact with young people who are engaging in criminal or violent activity, they are therefore often forming relationships seeking to bring about some progress towards the cessation of that activity or, in criminological parlance, desistance.

This debate is being conducted within ongoing wider competing discourses as to how professionals should address aspects of young people's behaviour that are perceived as problematic, whether in the form of incentives and rewards or sanctions. The professional relationship between adult youth worker and young person – how it can be conceptualized and how it might operate to bring about behaviour change - sits at the heart of this debate. Drawing on their professional training, qualified youth workers may be minded to place their humanistic relationships with young people centre-stage as their method of engagement. But traditional professional youth work development regimes have been slow to reflect the shift towards more individualized, desistance-focused interventions reminiscent of youth justice models. This is possibly as a result of some resistance to the potential atomizing effect of approaches that stress the individual mentoring of young people within a risk management, crime reduction or behaviour modification brief (Colley, 2003). Campaigns such as *In Defence of Youth Work* (2012) associate such individualized approaches with a quasi-medical, diagnostic treatment orientation. This is seen as part of a more general attack on youth work's stated commitment to more social and educational group work practices. The concern is that movement onto this contested professional terrain might lead to a focus on young people's dysfunctional behaviour rather than their potential.

These debates also bring points of convergence and divergence in terms of the underlying approach of the youth work and youth justice professions to the surface. Youth justice in the UK is also grounded in the notion of person-centred practice and that supportive relationships are central to promoting change (Brandon et al, 1998; Kadushin and Kadushin, 1997; Shulman, 1999; Trevithick, 2005; Wilson et al, 1992). Research in the youth justice field provides ample evidence that young people need to be actively engaged (psychologically as well as physically) in youth justice interventions in order to maximise the long term, desistance promoting potential of that intervention (Cooper et al, 2007; Farrington and Loeber, 2001; Leischied, 2000; Lipsey, 1995; McGuire et al, 2002). Such active engagement is grounded in the creation of a 'working alliance' between young person and worker.

However, in common with youth work, the youth justice sector has also been subject to changing policy imperatives. Mirroring parallel processes of bureaucratization within youth work, post New Labour and the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the youth justice practice on the ground has also become subject to new managerialist, actuarial and performative policy regimes. The murder of James Bulger in 1993 by Jon Venables and Robert Thompson was a pivotal and well documented contextual event that triggered a move away from worker-young offender relationships to an emphasis on risk assessment. Borne out of a reaction to the claim "nothing works" in terms of recidivism in the 1970's (Martinson, 1974) subsequent meta analyses (Lipsey, 1992; and McGuire 2002) had the explicit aim of distinguishing between effective and ineffective practice in order to encourage the former. According to Raynor (2018) this led to,

a number of innovations and in particular to the development of structured group programmes using cognitive-behavioural methods. These aimed to ensure the right inputs from staff by providing detailed manuals and training, and they emphasized programme integrity, that is, delivery as designed (p11).

At the centre of the youth justice model there now lies a standardized process of assessment (ASSET plus – formerly ASSET) set within a discourse of risk minimization (the Risk Factor Prevention Paradigm or RFPP) and designed to target resource narrowly

towards criminogenic needs and risk factors. Introduced as part of efforts to create greater uniformity in the standard of practice and based on longitudinal criminological research (Farrington, 1996) the RFPP has also been heavily critiqued. O'Mahony (2009) claims it is an "obstacle to a fuller understanding of, and more effective responses to, youth crime" which fails to account for key facets of youth crime, such as "personal agency, socio-cultural context" and "psychological motivation" (p99). Farrow et al (2007) in their review of assessment processes stress the importance of empathy, that the nature of the worker's relationship with young people is "of even greater significance" than the content of the intervention, and that the worker should seek to "draw out the individual's story, as it has meaning for him and her" (p117). However, they highlight how the assessment process within youth justice can become a barrier to meaningful, empathic communication between worker and young person that discourages the elicitation of such personal stories. McNeil (2006) notes that often youth justice interventions take the form of structured programs and interventions that can reduce the ability of workers to be flexible or use their discretion and ultimately fail to engage young people.

Over the last 15 years, one particular approach to intervention within youth justice has accumulated some critique from practitioners and academics alike. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a psychotherapeutic approach that seeks to address problematic behaviour by systematically addressing maladaptive cognitive processes. Often used in the treatment of anxiety, depression and eating disorders, CBT, and its derivatives, are, according to Pitts,

the central plank of the "What Works" crusade that has transformed professional practice in youth and adult criminal justice systems, and adjacent areas of work with young people in the UK in the last decade and a half. (Pitts, 2007, p5).

Much championed by the Home Office and Youth Justice Board, programs (such as Aggression Replacement Therapy and 'Controlling Anger and Learn to Manage It') see youth crime primarily as a product of a failure to develop pro-social cognitive skills and are often delivered in the form of largely non-negotiated, uniformly-structured, anger management programs.

From a youth work perspective, the reliance on CBT triggers a number of tensions. It sits uneasily with youth work's humanistic, critical orientation and is seen as devaluing personal agency, creating a "disempowered subject" (Pitts, 2007, p6) and failing to problematise the problem of youth crime (a la Freire). Arguably, the most pertinent criticisms of CBT centre more on flaws in its application than attempts to debunk its underlying theoretical base. It is worth noting that the location of CBT programmes within a punitive, mandatory framework would form no part of CBT in a therapeutic setting, as intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation to change is seen as a prerequisite for successful outcomes. Although it can present convincing evidence of its effectiveness (Cann et al, 2006), where CBT has been shown to be effective in reducing reoffending, the programs have been individually tailored and delivered by highly skilled, trained and supervised therapists operating in controlled environments (Armstrong, 2001). Current practice in Youth Offending Services has tended to take aspects of CBT and attempt to translate or dilute these into pre-packaged programs which are then delivered by a range of professionals, many of whom are unsupervised, lack training and experience and have no professional clinical psychological background (Pitts, 2007). Indeed, it is doubtful whether CBT as understood in its original therapeutic conceptualization is actually practiced on the ground within Youth Offending Teams.

The delivery of CBT programmes within youth work settings would most probably suffer from the same issues, namely application by under-qualified practitioners. In a youth work context pre-packaged, structured interventions do not sit easily with youth work's improvised approach highlighted earlier. The more uncontrolled physical and social environment of most, if not all, youth work settings would make the programmes practically impossible to deliver in a meaningful way. Youth workers, qualified or not, are unlikely to be able to operate with the "intensity, commitment and sensitivity" (Smith, 2006, p369) necessary for such methods to work as they are intended.

Tilley (2003) suggests that the search for what works in the shape of a universal, replicable intervention is therefore misguided. A more meaningful question would be "what works for whom, in what circumstances and contexts, and how?". Any attempt to find and then standardise modes of intervention falls into the trap of not taking into account diverse

personal biographies and changing social circumstances. How the professional relationship is framed on the ground within youth justice and youth work settings will of course also vary considerably depending on individual practitioners. Broadly though, the legal authority of the youth justice worker can perhaps be contrasted with the more rational authority (Fromm, 1941) of the youth worker (i.e. that not based on status or position, but on the personal qualities of the individual). It seems probable that for youth justice workers the essential business of building rapport will continue to be hindered by the sense of coercion and relative powerlessness felt by the young person forced to attend meetings with a Youth Offending Team worker. This could be contrasted with the explicit emphasis on self-determination, empowerment and advocacy that still persists within the voluntary youth work relationship. Trotter (1999) acknowledges this much when he suggests that for those working with involuntary clients reconciling the helping, therapeutic role with the legal enforcement of court orders presents a major challenge. For youth workers, willing engagement is less of an issue as young people can freely choose whether to engage with them or not. In the context of violent behaviour though (for which society demands some reparation for, and protection from) the concept of young people's choice exists within a different set of parameters. Some degree of coercion may well be deemed an appropriate consequence of the young person's choice to offend in the first instance, especially post the New Labour project, within which Left Realist (Young, 1997) ideas of individual responsibility were a strong influence. Moreover, even within a relationship in which the young person has not freely chosen to participate he/she still retains the ability to choose the extent to which they meaningfully engage.

If, as Kerry Young (1999) suggests, youth workers' potential to change behaviour lies in its informal approach to moral education, the worker's own skills and ability to generate morally infused conversation within their relationships with young people will continue to lie at the heart of any desistance promotion. Similar conclusions have been arrived at in probation research that shows the centrality of skilled supervision and therefore the importance of quality training for officers (Chadwick et al 2015). If youth work is improvised and spontaneous, the degree to which youth workers are ready, willing and able to improvise and take every opportunity to challenge young people's behaviour, will be even more central to the desistance promoting potential of their interventions. It is likely

improvisatory dispositions will be unevenly distributed through the workforce and there may be issues with existing professional development programmes failing to reflect this aspect of the job role (Harris, 2014). For those engaged in training youth workers, distilling out the causal mechanisms of desistance promotion through relationships in the context of other variables such as maturity (Laub and Sampson, 2003) and other external influences, is difficult.

In our large-scale research study (2016) Mike Seal and I sought to offer some critical analysis of current youth work practice across four countries in the area of crime and violence prevention. Our findings offered some evidence to support the general premise that young people simply participating in free association and recreational youth work-led activities is no panacea for promoting desistance from violent crime. Although such activities might fill the time of potentially deviant young people, we argued that their desistance promoting potential lies in the manner in which these activities are facilitated and the interpersonal processes that arise through them within relationships, rather than participation alone. We began to delve deeper into the nature of these relational concepts within a youth work context and argued that for instance, worker/young person trust necessarily involves a degree of professional risk and vulnerability, and that youth workers need to be mindful of colluding with young people's violent behaviour rather than effectively challenging it. We suggested that models of communication based on the precepts of person-centred practice may not be fit for purpose where workers are engaged with young people involved in violence and who are deeply invested in gendered and racialized identities.

Young people's decision to engage in relationships with youth workers (and ultimately desist from violent behaviour) may be more internally complex than orthodox Freirean, humanistic or cognitive analyses can account for. There is room for doubt as to the extent to which youth workers have ever been (or will ever be in the current political and economic climate) able to realize their lofty ambitions and consistently adhere to Freirean and humanistic principles. Despite this, the individual and idiosyncratic relationship between a youth worker and young person is still likely to continue to be framed somewhat differently than in the increasingly standardised world of youth justice interventions. The

way in which that difference might strengthen or weaken the desistance promoting potential of youth work remains somewhat unclear, however. The orthodox formulation of youth work relationships may not be able to sufficiently explain the psychological and social processes between worker and young person and how they can be harnessed to bring about permanent change in behaviours like violence.

If they are to argue that their core vehicle for behavioural change is the voluntary relationship between worker and young person that grows, matures and adapts over time, youth workers need to gather evidence of the impact of these relationships, over time. Although there is some evidence that this relationship carries with it considerable potential for transformational moments (*In Defence of Youth Work*, 2012) for such a central tenet of practice, there is room for greater clarity with how these moments are theorized, especially with regards to responding to violence. Moreover, despite the efforts of the profession to ensure standards of professional practice, there may well be a disjunct between youth work as theorized and promoted within the literature and that practiced on the ground. Since the recent cuts to local authority services, much face-to-face practice continues to be delivered by unqualified workers or those still in training. Even those who have completed training do so within the dominant theoretical paradigms outlined earlier. There is certainly little or no sign of emerging literature that focuses specifically on the desistance promoting potential of youth work relationships, despite the emphasis on the need for such relationships within public and policy discourse.

If adopting some of the more standardised youth justice methods wholesale would dilute the principles and methods that give youth work its distinctive professional identity and quite probably its effectiveness too, are there any alternative frames that can shed light on these and related questions? Serious doubts remain as to whether youth justice practices rooted in lists of causative factors such as the Risk Factor Prevention Paradigm or cognitive theory such as CBT, sufficiently take into account the affective (i.e. emotional rather than cognitive) driven aspects of young people's violent behaviour. Proponents of a psychodynamic perspective on the human mind argue an over exclusive focusing on *conscious* thinking patterns alone cannot provide the space to acknowledge the *unconscious* processes behind the stories offenders tell others (and themselves) about their

violent and criminal behaviour. This suggests the conventional youth worker's stress on hearing and listening to these stories, rooted in humanistic notions of empathy and appreciation of the person, may insufficiently account for how and why young people construct these stories. What functions are the stories serving for them? And are the workers and young people aware of these functions? How do these emotional and unconscious aspects of subjectivity feed into intersubjective processes between the workers and young person? How do these aspects of subjectivity find effect in their relationships with women including their mothers and partners? This has significant implications for the framing of professional youth work relationships, including in the perceived appropriateness of the use of gendered practices such as 'surrogate' fathering and self-disclosure on the part of the worker. There is a further level of complexity engendered when intersecting indices of social identity such as gender, race and class are 'in the mix'. In the light of calls for more male workers as role models for young men, it appears a rigorous theorization of its relationship-based model is both timely and necessary.

Reformulating the youth work offer

So how might we find a way forward? This question is linked to longstanding and ongoing questions of the relative salience of psychological and sociological perspectives within conceptualisations of professional practice and epistemological standpoints on research. When considering how to respond to young people's criminal behaviour, youth work's natural bedfellow within criminological theory has traditionally been the critical, sociological school of deviance, and indeed much criminological writing around youth work draws heavily on this structural approach (see Pitts, 2007, 2008, 2009). As Smith (2006) points out though, in the context of his analysis of the relationship between the social work/probation professions and theoretical criminology,

The problem was that sociological explanations were often advanced as replacements of rather than complements to more established accounts based on individual biographies or family interactions, presenting social workers and probation officers with an either/or choice, rather than the 'psychosocial' blend advocated much later. (Smith, 2006, p366)

He continues,

The problem with this sociological line of explanation, of course, was that its prescriptions for practical action of a kind available to probation officers were not transparent: if criminal behaviour arose from economic inequality and social deprivation, the solution could only lie in political action to promote social and economic justice. (ibid)

The strong structural current that still runs within youth work's conceptual edifice can lead to a view of young people as structurally determined (Harris and Seal, 2016). Materialist accounts imply that young people's identities have unitary and stable properties, rather than being socially constructed, multiple and/or historically and spatially contingent. Seal and Frost (2014) identify how youth work theorists such as Smith (1996) have formulated a number of alternative conceptions of the individual subject or self-hood. One of these - the move to post-structuralism in which Michel Foucault is the central figure - allows a different subject to be posed. This highlights how subjects are caught up in knowledge/power relations (discourses) that then provide positions for subjects to occupy. They suggest youth work's traditional alignment with structural analysis, identity politics and the new social movements of the 70's and 80's has led to a tendency to over-essentialise identities. They question the wisdom of unifying behind socially constructed (and therefore ultimately ontologically hollow) identities, but also highlight a danger of de-politicisation in which the realities of discrimination are pushed out of sight. They suggest that groups may still need to "find common bond in those identities, be they socially constructed, to understand their positions and oppressions" (p151).

In the current professional and policy climate youth work's interest in individual subjectivity and biographical aetiological factors behind offending behaviour may also need to be resuscitated. Demonstrably, not all young people in the same social circumstances become involved in violent activity. Workers need a more adequately theorised and recognizable subject to help them think more productively about how they can engage with young people living in homeless hostels or engaged with youth offending programmes. In the context of violent offending some young people, motivated to defend against painful self-knowledge, will seek to resist any challenges issued to them concerning that behaviour.

The youth workers we spoke to during Project Touch (Harris and Seal, 2016) confirmed as much when they reported meeting young people's ingrained resistance to the challenges they issued. In line with established criminological theory, we showed empirically how young people were neutralizing (Matza, 1964) their behaviour. We also formed an impression that some workers were also unaware of how aspects of their own biography were colouring their perception of the young people they are engaged with. We named this as 'over-identification', and noted its gendered dimensions, but we were unable to fully explore this in any depth.

Within the probation field, David Smith (2006) identifies that this perspective on a need for worker reflexivity and self-awareness is not by any means new. In fact, it was a strong feature of probation practice 50 years ago,

The importance of self-understanding as a basis for understanding others would have been entirely familiar to probation officers trained in the psychoanalytically influenced environment of the 1950s and 1960s (Vanstone, 2004: 105); but it is a stress entirely at odds with the emphasis on behavioural 'competencies' which dominated social work training from the early 1990s, and with the increasing tendency in probation training to define good practice solely in terms of adherence to organisational procedures and national standards. (Smith, 2006, p362)

With reference to social work, Sudberry (2002) categorically states that the "primary resource in this work is the social worker themselves and their use of relationship" (p151) and identifies key features of therapeutic social work, such as, "attention to basic need, response to aggressive impulses and the lessening of punitive self-criticism" (p149). Notably, he locates these in a psychological, psychodynamic theoretical framework, which includes, "transference, counter-transference and the punitive superego" (ibid). Whilst acknowledging the contested nature of these psychoanalytical concepts, he maintains their relevance to any analysis of relationship-based work.

Youth work training regimes have long been, and are currently, heavily weighted towards the development of worker reflexivity and self-awareness through the promotion of reflective practice. However, this has not translated in to any commitment to take seriously the psychoanalytic perspective on personality and self, on subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

The youth work profession has, to date, been nervous about delving into inner worlds of young people partly due to a recognition that without highly specialist training such methods could cause real psychological harm. This resistance coincides with a desire to avoid pathologising individuals and retain a sociological rather than treatment orientation. Within the youth work field, psychotherapeutic literature, especially in its psychoanalytical guise, seems notable in its absence. Perhaps this is because it is still often associated with undemocratic, heterocentric and non-dialogical modes of intervention where the therapist holds power over the client and over-values certain theoretical precepts before engaging in wild analysis (Freud, 1910). This is despite the major revisions and critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis (from Klein and Lacan, feminist psychoanalysis and critical psychology onwards) towards more co-produced and *relational* rather than top down practice (Ogden, 2009).

Wild analysis is not the sole terrain of psychoanalysis; other disciplines are capable of overstretching and imposing theoretical ideas. Constraining this is a challenge for researchers and practitioners alike. Cross-fertilization between different schools of psychological thought (humanistic, behaviourist and cognitive) has meant that much psychotherapeutic work recognizes the value of a range of perspectives on the self. From psychotherapeutic quarters the charge is laid, to both youth justice workers and youth workers that neither a cognitive nor person-centred approach has the ability to deal with serious psychosocial disorders (Taylor, 2006). Psychodynamic psychology suggests, underlying causes of hostility and aggression are not always accessible to the conscious mind or are meeting psychological needs which young people are repressing. Standard youth work approaches rooted in Freirean and Rogerian practice may lack the necessary tools to uncover these unconscious causes and address them effectively. The objection that psychodynamic perspectives necessarily pathologise young people, see them as sick and in need of treatment, or in deficit in terms of their development, oversimplifies reality. This oversimplification could arguably be said to be leading to serious shortcomings in practice on the ground.

A new psychosocial youth work for a new terrain?

Jones (2012) states that there are four areas that criminological theory has not explored,

“to the great detriment of our understanding of crime” (p245). These are the “inner experiences of the emotional lives of individuals” the “psychological roots of masculine modes of experience and behaviour”; the “significance of family and intimate relationships in shaping people’s interactions with the wider world” and the “overlaps between issues of criminal behaviour and mental health” (p245). This thesis seeks to plug that gap in criminological theory and explore the possibilities of youth work adopting a conception of the human subject that holds on to both structural and post structural perspectives, whilst also taking into account the unconscious nature of internal psychic processes.

The body of empirical and theoretical work that has emerged under the auspices of psychosocial studies seeks to blend psychoanalytic with post-structuralist insights into a range of cultural phenomena. This conception of psychosocial does not mean simply combining psychological and social factors to explain behaviour, as per Smith’s more conventional characterisation above. Rather it employs the Foucauldian notion of discourse in order to capture how subjects position themselves within a number of competing discourses *and* the psychological function this serves for them. It seeks to understand human subjects as “simultaneously the products of their own unique psychic worlds and a shared social world” (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007, p4). The subject becomes both a centre of agency and the subject of external forces. This allows the consideration of psychodynamic processes such as defence and identification at play in identity construction, without denying the impact of social environment. The modern notion of a rational, unitary subject is replaced with a non-unitary, multiple, and also defended subject, with unconscious motivations and constituted historically, culturally and relationally (Aron, 1996; Clark et al, 2008; Mitchell and Aron, 1999). Whilst retaining an interest in themes of politics and power, and social identity in the form of class, gender, race, etc. a psychosocial frame employs contemporary branches of psychodynamic thought (notably Kleinian object relations and relational psychoanalysis) to anticipate that individual psyches alter how these social themes impact on them individually.

Whilst acknowledging that youth work will continue to draw on its underlying humanistic and Freirean tenets, especially in traditional youth work contexts, this thesis rests on a supposition that we may need a conceptualisation of youth work practice that is (in the sense outlined above) fully psychosocial. In order to claim a place on the policy and

professional terrain as it is currently constituted, and to support the current workforce who find themselves increasingly located within it, the field needs a theoretical framework that can encompass the social and psychic dimensions of subject positions and how these operate within gendered intersubjective relationships.

Summary

This chapter has set out the current conceptualisation of youth work in the UK, illustrating the centrality of a voluntary professional relationship within it. It has identified how the profession has been affected by shifts in national policy, including some that have led to the permeation of that professional relationship with the promotion of workers as male role models for young men involved in violence. This, combined with moves away from universal provision towards work more targeted at social problems such as youth violence, raises concerns that orthodox formulations of youth work practice might need to be revisited. I have argued that moving onto the terrain of desistance promotion requires youth workers and researchers engaging with alternative theoretical and frameworks, such as those offered by criminology, and in particular in its psychosocial guise. Having established this as a possible theoretical framework, the next chapter gives an account of the decision to also apply this psychosocial framework to the empirical task set by the focus of this thesis. It seeks to illustrate how this generated some methodological and ethical hurdles to overcome, but also some opportunities too.

Chapter 2: Methodological and Ethical Aspects of the Research

Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodological and ethical challenges that this thesis faced and how my efforts to overcome them surfaced some nuances which may be of interest to the field of psychosocial studies and youth work alike. Firstly, I set some context, briefly summarising the debate that surrounds how research into the efficacy of interventions with offenders should be conducted; between proponents of large scale quantitative meta studies on the one side and those who argue for small scale qualitative studies on the other. I suggest that large scale studies struggle to capture the nuances of relational practice. Previous research in the youth work field, including my own, has tended towards participatory methods. I explain how this study's focus on desistance and inter-subjectivity within relationships required the adoption of a different (psychosocial) ontological and epistemological framework. I outline the distinctive features of psychosocial methods including Free Association Narrative Interviewing.

I explain how questioning how much young people and youth workers really knew about their lives or relationships sat uneasily with the participatory and dialogic principles of youth and community work and triggered some ethical tensions around how to balance a duty of care to interviewees. I provide examples of these tensions and how I sought to achieve such a balance. I outline how I gathered my small sample by selecting male youth workers who brokered access to young men and included cases which seemed to have generated some progress in terms of desistance and others that were less successful. I think through how issues of harm, consent, reflexivity, intersectionality and power surfaced in the research process and how these were resolved. I also explore the notion of the defended researcher, identifying how my own prior personal and professional experiences formed part of the motivation to engage in this topic. The discussion seeks to illustrate how the professional context in which the study was conducted afforded the opportunity to work more in partnership *with* (rather than *on*) participants. The commitment to analyse the data as a whole gestalt rather than in fragments and an emphasis on reflexivity and

intersectionality meant ethical and epistemological dilemmas could be balanced in ways compatible with democratic, dialogical principles.

Meta v micro

Academic criminological debate has long sought to shed light on the activities of professionals and provide evidence and insight into ‘what works’ with young offenders (McGuire, 2002; McGuire and Priestly, 1995; McLaren, 2000; Prior, 2005; Whyte, 2004). How this research is best conducted, interpreted and utilised in policy and practise remains contested, however. Several large-scale meta-analyses (Lipsey, 1995, 1999; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998; Losel, 1995; McGuire et al, 2002; Newburn and Souhami, 2005; Wasserman and Miller, 1998) have attempted to establish an evidence base for effective practice by systematically contrasting and combining results from large numbers of different studies, in the hope of identifying patterns among their results. Such studies seek to maximise objectivity, reliability and generalizability, but face major methodological challenges in doing so (Mair, 2004). Furthermore, what they reveal may need to be treated with caution, primarily because of the extent to which such methodological approaches necessarily de-contextualise how researchers and respondents *interpret* the nature and meaning of the phenomena under investigation.

For example, in Lipsey’s large-scale study (1995), selection criteria for the 400 studies to be analysed included a requirement that they produced quantitative data and through the use of controlled measures, sought to isolate the “magnitude of the estimated intervention effect on recidivism” by calculating deviation from a “pooled standard” (p145). Although such studies strive to demonstrate which forms of interventions are most and least effective (including counselling, advocacy and behavioural programs, etc.) Lipsey recognised that they need to be supplemented by in-depth research that seeks to examine *how* they are so, and in what context. Lipsey himself concludes that:

The challenge presented by the research evidence is not to the premise that rehabilitative interventions can be effective, nor to the promise that its effects can be of meaningful magnitude, but to rehabilitative practice, which can either be very effective or very ineffective, depending on how it is carried out. (p164)

Consequently, some critics have argued that this de-contextualising has led to a misplaced focus on the *content* of interventions and thereafter an over reliance on structured programmes within (for example) current youth justice practice in the UK, which in the wrong hands, and where there is no real engagement on the part of young offenders, could be making little or no impact (Pitts, 2007, 2008). Such features of relational practice are inevitably heavily contextualised and the nuances of transformational moments for both parties to the relationship can only emerge from detailed consideration on a case-by-case basis. Attempting to abstract or establish causal mechanisms through the use of large random samples and controlling variables, makes little or no sense when the research focus is on such inter-subjectively experienced phenomena.

Raynor (2018) charts how quantitative analyses of probation services have been primarily concerned with the delivery of change programmes and detecting the specific change agent or ingredient in terms of desistance promotion. Qualitative evaluative research has taken a greater interest in implementation, organisational culture and officer skills. He also points out that professional expertise has been denigrated in recent years. In this study I wanted to look carefully at change agents and how they feature within youth work relationships. Whilst recognising that the youth worker-young person relationship is not the only ingredient, I wanted to explore what expertise might look like in practice, in order to create the opportunity for the field to consider how this can best be cultivated in training and continuing professional development programmes.

Youth work and desistance research

Examples of youth work practitioners critically detailing their interventions and relationships with young people, and especially young offenders, are rare. These need supplementing and crucially, buttressing with a secure theoretical and evidential base. Much youth work research into youth violence, including my own previous published work (Harris, 2014; Seal and Harris, 2016) has been concerned to involve participants in any decisions affecting them (Hart, 1992) and minimise the excessive use of power in the form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) by professionals and researchers. This has had led me and others in the field towards a preference for participatory research methods (Chambers,

1994, 1997; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Petty et al, 1995). As I indicated in the preface, the large-scale Touch project left me with a sense that some research participants (many of whom were young men) were not necessarily always able to articulate conscious explanations for their behaviour or were often resistant to acknowledging the impact of their behaviour on others, seeking to neutralise their actions (Matza, 1964). Eliciting narratives from such participants seemed to induce feelings of shame, regret or even pride and caused some to be evasive and guarded, making the production of meaningful data difficult.

As a study focused on desistance I looked to previous research conducted within the criminological field. The degree of de-contextualisation in the meta analyses of interventions with young offenders meant that what may be the most critical feature within the process of change - the meaning of the offending and crucially the relationship between worker and young person - received least consideration because these are least susceptible to quantification. As a result, these meta-analyses did little to help me understand *how* relationships operate on a micro-level to promote desistance (Burnett, 2004).

According to Maruna (2010), desistance is underpinned by both critical social determinants and, psychic processes too: the re-narrativisation of self through redemptive scripts, the creation of opportunities for generativity and the operation of a blueprint self in the form of significant others. Questions of identity, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are clearly pivotal to the desistance process. Embarking on this study in 2013 I came to the conclusion that exploring these questions in sufficient depth would mean engaging more deeply with how my participants – male youth workers and young men - struggled with the constraints and possibilities of their personal and professional lives. Following the exemplar of other similar, small-scale qualitative studies (Lucey et al 2003), I decided to compile detailed, longitudinal analyses of the psycho-biographical specificity of the youth workers and young men, including their unique journeys prior to meeting each-other, the journey they took together and their retrospection on it too. I knew this would involve learning something of the relationships they brought with them to the one under study, in the shape of those they had lived through in their past with male and female friends, family and figures in authority. In the case of workers or young men who had been (or were still) involved in

violence, it was important to understand something about their individual path into, and through, that violent behaviour.

A potentially distinctive feature of the research lay in seeking to shed light not just on these individual biographies and *intra* subjective processes (as within much life story work) but also the *inter*-subjective and gendered processes within the relationships - that is - how both parties perceived each other and constructed meanings/discourses around their interactions. The intention was also to capture that dynamic change within the relationships *across time*, as it occurred in situ and retrospectively, allowing for both parties to re-narrativise their individual biographies and for the complex mechanisms contributing to behavioural change within the relationship to emerge.

A new ontological and epistemological rationale

In the face of these challenges, this study chose to adopt an ontological and epistemological standpoint rooted in psychosocial theory. The body of empirical and theoretical work that has emerged under the auspices of psychosocial studies seeks to blend psychoanalytic and post-structuralist insights into a range of cultural phenomena, employing the Foucauldian notion of discourse in order to capture how subjects position themselves within a number of competing discourses and the psychological function this serves for them. Importantly for the foci of this study, psychosocial researchers argue that this blend is distinctly suited to the exploration of the psychological and social dynamics of human *relationships*.

At the opening of their book, *Doing Qualitative Research Differently*, Hollway and Jefferson challenge qualitative researchers to ask themselves,

What do you the researcher assume about a person's capacity to know, remember and tell about themselves? (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p1.)

This question arises from their conviction that the psychodynamic concept of defence mechanisms has significant analytical purchase when seeking to understand subjectivity and the life worlds of research subjects. In this formulation of subjectivity, the modern notion of a rational, unitary subject is replaced with a non-unitary *defended* subject, with unconscious motivations. In line with post-modern notions of the self, the subject is also

characterised as multiple, and constituted historically, culturally and relationally (Aron, 1996; Clark et al, 2008; Mitchell and Aron, 1999). Whilst retaining an interest in themes of politics and power, and social identity in the form of class, gender, race, etc. a psychosocial frame employs branches of psychodynamic thought (notably Kleinian object relations and relational psychoanalysis) to anticipate that the individual psyches of research subjects alter how these themes impact on them individually. Adopting this conceptualisation of subjectivity as an underpinning frame, the study sought to illuminate the inter-subjective processes at work within the relationships under observation whilst simultaneously incorporating how societal, institutional and gendered structures and working practices within youth work and youth justice influence these processes. It was hoped that a sustained focus on selected cases could capture this intertwining of psychic and social realms within the relationships.

Taking such an approach on a project such as this that spanned the fields of criminology and youth work had the added benefit of avoiding the pitfalls of essentialising theoretical frames which can pathologise young offenders as objects to be studied by detached, law-abiding (adult) citizens from a safe distance. I hoped this would avoid such potential reductionism and determinism by understanding how the participants might negotiate and resist structural forces. However, this standpoint also generated some epistemological doubts about objectivity, replicability and validity and concerns about how meaning can be controlled and made identical in successive applications of a question, as well as some idiosyncratic, taxing ethical dilemmas. Previous proponents of psychosocial research methods have articulated a distinctive outlook on these ontological, epistemological and ethical questions but have until now paid somewhat limited attention to youth and community work, with some notable exceptions (Hoggett et al, 2010). I looked to these studies to provide some guidance as to how to approach my field work - the first stage of which was the gathering of data through Hollway and Jefferson's distinctive approach to interviewing – their so-called FANI method.

Research Method: Free Association Narrative Interviewing

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) maintain that their interview method (the Free Association Narrative Interview - FANI) enables interviewees to “give answers that reflect their own

concerns even when these are not immediately consciously accessible” (p151). It is,

most powerful when the research question involves understanding people’s experiences through their own meaning frame and when the area that needs to be tapped to address the research question implicates a person’s sense of self (p143).

They argue that the FANI is designed to minimise the limitations of simple semi-structured or unstructured interview processes that can suppress the very narratives that studies seek to explore, especially if the research participants seek to comply with what they perceive the research agenda to be. The method is based on the premise that the meanings underlying interviewees’ narratives are best accessed via free association because such associations follow an emotional rather than cognitively derived logic. Meaning is sought in the links within and between statements. During interviews an effort is made therefore to consider not only what respondents say but *how* they say it (so called “para-language”). This includes noticing what they struggled to say and what they could not or did not say. Interviewees are encouraged to recall whatever comes to mind even if seemingly irrelevant to the topic. This involves continually presenting elements of what participants say back to them in the order of their disclosures and adding further narrative eliciting questions before returning for a second follow up interview after some analysis of the first. FANI demands that the interviewer employs aspects of counselling and psychotherapeutic technique such as attentive listening, avoiding closed questions, reflecting and summarising statements using the respondents’ frame of meaning, tolerance of silences, and crucially, interpretation of the significance or meaning of respondents’ responses (or lack of response) *in the moment*. The FANI method also demands extra sensitivity within transcription in order to capture changes of tone, hesitations and body language which are captured and analysed to produce provisional hypotheses based on contradictions, inconsistencies and avoidances. These hypotheses then form the basis of the follow up interviews.

Another key aspect of the FANI method is the avoiding of *why* questions, which invite respondents to theorise what causes the problem under investigation or what should be done about it. In the context of this study for instance, this meant not asking participants why they became involved in violence or continue to carry out violent acts. Gadd (2002)

states that, “Often interviewees do not know very much about the problem under study” (p40). This is in part, as my experience on the Touch project had intimated, they may be employing defence mechanisms such as denial or displacement to avoid facing up to the impact of their actions or the source of their aggression. As *defended* subjects they may *feel* they know a lot about their experiences and be able to recount them, but this is not the same as knowing the reasons behind their actions. Under these circumstances why questions can have the effect of pressuring them to give an opinion and produce clichéd rationalisations as they seek to avoid appearing like naïve outsiders, so obscuring the biographical uniqueness of the case under study. This questioning of how much young men and youth workers really knew about their lives or relationships sat uneasily with the participatory and dialogic principles of youth and community work and triggered some ethical tensions around how to balance a duty of care to interviewees.

Struggling with ethical tensions: Youth work and the psychosocial – uneasy bedfellows?

Even before I began my fieldwork, questions immediately arose as to the extent to which it would be possible to fully realise my participatory values within a research project rooted in the psychosocial ontology and epistemology outlined above. A research protocol had been devised in line with University guidelines to set the boundaries of the study in advance.¹ However, notwithstanding adherence to these standard ethical guidelines, ensuring the interests, rights and welfare of participants were safeguarded remained problematic owing to the tensions generated by the psychoanalytic underpinning of the FANI method. Unlike psychotherapists who in clinical settings interpret into the encounter for the benefit of their clients within the therapeutic relationship, researchers generally

¹ Ethical consent forms were phrased to not overly frame the participants’ expectations of the terrain to be covered but also to inform participants about what to expect (that they would involve discussing whole life, etc.). It was recognised that these forms could not capture the ongoing and dynamic process of interpretation and authorship in a longitudinal study where field research took place over 30 months. An “ethics as process” framework (Josselson, 1996) was adopted involving a continual renegotiation as unforeseen circumstances emerged. Where participants were identified as either especially vulnerable or becoming so (e.g. with mental health problems or experience of trauma) they were regularly reminded of the option to withdraw and given the name and contact details of independent support/counselling agencies if they felt they needed assistance with any issues that had arisen from the interview(s). Contact details of the researcher and University were given to participants so if after reflection they wished to terminate their involvement and withdraw their narratives they could do so and a clear complaints procedure was outlined. All information gathered during the research process was kept confidential, including that which referred to illegal activities, past or present (unless there was a risk of serious harm or an immediate threat to life). Individual identifiers were removed from stored data and altered where required in dissemination, and data files were password protected and encrypted.

save their interpretations for outside it and for a very different audience. In therapy, client upset or distress triggered is managed as part of the process. I was faced with the dilemma of whether I should, or could, feedback results to participants whose lives I was claiming to understand and how to ensure accountability to them. I knew that a psychosocial approach to data interpretation could involve the making of conceptual connections that the participants did not recognise or accept. Not providing participants with the opportunity to contribute or challenge that interpretation left me feeling distinctly uneasy. However, I also knew this had to be set against the risk of over-reifying the participants' knowledge, avoiding analysis and simply reproducing their stories in unadulterated form. This was an especially pertinent issue in a study of male workers and young men who would be speaking for and about women in their lives who I was unlikely to ever meet. This could oversimplify the issues under examination and possibly further dehumanise both the male participants and the women in their lives in the process. I also felt that the overarching aim of the study - to strengthen the practice base of a profession and thereby contribute to a common good - needed to be weighed against any loss of power on the part of participants.

Finding space for dialogue

Once I began my fieldwork more relational models of a more dialogical, collaborative approach to data-gathering began to surface. Hoggett et al (2010) seemed to have had the same experience when working with a sample of youth and community workers. They too found themselves moving towards an increasingly dialogical stance, sharing their thoughts with participants. As ex-community development workers themselves, they felt "uncomfortable excluding [our] respondents from the process of 'doing research'" (p175). One of their worked examples included a youth worker - David - engaging in reflection as to why he felt out of place in certain professional contexts and making connections to his own biography. Over an extended period of time and a number of interviews the research team were able to assess the value of some of their interpretations with David and their other participants. This led to the development of relationships where the workers were able to gain insight into their own working practices. Hoggett et al characterise these evolving relationships as an "epistemic alliance" with "heuristic power" (p183). They do stress that careful consideration needed to be given to how this sharing occurred, such as bearing in mind the defensive organisation of the participant. The extent to which this

alliance would be realisable with my participants, who included not only trained male workers but young men with a history of violent behaviour, and where the topics under consideration demanded extra sensitivity, was open to question from the outset.

Employing an interview method (FANI) that seeks to focus on participants' avoidance of certain topics, identify projections and inconsistencies in their responses and look for signs of emotional disturbance, could arguably be said to amount to a psycho-analysis of participants without their expressed consent to engage the services of a psychotherapist. This generated considerable tension as to the extent to which young men and workers should be exposed to this scrutiny and how they could meaningfully give their informed consent to such a process. Although no deception was involved (I was not seeking to minimise reactivity by engaging in covert research) the research was premised on the belief that both the workers' and young men's practical/self-knowledge may be inferior to some aspects of theoretical knowledge. The accounts they constructed, including how they perceived their relationship with each-other, female partners, peers and parents had the potential to be flawed. This required accounting for how male workers, for example, might lack insight into how gendered work settings and contexts structured their activities and how there may be unintended consequences of their actions that emerge over time. The dyadic design of the study meant that as the young men and workers began to reveal intimate aspects of their life stories, they might not wish that new information be shared with the other in the dyad. Each party's growing awareness of this through the process of research could potentially have resulted in a degree of distress and emotional intrusion. This all meant that interpretation of data, conducted during and after the interviews, could paint pictures of participants' lives which they might not have fully recognised.

However, once the interviews began, there were more opportunities to mitigate the marginalisation of interviewees in the process that might otherwise have been expected. The youth and community work field in the UK operates as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) that encompasses certain notable norms and conventions. As a long-standing member of that community myself, these norms inevitably began to permeate the methodology and how it was mediated through to the participants. In the case of the workers, some of whom were students in training or professionally qualified colleagues,

they had all (to a greater or lesser extent) undergone training programmes with the building of reflexive ability as a core competence. Student youth workers are (at least in theory) placed in practice placements under the supervision of qualified or more experienced practitioners and encouraged to engage in critical reflection on experience through the use of reflective techniques such as writing (Boud et al, 1985; Moon, 2004). Individual practitioners will of course vary in their readiness, willingness and ability to engage in this reflection and there may be unevenness in the degree to which they continue to be offered the opportunity to reflect once they enter the working environment. Indeed, this unevenness emerged as a key variable as the study progressed. With some of the worker participants though, their commitment to reflective practice did make it possible to test the value of my initial interpretations by returning their transcripts to them to read and comment on. In one instance, I decided to share interview transcripts with a worker. He later confessed they were “really hard to read” but this led on to fruitful further reflective conversations that he felt enhanced his practice. With other workers I judged my interpretations of their narratives to be too at odds with their self-image. At points during one interview, a worker became visibly upset, and said that I was “messing him up”. By the end of the interview though, he had recovered and indicated he had found the experience cathartic. Despite this I came to the conclusion that his investment in a bona fide professional persona and muscular defensive organisation would make the process of reflexive, shared data analysis too burdensome for him.

The young men selected for the study, all of them who had been, or were still, involved in violence, had not been formally or professionally schooled in reflexivity, but some were encountering encouragement to reflect on their biographical experiences within their relationship with youth workers. In some cases, this was a key facet of how the youth workers were seeking to induce changes in their violent behaviour. Mutual trust and empathy was established between first the workers and I and then, over even more time, the young men and I too. This produced an emotional and psychological climate that could tolerate some challenge to views of self and at least a rudimentary willingness to accept constructive criticism. The research sought to chart the presence or growth of such reflexive ability in both parties, as this was integral to the research question. As the interviews progressed it did become possible to share some of the findings with the young

men too, allowing speculative findings to be further examined collaboratively. As Hoggett et al (2010) warn though, this did need sensitive and skilful handling. Two young men withdrew completely from the research process after the first interview, one stating that he was not “in the right mental state to discuss things right now”. All participants had given their informed consent and the fact that their involvement was voluntary was continually restated. That said, such admissions made for some uncomfortable decisions as to how best to ensure their well-being and how to compassionately and fairly represent and disseminate their narratives.

Thinking about harm and consent

These ethically complex scenarios led me back to Hollway and Jefferson’s honest self-appraisal of their study of the fear of crime (2013). They had also encountered some of these same uncomfortable questions. Is it always harmful for research participants to experience being upset or distressed? Should participants remain unchanged after their experience of the research? They argue that distress and harm are not equivalent and should not be conflated because the impact of surfacing emotion depends on the relational context: “Well-being depends on making the causes of distress conscious, in a containing environment” (p90) they maintain; distress can be the “midwife to truth” (ibid, p91). Clearly drawing on some experiences as therapeutic practitioners (or maybe clients?) they argue that the choice to reveal personal issues is a product of a continuing dynamic between two people. The experience of talking about personal, emotionally difficult issues in a supportive and trustworthy context could be cathartic for research participants and maybe even lead to them positively seeking further help.

This demanded a re-conceptualisation of informed consent based more on participants’ evolving feelings about me as the researcher throughout the research process, rather than at just the beginning. As my research progressed, those participants who did remain in contact with me confirmed that they were finding the process increasingly valuable. Despite moments of distress, the support I was able to offer as part of our relational dynamic and the opportunity to talk freely had significantly ameliorated that distress. It was more difficult to ascertain how those who chose to withdraw were affected and this worried me. I came to the view that their autonomous decision to withdraw at least

illustrated that they clearly understood their right to do so and had taken the appropriate action to safeguard their welfare. These participants (as with the whole sample) had been told that a third party would transcribe their interviews and were granted full anonymity via the use of pseudonyms. However, the use of pseudonyms was not seen as a catch-all. Specific details in case studies, particularly those that could make someone identifiable, especially to colleagues, friends and family, were removed. As participants did not retain the right to veto what data was placed in the public domain, this obligated me to be sensitive to their needs, protect their interests and to consider how the results would be received in the public sphere. Whilst recognising the overarching desire to advance public understanding I therefore chose to withhold certain aspects of all the participants' narratives from wider dissemination.

Thoughts on reflexivity and intersectionality

From the outset, it was clear that I needed to anticipate how indices of social identity and difference (class, age, gender, locality, generation, locality and race, etc.) would affect the dynamics of the research process. The relational dynamic between researcher and participant not only includes personal, micro-level emotional processes but also the structural disparities that persist between members of social groups. These disparities were foregrounded in this study and had significant implications for the research and my relationships with participants. This therefore required an ethical stance not only in line with the psychosocial view of identity outlined earlier (defended, non-unitary, and relationally constructed) but one which also recognises the *intersectional* indices of identity and power within relationships. It is the potential for asymmetry in power between researcher and participant that methods such as participatory and peer research seeks to equalise.

To conceptualise social similarity between researcher and participant as a way to equalise power oversimplifies the various ways in which power is deployed along a structuralist logic. The implications for this for my sample size are discussed below, but for now I want to highlight how reading subjectivity simply through group membership does not account for the discursive and psychic specificity of experience. As Harrison and Hood Williams

(1998) point out, identity based on social groups is complex and has “more varieties than Heinz”. The internal debates around identity within those social groups indicates the problem with assuming shared experience and views within the group.

As Walkerdine argues, “relations of power are not invested in unitary individuals in any way which is solely or essentially derived from their material and institutional position” or from their membership of certain social categories (1990, p5). In Walkerdine’s example, a female teacher is rendered at one moment powerful and powerless as result of how she is discursively positioned by four-year-old boys deploying sexist language in a classroom bounded by progressive pedagogic principles. She describes relations of power as “constantly shifting” (1990, p1); “a back and forward movement rather than binary”.

As soon as the interviews began it became clear that the relations of power between the participants and I were not binary and formed part of an ongoing, shifting process. With all the interviewees I found myself balancing a desire to maintain personal congruence and authenticity with some tactical accentuation of aspects of my own social identity that mirrored aspects of interviewees’ habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). This was brought into sharp focus with the male interviewees where I closely monitored the use of humour and banter to establish a congenial atmosphere for signs of complicity in hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell, 2005). As I began to apply theoretical knowledge to the narratives I was acutely aware of the need to consider how I was using the power imbued within that knowledge. Knowledge can be used to restrict or empower others and increased self-knowledge can be empowering. Hollway and Jefferson point out that if “self-deception is part of the human condition” (p90) when subjects deceive themselves, they also deceive others if those others take at face value what they say or do. They claim that relational dynamics that “draw on the deep pool of human characteristics” (p90) can transcend structural power dynamics. I shared some professional and life experiences and a sense of local geographical affiliation with all the interviewees, a commonality that became significant in terms of building rapport. Despite this, within the regional dimension, further fine distinctions around city and neighbourhood came into play at times, often based on local rivalries. My professional identity as a lecturer provided access and an opportunity to capitalise on pre-existing familiarity, trust and empathy with the interviewees who were either students or ex-colleagues. Informal conversations outside recorded interviews

included some acknowledgement of how indices of power along lines of social identity (such as occupation, but also class, race and gender) were imbricated within our personal relationship. However, this also meant that these interviewees needed to adjust to my different role as researcher. Maintaining reflexivity demanded that I acknowledge that whilst the students and workers may have felt comfortable sharing their stories with someone with whom they had built up a mutually respectful relationship, they might also have been keen to appear the most competent and effective as they could within their practice. They did seem to feel a need to retain the mutual regard we had already established with each-other and I was concerned they may only introduce me to young people who they felt they had had some success with. I needed to account for this dynamic in my analysis and also be wary of not imposing my own standpoint on professional practice on the workers. I probably did not always avoid doing so, due to my position as a Senior Lecturer in the subject, but I was at least able to lessen the impact of this by ensuring my own non-verbal communication remained authentic but neutral throughout the interview process.

All the young men were previously unknown to me. As cold contacts encountering a white, middle class male and member of an educational establishment, there were undoubtedly moments early on where this created the kind of barriers to authentic engagement that more participatory methods might seek to dissolve. I was aware that the young men's perception of me as a university lecturer could have loomed large. I also anticipated that they could have perceived the research to have any number of purposes, some of which may have been accurate and some not, including tokenistic exploitation, surveillance and intelligence gathering for instance, especially as their prior experience of adult institutions and authority was nearly always negative.

This was somewhat mitigated by the assurances given by the youth workers that I could be trusted. Participants did not include young people under 18 so consent was not required or sought from parents and guardians. This meant that youth workers were in effect operating *in loco parentis* and were part of the process of seeking informed consent from the young people themselves. Crucially they were also key to winning them round to the research objectives. Access to the young people was brokered through these workers, thereby generating a kind of "proxy trust" (Seal and Harris, 2016).

As I was aware that the workers may have selected participants they perceived as their successes or with whom they shared similar identities, I purposively sought out examples of young people who had continued offending (see chapter 4 Leon and Steve); where the worker and young person did not share a biographical connection or embodied masculinity (Daniel and Chris, chapter 6); and even a worker who seemed unable to build meaningful relationships with young people at all (chapter 5, Mark).

The methodology also included time spent informally interacting with the young men on their terms. Interviews with young men were not just conducted on a University campus but in neutral public spaces such as canteens and coffee bars and I was able to supplement the interviews with some participant observation of the worker and young men's relationships in these informal contexts. This gave me another insight into the relationships as both parties seemed less guarded and related to each other more freely, differently even, than when under the more formal gaze of an interview.

My previous career as a street-based youth worker (15 years) working with young people in (and on the verge of entry into) the criminal justice system meant I was able to utilise some of that experience and training when interacting with young people. This helped establish rapport quickly as did the fact that the young men were offered payment to cover their costs and as a mark of respect for their participation. This financial inducement and their sense of obligation to the workers could have unduly influenced the young men to participate so the workers were briefed to ensure they did not exert such pressure. Careful consideration was given to the ability of the young people to understand the nature of the research. My own professional experience assisted in the monitoring of participants' emotional states and the making of judgements as to when participants were no longer comfortable with my presence in their environment, or their presence in mine. This did seem to reassure the young participants and put them at ease, creating avenues for meaningful engagement.

The defended researcher

Throughout the research process, my own willingness and ability to examine my motivations was key to the avoidance of my own defensive reactions. Hollway and

Jefferson admit that the idea of the defended researcher was weakly developed in the first edition of their book. Dismissing any notion of scientific objectivity as quixotic, they underline that the question of what motivates researchers to inquire into the topics they choose should figure markedly in the researcher's reflections.

I soon recognised that my own experiences at school, which included some peer rejection and bullying, were part of my motivation to explore youth violence. At times I shared this with young people and the workers; a revelation that produced differing levels of emotional responsiveness from each of the participants. I also explained that as a youth worker I had struggled to engage with young people entangled in drugs and violence, often feeling I had failed. In some cases, I had seen young people enter custody, suffer injury and in one case, death. From the outset, I sought to bring these motivations to the forefront of my mind, in the hope that acknowledging them explicitly would bring them under greater critical control. This required me to remain attuned to how my own experiences could affect how I reacted to the workers and young people's stories, some of which were shocking. Some cases included descriptions of serious physical violence, non-consensual sexual activity, abuse and suicide. Whether I reacted with visible signs of approval/sympathy or disapproval/horror seemed to have some influence on their ongoing participation and how their narratives emerged. For example, one young man's story began within an account of him being a product of an incestuous relationship. Being able to hold this in a confidential, containing space seemed integral to his willingness to disclose further details.

Sampling and data gathering

In order to facilitate a psychosocial analysis in the depth required it was decided to purposively select three male youth workers who were, had been, or were preparing to, engage with young men involved in violence. These youth workers brokered access to four young men with whom they were engaged over a period of 30 months. The balancing of social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality etc., within such a small sample was a question with inevitable statistical significance. Harrison and Hood Williams (1998) argue that seeking to reflect the full list of relevant forms of social classification including

different, intersecting subject positions within them is ultimately unworkable. They insist that, "It is not just that it cannot be done but that it should not be assumed that it ought to be done" (1998, p 2.4).

The selection of only men in the sample allowed detailed exploration of a key variable – psychosocial constructions of masculinity. Broadly, the study did not seek inductive validity by suggesting that the participants represented – in any straightforward demographic or attitudinal way - some wider population of male workers. As with all case study work, the study did not seek to offer objectivity or replicability but rather to reveal the meaningful links between experience and structure within the selected relational encounters.

The distinctive formulation of the cases (as longitudinal and therefore incorporating dynamic change) strengthened the opportunity for meaningful theoretical generalisation, despite the small sample size. The young men and workers were interviewed separately and then observed together as the relationship progressed. In one case, the young person was interviewed sometime after his/her relationship with the youth worker had formally ceased, allowing it to be viewed more retrospectively. This was designed to capture how intersubjective processes, especially those that might promote desistance, developed in situ but also how participants' perceptions of the relationship and its impact might change after some time and with reflection. As the research progressed, emergent findings were used to ground (Strauss et al, 1998) subsequent interviews and analyses, allowing for some reframing of the interviews as the project unfolded. The presentation of the cases (in chapters based on individuals and dyads) was ordered and structured to illustrate different dimensions of the conceptual complexity thrown up by the data.

The interviews with youth workers focused on capturing the key life events from their childhood and family life prior to their entry into the profession, how they came into youth work and their reflections on their practice with the young person. The young men were encouraged to recall and recount their own life experiences within family and school, how they had come to become involved in violence, and their perceptions of the worker. All interviews were transcribed and then supplemented with field notes taken from participant observation. For a breakdown of each case, including participants race and age, see the table below.

Table 1.0. List of participants

Chapter	Case Study	Participants
3	Germaine and Steve	Young black man (19) and white, male worker (30)
4	Leon and Steve	Young black man (19) and white, male worker (30)
5	Mark	White male youth worker in training (25)
6	Darren and Chris	Young black man (19) and black, male worker (30)
7	Daniel and Jim	Young white man (22) and white, male worker (42)

Seeing the gestalt in the data – more than a sum of the parts?

The adoption of a psychosocial approach required some acknowledgement of the dangers of bringing psychodynamically-informed theoretical precepts to the data. These included the making of associations not explicitly present in the data and over interpretation. This is a familiar charge – that the top-down thrust of psychoanalysis where the unconscious is found in the subject, combined with the risk of personal commitments that are too heavily invested in to be open to examination, leads to ideas becoming over-valued. Any research involves some form of hermeneutic interpretation and will inevitably involve the application of some pre-set theoretical concepts. The more pertinent question therefore becomes to what extent any such application can be justified. There are echoes here of critical concerns with pure phenomenology which highlight how dominant discourses permeate social life and come to frame how research participants view the world – concerns which have resulted in moves towards critical discourse analysis within sociological studies, including my own previous work in this area (Seal and Harris, 2016).

The approach taken to data analysis here was one that sought to view data as more than a sum of its constituent parts – an approach underpinned by the principle of *gestalt*. The principle of gestalt posits that significance of any phenomenon is a function of its position in a wider framework. Parts of any system are defined by their relation to the whole in which they are functioning. In gestalt theory this focus on configuration, form, structure

and pattern is rooted in a belief that it is impossible to achieve an understanding of structured totals by starting with the ingredient parts which enter into them.

A mass of unstructured individual data are subjectively structured by the perceiver into wholes that have both form and structure. The person's actual experience is determined by the gestalt, rather than the raw pieces of data (Wagner-Moore, 2004, p185).

This study did not intend to produce a cross sectional analysis of the cases as a path to generalisability or any quantitative scales of desistance promoting potential. With this in mind, instead of coding the scripts, interview and observational data was considered separately on a case by case basis. Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDA) did not appear to be the best means to proceed once the transcripts had been completed. CAQDA affords a convenient way of holding data outside the mind and, as is espoused in grounded theory, a way to proceed from below to above to create hypotheses. The process of making links between the data is usually postponed until after the data is retrieved and coded. Arguably, this approach to analysis can lead to analytically significant segments taking precedence over the overall form and a degree of de-contextualisation, with certain ideas becoming foregrounded. Keeping the parts *and* the whole of long, complex narratives in mind and seeing their place in a wider context can become difficult.

I read and re-read the individual transcripts in conjunction with youth work, desistance and psychosocial literature, noting my initial thoughts next to the text in the margin, especially where I saw unconscious defensiveness or relevant psychosocial concepts. The next stage involved writing edited, descriptive pen portraits highlighting significant extracts from the interviews. These portraits acted as substitutes for the raw data in a more digestible form and provided the means to notice the inconsistencies and puzzles within the narratives, helping them come alive for me as the researcher, as well as the reader. These portraits were then read and re-read in conjunction with field notes and other sources (such as workers' written reflections) during the next interpretation phase. As the interpretive process began to surface meanings in the data, each case revealed patterns, some expected and some unexpected. Insights that emerged later in the process led to revisions of earlier interpretations. This non-linear approach to analysis sought to leave room for some ambiguity throughout, rather than the making of bald assertions too early or without

empirical support. The interpretations were then held together in mind and formed part of a final immersion (Borkan, 1999) deep-thinking stage of living with the stories. This incorporated walking and thinking in an attempt to engender synthesis of their disparate elements into a whole.

Although research participants were not directly involved in data interpretation during this phase, their comments made in informal conversations during the whole process fed into my personal interpretations. These were then offered for discussion with colleagues from other methodological traditions, including some from within youth and community work, who held to participatory principles. They offered their alternative interpretations. This helped to ensure that my interpretation was informed both by psychosocial theory and challenged by democratic and dialogical values.

The results evolved into a typology of relationship dynamics and worker/young person subjectivities that was then reflected in the overarching structure of the thesis. All data was then made available to full scrutiny by fellow researchers on-line allowing for external judgements to be made as to the extent to which any claim to robustness was supported by empirical evidence and how the theory was applied. Despite all these efforts, I still remained concerned as to how the data and the cases would be read by others and continued to experience feelings of protectiveness towards the most vulnerable participants. I therefore resolved to either edit some cases studies substantially and/or not submit some cases for publication.

Summary – researching youth work relationships, desistance and inter-subjectivity

This chapter has set out to describe a challenging but rewarding personal and professional journey, charting how I arrived at a research methodology that initially sat uneasily with my professional value base. It has outlined the ontological and epistemological standpoint of the forthcoming study, rooted in a psychosocial conceptualisation of participant subjectivity i.e. non-unitary, defended subjects that are constructed relationally. This approach combines a psychoanalytic emphasis on unconscious drivers of human behaviour with a sociological knowledge of intersectional identities and how these are then positioned in contemporary discourses. I have shown how the method of data gathering chosen (FANI) seeks to foreground the importance of noticing emotional dynamics carried

across narratives which might otherwise have been geared to depicting a coherent rational self.

The dilemmas presented here might serve to illuminate a number of themes that Hollway and Jefferson admit were ambiguous or underdeveloped in the first edition of their book; for example, the notion of the defended researcher and how to balance ethical duties to participants whilst also generating meaningful data that can contribute to socially worthy objectives. The chapter has also sought to show how the approach described here might be used by others who seek to maintain dialogical principles. This might not conceivably amount to an approach to qualitative research that is identifiably different from that set out by Hollway and Jefferson, but it may at least be seen as a useful, discipline-specific, augmentation of their model.

Chapter 3: Germaine and Steve

“He’s shown me the road” – youth work, youth violence and young masculinities: Interrogating the youth worker as role model and surrogate father through a psychosocial lens.

Introduction

This chapter seeks to critically examine a rhetorical trope that has come to dominate professional, policy and public discourse surrounding young people and youth work: the male youth worker as a role-model and surrogate father. It suggests that these professional subject positions are often offered as self-evident solutions to youth violence and that this obscures important gendered, generational and psychodynamic factors at play within youth work relationships. I begin by outlining how the call for male role models in youth work mirrors a parallel call in the formal education sector for more male teachers in primary schools. I cite research that has argued that this discourse is based on some disputable assumptions about masculine gender construction. I then set out some conceptual tools, contrasting structural and post-structural perspectives on masculine subjectivities. I argue that academic analyses may be struggling to keep pace with how these subjectivities materialise in contemporary youth subcultures. I show how a psychosocial frame that seeks to fuse post structural insights with psychodynamic theory might offer a more contemporary and comprehensive conceptual frame, especially when discourses of black masculinity and father absence add further complexity. I then highlight a number of possible implications that can be gleaned from this frame, specifically for our understanding of contemporary relationships between male youth workers and young men involved in violence.

The chapter is centred on a pen portrait of a young, black man (Germaine). The portrait charts his memories of growing up, his feelings surrounding his own (absent) biological father, his drift into violent milieus, and how he perceives his relationship with an older, male, white youth worker – Steve. A psychosocial analysis then explores how Steve manages to lower Germaine’s defensiveness and overcomes Germaine’s racialized rejection of him via the use of humour and a steadfast offer of support to him and his mother. I show how Steve becomes a surrogate father figure in Germaine’s eyes and how

this seems to have played a significant part in Germaine's desistance. I argue that, notwithstanding some problematic undertones that run beneath the role model and father absence discourses, the case study shows that youth workers like Steve can become figures of identification for young men like Germaine and meet their needs, including that for a male father figure. However, in order to maximise the desistance promoting potential of their practice, adult male youth workers need to develop an awareness of how discourses such as father absence reproduce gendered expectations that are responded to differently by young men, depending on their own experience of being parented, cared for or neglected, the meanings they attribute to this, and the relationships they develop with women. I conclude that a reflexive awareness of how men's gendered and racialized identities are performed across generations and within subcultural spaces is essential to developing productive professional responses to youth violence.

Conceptual tools

Male role models

Responding to calls for more male teachers in primary education in the United States, Sevier and Ashcroft (2009) argue that academic analysis must first

address questions such as why we need more male teachers, what masculinities these teachers will model, and how bringing more male teachers into the classroom affects gender relations between staff and students. (p534)

They suggest research needs to inquire into the meaning and/or usefulness of the male teacher as male role model discourse itself, interrogating the confusion surrounding the concept and the consequences of this confusion. Moreover, they warn that the illusion of clarity afforded by the taken-for-granted nature of the discourse prevents men from interrogating what it means to be a male role model and virtually ensures that they will fall back on more traditional or essentialist beliefs about gender. They identify three rationales behind the discourse; firstly, that more male teachers are needed to compensate for the lack of positive male role models in many boys' lives, especially in light of the rising number of single-parent households (Brookhart and Loadman, 1996; Bushweller, 1994; Holland,

1991; Mancus, 1992; Wood and Hoag, 1993). They claim that this surrogate-father rationale assumes that male teachers, by virtue of their very maleness, will serve as desirable models of masculinity. As such, it does not articulate or even question what kinds of masculinities are being modelled (Mills, Martino, and Lingard, 2004; Sargent, 2000) and comes close to suggesting that the presence of men is a necessary corrective to the damaging effects of over-exposure to single mothers or other women. The second rationale suggests that men will bring unique pedagogical styles to the feminized school environment (Beckstrom, 2004; Martino and Kehler, 2006) and broaden children's conceptions of appropriate masculinities by providing examples of nurturing men. They point to studies that have demonstrated that male teachers frequently engaged in hyper-masculine behaviour to compensate for the perceived feminine nature of their occupation (Roulston and Mills, 2000) and that other teachers, administrators, and parents frequently call on them to perform more typically masculine tasks. Several other studies have also raised concerns about male teachers' efforts to secure masculine legitimacy by performing and reproducing hegemonic masculinity in their classrooms (Allan, 1997). A body of scholarship within the interdisciplinary field of Black masculinity studies has sought to give attention to race as a mediating factor in these debates, interrogating how discourses of role model and father absence impact on Black males who are navigating the gulf between dominant notions of manhood and their invariably subaltern social positionalities (Wallace, 2002).

This analysis raises a number of questions around race, gender and pedagogy that are equally pertinent to the work and positioning of professional youth workers in the UK. Recently, Batsleer (2016) has charted how the perceived paucity of male role models and father figures has been revitalised as a mantra within certain policy making quarters and has now become a rhetorical trope. She warns that an uncritical acceptance of this trope as a desirable professional subject position for youth workers could have the effect of ensuring the continued socialisation of young people in binary gender norms and the reproduction of patriarchy. As with Sevier and Ashcroft, she argues the male-youth-worker-as-role-model discourse might obscure political and ethical tensions, especially where aspects of masculinities that could be viewed as complicit in the continued sustenance of patriarchal power form part of professional youth work identities. Binary role modelling, she argues, also assumes a deficit model where the focus is on the individual young person

to conform to idealised notions of masculinity/femininity in order to fit in and get on. She claims that the revalidation of “respectable” and “muscular” masculinities occurs at the cost of symbolic violence to “other” masculinities (p26). Notably, she hints that there may be a pragmatic utility in male workers embodying such respectable, muscular masculinities because a need for “space or distance from the feminine or gay (subordinate) masculinities remains in this context” (ibid). This points at some deep contextuality within youth work practice that acknowledges a plurality of masculinity constructions within subcultural spaces within which male (and female) youth workers are located. These spaces can become segregated and dominated by some young men. This implies, in turn, that the positionality (geographically, generationally, personally and professionally) of male youth workers might present both creative possibilities for interventions with young men but also considerable challenges around engagement, professional boundaries and worker reflexivity.

Reviewing masculinities theory

Understanding how this all works requires an account of how gendered identities are constructed, embodied and enacted relationally within subcultural spaces. In making her distinction, Batsleer is drawing on a long-established literature and body of research within masculinities theory, mostly based on ethnographic and observational methods (Cohen, 1955; Sewell, 1997; Willis, 1978; Back and Solomos, 1995; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Nayak, 1999). Connell’s (1995) theory of multiple masculinities (hegemonic, subordinated, complicit and protest) has become a prerequisite for such accounts. Connell suggested later (2002) that her framework may help explain the cultural embedding and specific shape of violence in communities where physical aggression is expected or admired among men. Messerschmidt (1993) drew on Connell’s notion of an ordered hierarchy of masculinities, and hegemonic masculinity in particular, to apply it to young men and their violent behaviour. In Messerschmidt’s broadly structural account, young working-class men are increasingly being left behind in post-industrial landscapes (marginalised) with no prospect of acquiring the conventional markers of success. According to Young (1999) they turn to

the creation of cultures of machismo, to the mobilisation of one of their only resources, physical strength, to the formation of gangs, and to the defence of their own turf. Being denied the respect of others they create a subculture that revolves around masculine powers and 'respect' (p12).

Seen through this theoretical lens, the implicit motivation for young working-class men's criminal and violent behaviour is as an alternative form of work; a way in which they can recover their sense of self-esteem and conceal their social dependency. For these young men, often situated in relatively deprived urban neighbourhoods, it is this need to accomplish masculinity and compete successfully that leads to crime and other hyper-masculine practices such as violence, competitiveness and attraction to risk.

Within contemporary criminology, it remains hotly contested whether Connell's notion of a gender order in which certain masculinities are subordinated and marginalized in relation to a hegemonic position necessarily aids criminological explanation (Hall, 2002; Jefferson, 2002). Poststructuralist theorists, heavily influenced by Butler (2004), view gender as *performative* – i.e. having no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. They argue that viewing the youthful masculine subject as solely a site of struggle for power and dominance between men and women, or between hegemonic and marginalised men, risks obscuring the multifariousness of masculinities (Pattman, Frosh and Phoenix, 1998). Rather than having unitary and stable properties, masculinities are seen as fully socially constructed, multiple and/or historically and spatially contingent. Swain (2006) argues for the consideration of what he calls "personalised masculinities" that may contain elements of the hegemonic (for example athleticism or a sporty persona) but which do not incorporate the wish to subordinate others. These masculine subjectivities are realised in "particular places and contexts" (Hopkins and Noble, 2009, p813). The post structural approach seeks to destabilise, if not sever entirely, the link between masculinity and the male body and highlight the creation of spaces outside of a normative heterosexual matrix.

In "The Location of Culture" (1994) Bhabha suggests the term *post* does not signify that we are now in an era in which colonial or patriarchal ideology has been supplanted; rather one

in which subjects are attempting to deconstruct the contradictions of history and improvise ways to move beyond its limitations into a hybrid third space – an ambiguous area where two cultures interact. Arguably, contemporary literature, film, music and even comedy and the advertising industry, may well be stepping ahead of academia in portraying how young masculinities are constructed within the contemporary generational context. For example, Barry Jenkins' film *Moonlight* portrays how a young, gay black boy comes under the influence of a local drug dealer who, despite his entrenchment in criminal underworld, still offers the boy a paternal and emotionally fruitful relationship as he struggles to survive in a hyper masculine environment. A new generation of young Black and Asian writers are seeking to produce work, like *Moonlight*, which is not defined in relation to essentialised notions of sexuality, race, gender and colonial power. Boakye (2017) writing about the emergence of the Grime music scene and black masculinity in the UK argues that Grime is a "post-post-colonial cultural artefact" (p325). He identifies the reinforcing of racial and gender stereotypes in the lyrics of young black and white grime artists, but also their playful manipulation via the use of humour. This is now being picked up by academic analyses of masculinities too. McCormack, Wignall and Morris (2016) discuss "gay guys using gay language". They conceptualise an "intent-context-effect matrix" to capture how the interdependency of shared norms means the use of phrases like "that's so gay" can have the effect of bonding straight and gay men together, often through humour about stereotypes of gay men.

Psychosocial theories of masculinity have sought to fuse post-structural perspectives on identity construction with psychodynamic theory, thereby shifting the focus of analysis to the way in which subjects come to invest – consciously and unconsciously – in empowering social discourses (Jefferson, 1996; Jones, 2013). In this frame distinctive masculine subjectivities are understood as emerging from the employment of defence mechanisms linked to object relations in early life (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). This involves reconfiguring behaviourist, social learning theories, including those of the role model, to one that seeks to take more contentious psychoanalytic ideas seriously when seeking to understand the gendered and relational construction of identities. This allows the consideration of psychodynamic apparatuses of defence and identification at play in the formation and maintenance of young men's subjectivities and within their relationships

with female partners, peers and adults, such as parents, teachers and youth workers. Young men growing up in urban, deprived communities are often left to identify with the images of masculinity they find in men around them. These often portray tough, violent and hyper masculine identities as those that hold the most social value within those communities. The display of feminine attributes (such as emotional vulnerability or expression) leaves young men susceptible to ridicule and abandonment. This denial of vulnerability shapes how they form and make sense of their relationships with women in their lives - mothers, partners and friends (including those 'with benefits'. Boakye (2017) neatly captures how denied vulnerability may lie behind the hyper-masculine posturing of young black men in their grime lyrics too.

Young black men entering the public sphere readily use masculinity as a shield to their vulnerability... throw a dust sheet over your insecurities – put your hands over your ears, shut your eyes and start screaming. Vulnerability – gone. (p77)

Black masculinity

Boakye's vivid portrayal of young black millennials shows how the conceptualisation of young men is further complicated when working-class masculine identities intersect with racism and ethnicity, especially at this historical juncture. Black masculinity has long been seen as a key site of ideological representation (hooks, 1992; Golden, 1994). Majors and Bilson (1992) characterised black young men's identity construction as *cool pose* – an embodied subjectivity that emphasizes respect, appearance and pride. They saw this as a performance designed to render the black male visible as opposed to invisible (Ellison, 1952). Back (2004) has argued that for young black men, their perception as "undesirable, violent, dangerous and aggressive" (p 32) still forms a significant part of their identity constructions and works to further constrain the subject positions that they might adopt. In this way, black young male underachievement in education and disproportionate involvement in violence and criminality is seen as a product of how black men internalise aspects of dominant definitions of masculinity in order to contest the conditions of dependency which racism enforces.

More recently, black activists such as Tony Sewell have sought to suggest that black boys' underachievement is not so much related to structural forces, such as institutional racism,

but to what he sees as the feminization of young black men, especially within the British education system, and the lack of role models for young black men (see *The Guardian* 15/3/2010 “black boys are too feminized”). This sentiment has also been identified in European countries such as the Netherlands (see Timmerman, 2011) and the UK (Carrington and McPhee, 2008). This debate has echoes of earlier debates around the mythopoetic men’s movement in America, encapsulated in works such as Robert Bly’s *Iron John* (1990). Writing in response to *Iron John* in which Bly calls for men to connect with a lost masculine essence, Seidler (1997) argues that such calls fail to appreciate what can be learnt from feminism and risk losing touch with the insights into men’s emotional lives and relationships that feminism provides. There is also the added danger that a call for men to rediscover their masculinity is taken up by men who wish to reclaim power and ignore the challenges of feminism. Seidler argues that such perspectives remain too tied into competitive gendered relations, contain undertones that feminists have had their way for too long, and set up false dichotomies between macho and feminized masculinities. He does acknowledge, however, that these calls may find resonance amongst men partly because many men fail to recognize themselves in the images of masculinity portrayed within some feminist writings and exclusively structural analyses.

Father absence

Despite the ongoing nature of these debates the role model and surrogate father tropes continue to remain popular on both sides of the Atlantic and often come attached with their own answer in the shape of male mentors who can act as father figures to young men. The foregrounding of father absence, especially within black communities, continues to find considerable support within political arenas. In previous research (Seal and Harris, 2016) Mike Seal and I highlighted how youth workers were struggling to counter dominant discourses surrounding father absence. These continued to position young black working-class men as dangerous folk devils created in part by fundamental moral deficits within black families. Political concern around the disproportionate absence of fathers in black families has long and studiously ignored the heterogeneity and strengths of black women and families and reworked structural and economic factors into a discourse of moral dysfunction (Myers, 1982; Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Robinson, 1995). That said, among the groups of young men we met from all ethnic backgrounds, a number did express regret and

anger at the lack of a father figure in their lives as they grew up (Seal and Harris, 2016). Young mothers we spoke to reported contradictory attitudes towards the fathers of their children, reflecting their own confusion as to what was the effect of the presence or absence of their male partners on their children. This may reflect some wider societal confusion surrounding how fathers might be physically present within a home but psychologically and emotionally unavailable to their partners and children; how the presence of an abusive father may trigger damaging domestic conflict, or how the role and function of a father can be performed by a range of other actors, male and female, in children's lives. The confusion is further exacerbated by the conflation of problematic pathologising discourses around father absence with what may be empirically observable, cathectic dimensions of father-son relations in specific instances. Disentangling how this all materialises in the lives of young men requires sustaining a dialectical tension between structural, post structural and psychoanalytic accounts of selfhood, masculine subjectivity and parental roles.

Contemporary psychodynamic theorists have sought to capture how young men do or do not develop attachments to objects (Diamond, 2006) in their early lives. These objects include father figures. Through case study analysis they have shown how boys and young men's patterns of identification are reconfigured as they move through adolescence. This does not mean uncritically adopting Freudian biological and phallogocentric accounts of gender or Oedipal theory where boys, through competitive relations with their father, must unavoidably dis-identify or differentiate from their mothers and from the feminine more generally. The incorporation of feminist psychoanalytical perspectives (Chodorow, 1989; Benjamin, 2013) reveals sexed identity as a fragile and often ambiguous achievement rather than a natural essence. Diamond (2006) suggests that traditional Freudian theory is indeed congruent with a view, widespread in patriarchal cultures, that masculinity is defined by its not being feminine. He suggests that the absence of an emotionally available father figure who can model openness to feminine traits may well mean boys more vehemently repudiate identifications with their mothers and the feminine. Pressure from peers to renounce gender inconsistent traits then means that masculinity has to be proven repeatedly. This leads to "defensive phallicity" (p1101). By this he means the employment of aggression to protect fragile masculine identity rather than a more open, receptive sense

of self that can recognise the subjectivity of others and include aspects of the feminine. Diamond also seeks to show, through his case study work, that entering into fathering or surrogate father roles can either “reawaken old narcissistic injuries and conflicts” (p246) or be restorative, providing an opportunity to “reconnect with their own fathers and the sense of generativity” for some men (ibid). This has implications for how we conceptualise personal and professional relationships between older and younger men and raises the question as to how the relationship is experienced by both parties.

Youth work relationships between male workers and young men

A post-structural emphasis on performative identities suggests that in a local space and context, a male youth worker might perform masculine or feminine practices. How might this enable or preclude male workers from actively seeking to disrupt gender norms? How might male youth workers engage meaningfully with young men for whom so-called hyper masculine practices may be forming part of an emergent or established identity? *And* at the same time how might they reach young men who fall victim to the violent actions of these hyper-masculine young men? There are further layers of complexity which manifest in *local* peer group contexts of masculinity construction. Rather than occupying one category alone, young men and their adult male workers may be *simultaneously* positioned in more or less powerful positions with each other. Youth workers need to be able to meaningfully engage with these local contexts of masculinity construction where the pursuit of status and masculine capital (Visser et al, 2013) looms large. Workers seeking to inhabit the spaces young men occupy will need to draw on a range of practices and will do so from a range of subject positions, some more or less proximate to hegemonic, subordinate or marginalised forms.

How a youth worker presents himself therefore becomes central to how his capacity to respond to aggression and violence is perceived. Often a half or full generation older, male youth workers can easily be positioned by policymakers as suitable mentors and surrogate fathers to young men. This subject position can then be simplistically contrasted with other professionals whose positioning within structures perceived as more controlling might cast them as ‘too strict’ ‘square’, ‘bureaucratic’, ‘easily duped’, ‘officious’, or simply not sufficiently ‘down with the kids’. It can easily become entangled with essentialised notions

of gender, thereby casting female workers as too 'soft' or insufficiently versed in the 'man's world' of street violence. The male youth worker's own embodied identity performance can come to be seen as a uniquely apposite tool for young men to reimagine themselves. In short, the hope is that young men may move from seeing a man they *like* to seeing a man they want to *be* like. The reach of a male youth worker is thus characterized as not just a spatial metric but as the extent to which he makes his presence felt at a distance. This reach can become a corollary of the degree to which he is perceived as being part of the same sub or street culture inhabited by young men, howsoever defined. How he presents himself (strong or willing to be vulnerable for example) becomes central to his capacity to respond productively. As Elijah Anderson highlights, "a teacher who shows fear becomes vulnerable and can be emotionally undone by the kids" (1999, p97).

Male workers who embody more feminized or less racialized forms of masculinity may be perceived as facing other challenges in terms of gaining access and building rapport - hence the need for space and distance within subcultural contexts that Batsleer identifies (2015). So how do male workers position their own racialized and gendered performances relationally to those with whom they seek to engage? To what extent (and when) might it be productive for a male youth worker to challenge gendered practices, subject positions and performances that have kept young men and boys physically or emotionally safe within their peer group? Should male youth workers acknowledge the utility of perceived strengths such as physical prowess, discipline and local knowledge that form part of young masculine identities within local subcultures? Should they use the subject position of 'surrogate father' to encourage young men to acknowledge vulnerabilities and losses, including losses experienced in relation to their own parents and their own children? And how does this all relate to their own sense of their masculine subjectivity and their motivation to become role models and surrogate fathers in the first place?

Germaine

Germaine was a 19-year-old young black man living in a large town in the West Midlands. He had been involved in violence as a younger man but when we met he was on the verge of establishing himself as a professional footballer for a local team. He was introduced to me by Steve, his youth worker, to whom he attributed his desistance from involvement in

violence. Steve was an older white, working class man in his thirties who had grown up in the same area as Germaine and had spent some years in the army before training as a youth worker. He worked at a local gang intervention project.

Germaine began by telling me that he and his younger brother had not known their biological father when they were young and that they been brought up almost entirely by their mother. Although he was keen to stress his mother had “always been there” he later disclosed that when he was aged four his mother was sentenced to eight months in prison for a “serious” offence. During this time, he was cared for by his grandmother and his mother’s partner (Colin). Although Germaine expressed no hostility towards his mother’s partner and acknowledged it was Colin who had first introduced him to football, he made little or no mention of him in the entire interview. When I asked him again about his birth father he told me vehemently that if he saw him today he would not speak to him. He had only met him “a couple of times” and “didn’t have any respect” for him.

Germaine remembered being bullied by other boys in his final year of primary school and expressed a strong sense of disorientation as a result of “not knowing who his friends were at the beginning of the day”. By the time he reached secondary school (aged twelve) he had begun to establish a reputation for being one of the “bad ones” in his area.

I was bad as in, if I had a weapon on me, I am using that weapon. If anyone tries it on me I am going to do something.

The area he lived in was bereft of opportunity.

It is like a black hole. There are no dreams in *****. It sucks you in, like, there is nothing you can see. There is nothing to motivate you round here. It is just drugs, violence – that is all you see round here. But when I mean it is a black hole, there is no ambition in the Hood, basically. Like in the roads where I live, everyone knows each other and everyone knows everyone’s business. So, when I first used to walk to school I used to see crackheads, people selling to crackheads – that is first thing in the morning.

Germaine felt there were no older men in the area to whom he could look up to; no “role models”. He considered the white male teachers at the school to be all “aggressive bastards” and “idiots”. He remembered that the Head Teacher at the school had once told

him that he would “never amount to anything” and that he would only ever be “just another black person on the streets”. Germaine “wanted to prove people wrong”.

If the teachers used to tell me to do something I used to tell them to, “Shut up,” “Fuck off,” all of that. But that is the way I was. So, I wasn’t really listening to anything.

His older cousins were involved in drug dealing locally and he remembered being “intrigued” by the “fast money” they were earning. He was asked to drop off some cash to a local dealer and began to think “I want to be like that”. He began to notice that none of his black male peers “had a dad around” either. He felt the absence of his own father most keenly at his football matches, and it affected how he perceived his mum.

I used to see, like, say, the white kids...at half-time or something I used to see their mum and dad talk. I used to just look over and just see my mum. Even though I had a step dad, he never used to come and watch me play football, it was just my mum supporting me. But I used to think, like, it is making my mum look like a mug. Because my mum is over there just by herself and it is like (*pause 5 seconds*) to see a black mum by herself.

If Germaine saw that any members of his peer group seemed to have a good relationship with their father he would “diss” them, subjecting them to taunts such as “Oh, your dad’s a crack head”. Germaine recognized that some of this might have been motivated by envy.

When you used to see a black boy with his mum and dad you used to think, “I wish that was me.” He has got both things, you know what I mean?

Drift into violence and meeting Steve

Germaine began to get involved in fights at school with groups of Asian boys and he joined a local gang. In one incident he witnessed a twelve-year-old boy being stabbed four times by a “12-inch blade” leading to life threatening injuries - “all of his bowels came out”. He became increasingly fearful and reckless and began to carry around a wooden bat to protect himself. Germaine felt his Mum was struggling and “couldn’t handle” him. In her desperation to steer Germaine away from the gang, she asked her brother who had just been released from prison for drug dealing to show Germaine where the “road” he was on might lead. He took Germaine to a crack den.

He was just opening my eyes because my mum couldn't handle me. No one else couldn't handle me. I wasn't listening to anyone in my family. But she knew that if he spoke to me he could show me how the life would be if I wanted to carry on down that road. So, he picked me up from my house, took me to *****. First, he took me shopping just to say, "Yes, this is what you can do with about 10 grand." He was showing me, "If you want to do this, this is what you're going to have to do." But he knew I never had it in me to do that. I didn't find it very comfortable because I was sitting on the bed and there were needles around me. I was thinking, "This is fucked up." I don't really want to do this.

Soon after this Germaine met Steve, a local youth worker at the youth club he attended with his friends. He remembered being very reticent to talk to Steve when he first met him, partly because of Steve being white.

Back then, me and all my friends were thinking, "Who is this white guy? What's he doing here? We don't know him, he doesn't know us." We used to say he is, "Booky," (*weird*). So, we never used to show him any respect. When he used to come we used to ignore him or laugh him. We would say, "You can't eat black people's food" but then he would say, "Well, you like our white girls anyway." That is the way everything started for me – the banter. It was like, "Yes, we like this guy."

Germaine continued to get to know Steve in the local youth club where his friends were making Grime music videos, "dissing other people" and "wanting to be violent". Then when Germaine got into trouble at school Steve was called in to offer some support. Germaine was suspicious at first and felt Steve was "stalking" and "spying" on him. Steve took him out for a meal and visited his house. Germaine gradually began to feel he could talk honestly to Steve.

I never used to talk to him about anything to be honest. When I was younger I never felt comfortable around anyone, to talk to anyone about my stuff. I never used to tell my mum anything. When I used to speak to Steve it wasn't anything, like, 'off my chest' to be honest, but that was at the start. Then when our relationship started to progress, that was the person I could turn to and tell him my problems and stuff. So, I used to tell him, he used to give me advice.

Steve would "pop in school randomly" and sit in on any disciplinary meetings Germaine had to attend. Germaine felt that Steve always had his "corner" and even began to see

Steve as “family”. Germaine remembered that at this time he felt he faced a distinct choice of “roads” and that his mum just did not have the capacity to exert enough influence on him.

I didn’t know what road I was going down. I needed... Steve was my guidance to keep me on the straight and narrow because my mum tried it... you need someone to keep drilling it in you to not go down this road that your friends are down. So, Steve was pushing me down the right road.

Germaine began to “realise” that he was also going to have cut contact with his chosen peer group to block out “all the negativity”. He still felt the absence of a father figure who he felt would have been more “strict”.

If I had a dad as a role model in my life maybe I could turn to someone to talk to about my problems. But as my mum, you don’t really think you could talk to a woman about your problems on, say, my problems on the roads. Because if I had a dad to turn to he could be more stricter and tell me where to go to do this and to do that.

Germaine noticed that Steve was “putting in time” and was “checking up” on him, keeping him “on his toes”. His mum would often remind him that Steve had still “got his eyes” on him. He saw that Steve was supporting his mum too, and that she “had time” for him, which he seemed to find gratifying and comforting.

Sometimes I used to be upstairs playing my PlayStation. I used to hear a knock on the door and he wouldn’t come straight upstairs to me. I would hear his voice, I would go downstairs and he and my mum were having tea with biscuits and just talking. I was like, “Yes!”
(significant change in tone to indicate feelings of triumph)

Steve became an “angel” - a “quiet voice” in Germaine’s ear who could tell when he was lying and would show him the fruits of taking a different road though life.

When you are in your feelings and you think, “Oh I don’t want to do that.” Steve is there, like, keep pushing you and telling you it is not good and everything. He is showing you certain things, as in, he used to take me out and say, “This is what you can have.” He used to take me to posh restaurants, like, “This is what you can have if you’re not on the streets.” But when you are on the streets you can have anything you like, but it is not legit. Steve would tell me what to do to get legit.

By 15 Germaine had begun to extricate himself from his violent peer group. He was spotted by a local football club who then offered him a professional contract. Since then, he said, he had managed to stay mostly clear of trouble and was determined to not go back to his old way of life.

Because I am not going down that road. I am no longer going down that road. I am going down that road that I am on.

A psychosocial analysis

Understanding Germaine

As a story of a young black man extricating himself from a violent pathway whilst coming under the influence an older white male youth worker, this case study could be cited as evidence for the efficacy of the mentoring schemes currently in favour in youth policy discourse. Germaine's account of the lack of opportunity for young people locally – the “black hole” of structural disadvantage – shows how he felt this was blocking his means to accomplish his masculinity. Associating with peers who were equally marginalised and left behind in a post-industrial landscape offering no conventional markers of success, he drifted into violence as a form of protest. His identity as a “bad one” was a means to make him a visible, cool, local hero like his cousins, rather than an invisible, powerless victim like the boy he had seen stabbed. School was a space where he felt positioned in such a way as to reproduce racial and class inequalities, and where he could then position male teachers as “idiots”. He begins to construct a masculine identity another “black kid on the streets” – the same subject position that the teachers had deployed as evidence of his inability to learn.

Understanding his violence

Presumably, Germaine was not the only young black boy in the area who was experiencing these structural barriers. His drift into violence could be read as a product of his association with the male cousins and friends involved in crime in his neighbourhood, but not all of his peers drifted into violent behaviour. Understanding his drift into a violent milieu and how this impacted on his sense of personal agency requires a dual engagement with both psychological and sociological theory. Germaine's statement that his mother had “always

been there” indicates a strong gendered attachment with her that persisted into young adulthood. This attachment must have extended to his grandmother too, who took care of him when his mother was incarcerated. His early object relations with these women must have included a period of having to deal with feelings of loss and abandonment when his mother was suddenly absent. When she returned, these feelings, and the availability of pathologizing social discourses surrounding the black, single mother, may have contributed to his construction of his mother as unable to protect or contain him. Then, bullying at primary school left him unsure as to whether he could rely on his male friends. At this young age this experience appeared to have undermined his confidence and self-esteem, leaving him feeling emasculated and very vulnerable. Enduring feelings of vulnerability may explain his willingness to deny good parts of his self by cultivating a “bad man” identity and the defences against persecutory anxieties that entailed. His decision to carry a weapon for self-protection is reimagined as identification with the dangerously bad male aggressor, (“if anyone tries anything on me I’m going to do something”). This defence against uncertainty and vulnerability (Diamond, 2006) was then accentuated by witnessing a peer suffer a brutal stabbing.

Understanding his felt father absence

The absence of both his biological dad and his stepfather in the classed and gendered context of football (an absence that is highlighted by the presence of other fathers) triggers further feelings of loss, abandonment and envy. His determination to never see his biological father even if he did show up, is perhaps a defence against exposure to further rejection and pain. The absence of his stepfather from his narrative points to how this physical male presence in his life was unavailable to Germaine, psychologically. The resultant psychic pain and envy leads him to invest in social discourses that emphasise male defensiveness and stoicism. This materializes in a reluctance to talk about his feelings to anyone (to get things “off his chest”) or to listen to any advice, especially from his mother and grandmother. The actual biographical experience of not having a father on the touchline at his football games finds expression in his strong investment in a discourse of father absence. This investment is gendered in that he sees the lack of a disciplinary presence in his life as something that could only be provided by a male parent. The gendered nature of this investment also affects his ambivalent appraisal of his mother who

he perceives “can’t handle” him. He conflates his mother’s struggle to “handle” him with a notion that only men can be “strict”. Later she becomes a “mug” in his eyes; abashed by the absence of a male partner by her side, weak, and unable to control Germaine’s reckless behaviour. This lack is articulated as a longing for a man whom he feels can support his mum and/or take him on. Germaine cannot talk to her about his “problems”. It is only when his mother recruits her drug dealing brother as a *negative* male role model to administer some shock treatment that Germaine experiences the disciplinary male presence he feels he lacks. This triggers his first real epiphany (“this is fucked up”) and his primary desistance as he begins to reconsider his life trajectory.

Generational differences

Steve’s gendered and racialised repost “you like our white girls” in response to Germaine and his male friends teasing “you can’t eat our food” is revealing. When Germaine meets Steve, despite a shared affiliation to the local area, their different racialised and generational identity is, at first, a barrier to psychic identification. The exchange could be read as signifying Steve’s complicity (Connell, 1995) with patriarchal power secured through the invocation of a normative heterosexual and racialized matrix. Was he competing for masculine capital (De Visser et al, 2009) with these young black men? Did this “banter” endorse misogyny and objectify women as trophies? The exchange perhaps needs to be viewed within its intersectional and generational context. Steve later claimed his use of the term “our white girls” was tongue in cheek, but it is not clear whether the boys were aware of this, or if Steve was somehow parodying racial and gender stereotypes. As post-post-colonial subjects (Boyake, 2017) did Germaine and his friends view racial and gender differences as legitimate devices to create humour within a changed post-post structural race and gender politics? If Steve was trying to create a sense of “we are all in on the joke”, poking fun at young people and others who might use gender and racial stereotypes seriously, did Germaine and his friends get the joke?

Understanding Steve’s personalised masculinity

There was no other evidence in Germaine’s account that Steve’s sporty, muscular and heterosexual persona included any wish to subordinate others. In fact, he embodied what

Germaine envied in the lives of boys in his football team – a man who was willing and able to spend time with him and his mum and who could create space for authentic communication. As such Steve’s masculinity construction could be said to be “personalized” (Swain, 2000) and his banter and persona as rapport-building shortcuts employed towards a counter hegemonic goal (Raby, 2005). The pivotal distinction here in terms of worker expertise is whether his banter and persona, which could be considered sexist, were employed reflexively or unconsciously. Either way, building on the leverage acquired through this breakthrough, Steve becomes a consistent presence in Germaine’s life who can withstand Germaine’s initial disparaging and racialized rejection of him as a “booky” white man. Steve’s joke punctures Germaine’s cool pose and allows him to simply stick around long enough for Germaine to see beyond his social identity and to begin to like him. Then he sees that his mum likes him too and reads this as Steve meeting her need for a strong man in her life – a reading that represents a possible projection of his own needs onto her. Steve’s presence in his mum’s life and support for her seems to lift his spirits – finally his mum has what he feels she needs (“yes!”). He begins to position Steve as his surrogate father and invest their relationship with a “he has shown me the road” motif. Steve’s reach can in this sense be seen as extending beyond the geographical and he becomes a desistance promoting “voice” in Germaine’s ear.

Two years after the events described in this study, Steve and I discussed Germaine’s transcript and the questions it raised for his practice and professional identity. On reflection he felt that the comment about “our white girls” and his bodily and linguistic practices may well have been triggered by a strong sense he had at the time that he could not afford to be seen as vulnerable by this group of young men. In these early stages of his relationship he felt he needed to avoid being “emotionally undone” (Anderson, 1999). Maybe this is what Batsleer means by the need for space and distance in these contexts. We agreed though that the gendered banter could equally have been interpreted by the young men as condoning their sexist attitudes. Steve began to further reflect on his own masculine subjectivity and how this may have been related to his own biographical experience of mothering and fathering. This led us to exploring how his relationship with Germaine and other young men affected Steve. Did it reawaken old narcissistic injuries or prove generative? (Diamond, 2006). What did he learn from the interaction with Germaine? Did

it trigger introspection regarding his own fathering and his own attitudes to women? Fully understanding this would require drilling down into Steve's own biographical experience and exploring how this related to his investment in gendered social discourses, a task I undertake in the next chapter. What was clear from Germaine's and Steve's narrative accounts though, was that there were important gendered, generational and psychodynamic factors at play in their relationship. The simple trope of role modelling could never really capture how this relationship between two men incorporated disowned vulnerabilities, and investments in classed, racial, and gendered discursive motifs.

Summary

This case illuminates how the youth-worker-as-male-role-model and surrogate father subject positions do not offer the self-evident answer to young men's violence in the way in which public and policy discourse often imply. It highlights the gendered, generational and psychodynamic factors at play within these youth work relationships that academic analysis needs to keep pace with and find ways to accurately portray. It also suggests in order to maximise the desistance promoting potential of their practice, male youth workers will need a highly developed sense of their own and young men's gendered and racialized performative identity constructions within subcultural spaces. Male youth workers distinctive professional positioning means they are well placed to offer themselves to young men involved in violence as role models and surrogate father figures. These subject positions contrast neatly with the disciplinary, mandatory presence of other professionals and the youth justice system, and the discursive positioning of women as less able to cope with young men's adolescent rebellion. However, a psychosocial lens allows us to see that young men and male youth workers are not reducible to the group identity or social category in which they are cast. Their subjectivities are constituted by both inner psychic and outer social worlds that are inextricably linked and shape their view of adults, parents and peers. Cultural ideals of masculinity penetrate and construct individuals in ways in which men are often unaware. A psychosocial sensitivity to unconscious psychic processes, identity performances, and the gendered nature of discourse can uncover assumptions that are being smuggled in through the 'male-role-model-who-is-older-and-wiser' discourse. Understanding the practices and positionality of male youth workers and young men as including an unconscious element means it becomes possible to see how male youth

workers' professional relationships with young men might become (unconsciously) rivalrous and competitive. Older, male youth workers seeking to act as father figures to young men might need to accept the young person is, in subtle ways, different to them.

Recognising the unconscious drivers behind young men's personas is also key to understanding how youth workers might disrupt gender norms and promote desistance. This disruption requires a delicate balancing of empowerment and simultaneous disempowerment. How and why young men construct their masculinity and/or desist from violence may depend on their how relationships with significant others, such as mothers, fathers and grandparents growing up conferred recognition and empowerment. Early object relations, experiences of loss and abandonment, including that triggered by the absence of an emotionally available mother or father, will affect young men's choice as to whether or not to psychically invest in hegemonic, subordinate, complicit or marginalised masculine identities. In order to formulate meaningful practice responses male youth workers may need to develop the necessary understanding of these unconscious and gendered drivers of young men's expressive techniques, of which violence may be one. There are some important paradoxes that require further attention, such as how negative male role models in young men's lives may also have desistance promoting potential and how their relationship with male workers may be meeting the needs of the worker as well as those of the young man.

This case also has implications for feminist, anti-sexist and single sex work. It illustrates the deep contextuality of youth work relationships where gendered and racialized identities are performed in local sites of masculinity construction. Generational differences may supersede other similarities in social identity (gender and ethnicity) as well as accentuate them. A male youth worker seeking to meet young men halfway and adopting gendered discursive practices does not necessarily equate with an uncritical adoption of hegemonic masculinity or a call to rediscover a masculine essence. The same gendered professional actions may contribute towards either hegemonic and counterhegemonic goals. Male workers need an awareness of post-structural and feminist analyses of male power and of the generational context in which they operate. Drawing distinctions between hegemonic and counterhegemonic practices and positions requires a deep sensitivity to socially and spatially embodied agency and a deep commitment to reflexive practice; a level of

understanding to which the current youth policy and training regimes may need to be further attuned. This is because there is a real danger of idealising the hetero-normative, charismatic male youth worker who shares a social identity with young men. This might have the effect of stifling professional and peer scrutiny and casting women as passive rather than active agents in young men's lives. Such professional identities may implicitly reinforce the forms of self-concept that lie behind some young men's sexist attitudes and more destructive behaviour patterns. Male workers who embody forms of masculinity which gain immediate masculine currency within local youth subcultures may act in ways that are complicit with symbolically violent power and the competitive pursuit of masculine capital.

The business of youth working and responding to father absence, rather than the imposition of one identity in the shape of a role model, becomes about enabling young men to be reflexive about a range of possible identities and to come to terms with their own psychological and social development. This highlights how male youth workers situated within local youth subcultural contexts might need to be able to move reflexively and fluidly around that subculture as a means to encourage changes in young men's thinking, even if the broader structural conditions that surround them are resistant to change.

Chapter 4: Leon and Steve

“I can tell him anything”: Examining processes of reciprocal identification and neutralisation between male workers and young men involved in violence.

Introduction

This chapter revisits the practice of the youth worker Steve who was introduced in chapter three. This time we see him working with another young black man with a history of violent offences - Leon. The dyadic case study illuminates how processes of reciprocal identification between youth workers and young men involved in violence can become entangled with the techniques young people use to neutralise their offending behaviour. Firstly, I explain the concepts of identification and neutralisation, revisiting some debates as to how these might be related to desistance and reconnecting them with their psychodynamic roots. I present pen portraits of Leon and Steve. Then, via a psychosocial analysis I show how their stories generate their respective subjectivities, both infused with discourses of masculine toughness, and how this is rooted in shared early experiences of abandonment and rejection. The analysis then explores their relationship and argues that the process of reciprocal identification between them, rooted in psychic and social similarities, morphs into an over-identification with Leon on Steve’s part. Although Leon describes his relationship with Steve as one in which he can tell him anything, some issues, including Leon’s ongoing offending behaviour and his neutralisation of it, fall off the agenda. The chapter concludes that tacit processes behind identification and neutralisation need to be made more explicit in order to maximise the desistance promoting potential of relationship-based youth work.

Conceptual tools

Identification

Identification is a theoretical concept rooted in psychodynamic theory that has entered common public usage and continues to be used widely within academic and professional discourses. Broadly, it can be described as a process whereby a subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of another subject and is transformed wholly or partially, by the model that other provides. Gadd (2006, p182) defines it as, “those mental processes

that involve imagining parts of ourselves to be similar to, or compatible with, qualities we perceive in others". Psychoanalytic theory views personality structure as emanating initially from identification with attachment figures (primary identification) and as a product of identification with new significant others. When we identify with the subject position of another or with their feelings or experiences, this produces an empathic response, and furthermore an active (but not necessarily conscious) psychic investment in them. This investment can lead us to make changes in our own subject position.

Any agentic change in subject position or personality structure via a relationship with another subject clearly has important implications for youth workers engaged with young offenders. Narrative-based desistance theory (Maruna, 2001) suggests that offenders might look to those around them as "blue print selves" (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009) as they construct narratives to make sense of their own offending behaviour and progress along their desistance pathways. There are some renowned examples of identification being proposed as a force within the desistance pathways of young offenders within classic criminological literature. For example, Snodgrass (1983) believed that Clifford Shaw was perceived by Stanley (the Jack-Roller) as the father he lacked in his boyhood. This form of one-way identification is often cited as the vehicle through which the young person begins to shift his/her self-perception and relinquish criminal behaviour. Notably, Snodgrass argues it was the *reciprocal* (two-way) identification between the *two* men that explained the success of the social treatment intervention to which Stanley was exposed and the intervention's ultimate failure once the research relationship concluded. Gelsthorpe (2007) has attempted to dig down in to this reciprocity by charting Shaw's own story² and asking whether there were "overlapping experiences" such as Shaw's lack of voice as a child.

² Clifford Shaw was born in August 1895 in the rural mid-west, as the fifth of ten children. He had a Christian upbringing in a family of 'poor dirt farmers', attended school irregularly before being forced to leave school at 14 and work on the farm. After a brush with delinquency, he became a minister and lived in a settlement in Chicago called 'The House of Happiness' in an Eastern European neighbourhood near the inner city. Shaw's role as a residential settlement-house worker in a Polish neighbourhood is thought to have had a profound effect on him (Snodgrass, 1976: 4). Snodgrass argues that, this exposure to the harsh reality of life for immigrant populations liberalized Shaw, who had been brought up in a very conservative, strict home environment.

Gelsthorpe speculates how this might have had led Shaw to identify with Stanley, as well as leading Stanley to idealise Shaw as a father figure.

Neutralisation theory

Neutralisation theory, first developed by Gresham Sykes and David Matza in 1957, is concerned with the justifications or excuses that offenders use to rationalise their behaviours. Their work has been consistently cited since as a means to account for young people's drift into delinquency. Their five "techniques of neutralisation" (denial of injury, responsibility, victim, condemnation of the condemners and appeal to higher loyalties) can be understood as forms of inner speech and self-attributions that serve to reduce feelings of disequilibrium or cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Sykes and Matza were interested in how the conflict between one's self concept as a moral person and one's morally questionable behaviours might play a role in delinquent behaviour and (particularly secondary) deviance. Their work could be read as a reaction to subcultural theories that saw delinquency as young offenders replacing middle class values with a set of their own as an act of rebellion and resistance. Sykes and Matza claimed that offenders remained wedded to wider societal values. They asked why young offenders experienced guilt, showed respect for law abiding others and distinguished who should and should not be victimised. In sum, they argued that young offenders were aware that what they were doing was wrong and therefore needed to neutralise their guilt in various ways, for example by obscuring their agency or vilifying their victims.

In their review of neutralisation theory, Maruna and Copes (2005) draw out some problems with how it has been used since it was first proposed and how this has implications for those working with offenders. Significantly for this study, they argue that since Matza and Sykes first set out their ideas, we have seen moves towards offender treatment programmes that seek to promote desistance by confronting neutralisations. This is mostly attempted via a restructuring of offender *cognitive* processes. In this process, they claim, the psychoanalytic roots of neutralisation theory have been "all but forgotten" (p236). They claim that if neutralisations are treated simply as "processing errors," "faulty reasoning," or "cognitive deficits," much of the richness of the theory is lost. They cite early authors in the field of child psychology such as Redl and Wineman (1962) who chart young people's

use of defence mechanisms such as denial to resolve cognitive dissonance. Redl and Wineman argue that this is driven by unconscious needs to obviate anxiety, insecurity and fear. They claim these needs amount to an “onrush from within” (p93) which results in children developing “ritualistic avoidance machinery” and even an inability to “remember and single out their own contribution to a total causal chain”. Young people simply forget “their own feelings or motivations and the intent and intensity of what they did” (ibid).

As well as highlighting the unconscious (and therefore not cognitive) nature of neutralisation techniques, Maruna and Copes argue that whereas neutralisation theory has been employed to explain criminal behaviour, using it to explain desistance requires some careful application. Neutralisation techniques may also serve to sustain rather than impede desistance. An offender may use such techniques to keep his/her sense of a law abiding self intact when threatened by the impact of past misdemeanours. These may induce intense feelings of self-hatred, guilt and shame as part of condemnation rather than redemptive scripts. Neutralisations that separate offending from the core self are more associated with maintaining desistance. This suggests that making excuses may have advantages, and that neutralisation theory might also be seen as an explanation of desistance as well as persistent offending behaviour.

This is further complicated when two narratives of trauma, criminal behaviour and desistance coincide. What happens when a worker with his or her own history of offending and trauma enters a generative stage of his own life cycle (Erikson, 1959) and, wishing to make good his past misdemeanours, joins a profession such as youth work? How does this play out when what Jung (1951) called a wounded healer encounters a young person with similar experiences? What happens when the professional within the dyad is seeking to retain his or her self-concept and ward off feelings of shame, guilt or regret? We have seen in chapter four how such a worker’s ability to be reflexive can promote desistance, but how is this affected when the worker is struggling with loss, trauma and offending in his biography? How does this operate inter-subjectively and relationally and how is it shaped by gendered discourses? There has been little analysis of how identification and neutralisation operate within professional relationships such as youth work where *reciprocal* identification and shared experience of loss and trauma is often a strong feature.

How might the fact this affect the accounts young male offenders give over time and how the male youth workers interpret or challenge those accounts?

Leon

Leon was an 18-year-old black male who grew up on a council estate in a Midlands town in the UK. He was introduced to me through Steve, his youth worker, as somebody who had been involved in violence and had some experience with the youth justice system. At the time of our first interview Leon was unemployed and receiving assistance from Steve with regards to re-entry into education or employment. A complex picture gradually emerged of a young man whose options in life had been heavily determined by structural forces such as poverty, discrimination, and labelling, but also by childhood experiences of abandonment and rejection. He also presented as somewhat of an enigma; as someone faced by choices at a crossroads in his life trajectory and whose pathway out of criminal behaviour was far from clear.

Childhood and school life

Leon described his early family life living with his mother as “very loving”. When he was seven or eight a new male figure (his mother’s partner) arrived in the house. Leon struggled to accept the presence of this man in the family home and felt he had no right to claim authority over him. When asked about his feelings towards his mother’s boyfriend, Leon immediately linked to this to a sense of paternal lack in his own biography, as well as the breakdown of his family life.

Yeah, I’ve never had a Dad figure, I’ve never had a manly figure there, and when he got married to my mum, I probably didn’t like the fact that he thought he could just come in and be that father and the way he used to speak to me. I was young but I still didn’t find it right, how he was speaking to me, how he was treating me and that, and that was before I even grew up and started to hate him and all that. He would do things like a father would, go to the park play football and stuff like that, but it was just the inner feelings, the inner feelings...I could see and feel that he was putting on a front, if you get what I am saying?

Leon had been talking for some while to his grandmother about these difficulties and she offered Leon a place in her home, something he accepted gladly because at least “he” (his mother’s boyfriend) “wasn’t there”. Leon recalled primary school as trouble-free but felt his behaviour changed through his association with a new peer group at secondary school. He was expelled in year ten (aged 15) when teachers found a small amount of cannabis in his pocket. He claimed it was left there by his sister without his knowledge. He was moved to another school but only attended sporadically due (he said) to the school’s distance from his home. He got into fights “now and again”, but claimed he was always provoked, usually by peers making insulting comments about his mum or his family.

I wasn’t just doing it for no reason. It takes a lot for me to, like switch, or attack someone.

Leon left school with no qualifications, by which point he was already in trouble with the Youth Justice system. He and a group of friends had targeted a family home in their neighbourhood. They had vandalised the property, spraying paint, breaking windows, and attacking (verbally and physically) the family, primarily according to him, out of boredom. This behaviour led to Leon receiving his first sanction - an Acceptable Behaviour Contract imposed for a year.

Entry into youth justice

Then, two years prior to our first interview, while walking through his local town centre, Leon was approached by an elderly, intoxicated white man and asked for money. When he refused, the man began to racially abuse Leon. Seeking to avoid confrontation, Leon walked into a more public area so that others could witness the abuse, but it continued. At this point Leon felt he “switched”.

I’ve tried to walk off and I’ve tried to be the bigger person and I moved somewhere else and he’s still there and I just thought ‘forget it’. I should have, but I didn’t. I kicked him and he’s dropped to the floor and then there must have been another group of black lads at the top of the depot and then they must have come over.

Leon then left the scene but the group of young men began a more sustained attack that

was captured on CCTV cameras. Leon felt a strong sense of injustice at how the incident was made to appear in the local media, because although he struck the first blow, he was not involved in the group attack. Leon escaped prosecution as the CCTV evidence demonstrated the attack was indeed provoked, but that one incident appeared nonetheless to depress him.

That one has really changed me, changed how I am like. Before that one, I was all just confident with everything like, but after that one, it's just put a downer on things like. I haven't been bothered to do anything, I think I'm not going to get anywhere with anything I do.

Leon was referred to the local youth offending team where according to him, he was told he had "anger problems" and had to "fill out forms". He viewed these interventions where he was expected to record his thought processes in written form, as "rubbish".

People were saying I had anger problems, which made me say, "I haven't got anger problems, why are you saying, I've got anger problems?" And that was probably showing her that, yeah, I've got anger problems! (*laughing*)

Despite this, Leon completed his YOT order and moved back to live with his mother. She would often leave him on his own in the house. By now, his attachment to his grandmother outstripped that which he felt towards his mother. Even though he had come to an understanding of his mother's behaviour, he still felt abandoned.

Yeah, well, sometimes she goes away like, but I think she goes away to try and clear her head because I feel as if she feels bad that she wasn't there for me when I was younger, and she sees the connection me and my Nan has got, and she finds that hard to deal with. So she just goes away for a while and I'm wondering, so "where is my mum gone?" like. That's why I really class my Nan as my mum.

Leon also described a close friendship he had developed with another young man in his neighbourhood who was on the autistic spectrum and who also had a tendency to "switch".

I don't know, we are just good for each other like. I am like the only person who can calm him down. Like he can switch and I'm that person there to stop him. If there was

someone else to tell him he ain't going to listen, but I can speak to him and I can settle him down and that.

Continued offending

Outside of formal interviews Leon admitted that he had recently used a Taser gun in order to extract information from two young men in his neighbourhood on the whereabouts of a stolen bike. He also told me he had robbed and violently assaulted a member of the public, with a friend, simply in order to "raise" money for a car (which was not insured and they were driving illegally). On one occasion Leon had in his possession an expensive mobile phone which claimed to have "found". Even though he knew this was stolen property, he had no intention of handing the phone over. Despite this, in our final interview, Leon insisted his life was no longer going in the direction it had been; that he and his friends had "grown up" and "changed a lot" and that they might be able to have some positive influence on other young people in the community. He attributed this in part to his relationship with Steve, a youth worker he had known for several years.

Steve

Steve was a white youth worker in his late twenties working as part of a gang prevention project. An ex-army man from a deprived background, he felt that as a result of his life experiences he could be a valuable resource to young people involved in crime and violence.

Childhood and family life

Steve had grown up on the same working-class council estate as Leon, the youngest of four brothers and with one younger sister. It was a family environment he described as "strict". From an early age he, his mother and his siblings had suffered violent abuse at the hands of his alcoholic father. Criminal activity and drug dealing were very much part of the "furniture". Steve admitted he "idolised" his elder brother who was around to protect him when needed. At school Steve felt his family's reputation affected how teachers viewed and interacted with him. He was placed in what he called the "bottom set", but he quickly realised the school work was "too easy". He would often misbehave as a result of boredom

and frustration. Even when he did show interest this was not noticed or encouraged by the teachers. On one such occasion Steve assaulted a male teacher.

I was doing my work and he was constantly going on at me, and it felt like these guys were out to get me, because I felt vulnerable anyway and trying to dodge everything. I felt like these were the ones who were going to get me, someone was going to get me. I always remember, I got that frustrated, I got up, I walked around the table and I punched him. God knows why, I punched him.

At 13, Steve witnessed his father beating up his mother, which despite his brother's attempts to intervene, resulted in his mother leaving the home with Steve and his younger sister. His father was then imprisoned for a serious violent attack on his older brother and his mother quickly found a new partner (Frank). Steve described how he lost 'respect' for her at this point.

My mum and dad split up and the introduction I had to that was kind of a little bit weird. My mum turned round and said, "so how do you think about me and your Dad splitting up and me introducing you to a nicer bloke, like Frank"? That kind of threw me because it was like, what are you doing?

On his 14th birthday, Steve's mother announced that she was leaving the family home. Steve refused to leave, despite his mother's attempts to "bribe" him by promising to purchase him a motorbike. His mother left anyway, leaving Steve on his own to fend for himself in an empty house. Living alone and without his brother for protection, Steve began experiencing serious problems with bullying at school. One day, Steve's father, now released from prison, asked him to explain why he was not in school. When Steve explained that he was playing truant to avoid being bullied, his father beat him severely because he "didn't front it out". This left Steve feeling that he could not tell anyone about his problems. Acutely aware of the risk of being taken into care, he became adept at concealing the lack of parental supervision or financial support at home and found employment (at 15 years old) in a local butcher's shop. When his money ran out, Steve supplemented his income by running errands for his brothers' drug business. He began to spend time with a group of predominantly black friends who were also involved in petty crime and drug dealing and he drifted into delinquent behaviour, petty vandalism, and stealing cars.

Steve spent his spare time playing football and attending the local youth club, all the time concealing his home circumstances from the youth workers. He recalled how they did “that little bit extra” for him, taking him to Sunday football matches and to pubs. This made Steve feel “accepted” and like he was “part of a big ‘man’ thing”. An African Caribbean neighbour who had spotted Steve fending for himself took him in; a kind of pseudo-adoption that Steve said made him feel “wanted”.

Entry into the army

Steve left secondary school aged 16 with no qualifications. He tried to make contact with his father, who, still an alcoholic, now rejected him completely.

I remember him turning around to me one night and saying to me, “I don't love you, don't come around here no more”. Sent me home in a taxi, me sort of crying to a taxi driver 'cos I knew I was going back home to nothing.

Fearing his sons were becoming lost to a life of crime, Steve’s father frogmarched Steve direct to the nearest army careers office. Within weeks of his 16th birthday, Steve was enrolled in army training. He was physically fit and coped well with the physical demands of army life. He described his training as cold, impersonal, and pervaded with violence. Failure to achieve often near impossible tasks would result in menial, degrading punishments meant to “break you to the point where you were a blank canvas”. Often the performance of the weakest member of the group would cause the whole group to be punished. Mistakes in combat training exercises could lead to serious assault. On one occasion an officer beat him with a metal bar and on another he was ambushed and beaten by a group of other soldiers. When faltering under the physical and psychological pressure, senior officers would remind Steve how little he had to return to at home. For Steve, this confirmed that he should remain in the army rather than go home to a dysfunctional family that could not offer that same feeling of belonging.

Steve embraced his new identity of the “squaddie” wholeheartedly. He experienced (and also engaged in) racist banter, sometimes along the lines of rival British ethnicities. With his salary paid in lump sums, Steve came to consider himself a “one day millionaire”. Binge drinking often led to violence and predatory sexual predatory behaviour, all of which

appears to have been condoned or at least overlooked by his superior officers. At some point, Steve spent 28 days in an army prison for fighting – as he described just for the “fun” of it. When he returned to his own community he felt, possibly for the first time, a degree of acceptance and admiration.

You know, once you turn up in a pub, you're with your mates and you're a squaddie, people constantly buy you pints. It's like you are loved.

Such love was not universally felt, however. One of Steve's close friends, Dave, wanted to leave the army and had been granted permission to do so, except the commanding Sergeant decided to delay informing him. As a result, Dave committed suicide in the barracks. Steve found his friend hanging but was unable to save his life. (*pauses in seconds in brackets*)

He was there hanging, 'em (8) yeah, he was hanging, yeah, and I grabbed him, put him on the floor, took him off. I can't remember much of it (8) yeah, and literally phoned the ambulance. The ambulance came and I was back on the drill square, doing what I was doing, which was quite weird. (5) Yeah, that was training for me. They wouldn't let me go to his funeral, and yeah, that was quite hard now for me.

He had no time to digest the shock and trauma.

What they do in the army was that quick, they make you go through things that quick, you don't think about things and I didn't really think about it at that point in time. So I went back and I got drunk over the next couple of weeks and stuff like that and then I joined a battalion and everything was fine, everything moved on and everything was fine and yeah, it was alright.

On completion of his training, Steve's parents did not attend his passing out ceremony. He was posted for several spells of active duty, first Northern Ireland, then Iraq, Afghanistan and finally Bosnia. In Ireland he narrowly missed being hit by a petrol bomb. He called his father, crying, asking to come home, but to no avail. Steve felt that at this time he “got a lot of anger out, a lot of the feeling of rejection went”. This was partly through,

going out and absolutely loving it and getting kicks out of hitting people with the baton, you know.

In Iraq, Steve was expected to “clear up” the aftermath of fire-fights, including dead bodies, which he described as “pretty boring”. Boredom brought unwanted time to reflect and Steve spent most of his time intensively training in the gym. He was posted to Afghanistan as a sniper, a role he described as being like “action man”. Two of Steve’s close friends were killed in hand to hand combat and another stepped on an IED and lost a limb. These were clearly intensely painful memories for Steve. He recalled his own inability at the time to process them.

He’s just (3) dead, you can’t explain it. I don’t think you can explain it but at that point you don’t, you cry, but it’s not an emotional cry. It’s like you don’t know what you’re crying for. That’s the only way I can explain it. It’s very cold and calculated.

Steve described how on another occasion he was asked to direct heavy fire at an enemy position.

We didn’t see a head pop up afterwards. Now, for me, I struggle with that because I think to myself, did the head not pop up because they thought, fuck, I’m not going to do that again, or did the heads not pop up because they were dead? Do you know what I mean? And eh.... (5).....that was freaky, that was freaky, and really hard to live with and still is.

During his recovery he worked in army recruitment where he had his first taste of working directly with young people, some of whom came from similar backgrounds to his own.

I remember the day one of the lads came and he was crying. He was supposed to be this big man and all this stuff and he was crying and we just got on and I loved working with young lads, to let them know about army life.

Entry into youth work

He decided to leave the army and this triggered a troublesome transition. There were ongoing psychological consequences directly related to the trauma he experienced in the

army and specifically the suicide of his friend during training, including nightmares. Steve's attitude to education changed. He gained a part time youth work job and then a place at a local university to study Youth and Community Work. Removed from army life he began to form relationships with a diverse group of students, male and female, with different biographies. His attitude to his former "squaddie" contemporaries changed.

Weirdly enough I hate squaddies now, I hate them. I hate what squaddies represent. If I had a daughter and my daughter brought a squaddie home, I'd tell him to leave quite quickly. I think I am evaluating myself when I was in the army and how much of a prick I was to women, to people, to civilians as we would call them back then.

He graduated with a professionally validated first class degree. He felt that although the course had allowed him to deal with some of his own "baggage", his time in the army had resulted in him inhabiting two "selves" – one he called the "squaddie" Steve and the other the "normal" Steve. He found work in the same secondary school he attended as a boy, something he felt gave him the opportunity to "give something back" to the community in which he grew up. This was where he had met Leon.

I'm (a) completely new person, I'm a new person with my past experiences still there, if you know what I mean. It's helped me reach my potential. I'm somebody else, I'm somebody who is able to not just teach myself but teach others.

The relationship in focus: Leon and Steve

Leon talked positively about his close personal relationship with Steve that predated Steve's move into professional youth work. It was rooted in familiarity borne out of shared experience of the local area. Leon felt this gave Steve a vantage point from where he could see through to his real self.

I can't remember the first time I met him, I've known him for ages like. The thing about Steve, he knows me. So (*laughs*) that's the best thing. I don't really need to explain everything to Steve. He could come up to me and tell me what's the problem with me.

He described activities they had been engaged in together as part of Steve's youth project (e.g. quad-biking, meals) which had facilitated conversation and reflection.

The thing with Steve, I can never tell what he's trying. I wouldn't say he bribes me, but he might take me for something to eat and I'll speak to him and then when I've reached home or I'm on my own, I'll actually think back about what we spoke about, and, I do need to sort things out. Steve's right. I am getting older like.

When discussing his relationship with his female YOT worker, the difference in tone and impression was stark. Leon felt frustrated with the programmed, cognitive behavioural activities she expected him to complete. Steve, in comparison, could be trusted with information more than other professionals. Leon used familial language to describe Steve, likening him to his "big brother". Steve had offered practical advice and support with accessing training and Leon trusted him, especially after the incident that triggered his involvement with the YOT.

He's helped me throughout school. He's helped me try. He's helping me now trying to get into college, trying to get me an apprenticeship. Anything I need to speak to him about. I can phone him up. I can tell him anything, anything. I just feel safe when I can tell someone something.

Steve told me that he knew Leon had been involved in some serious violent incidents in the past and was still using (and possibly dealing in) Class A drugs. However, it became clear to me from comparing their accounts that Leon was keeping some of his violence and criminal activity from Steve. When Leon did disclose criminal activity, Steve seemed reluctant to confront Leon with the impact on the victims. They had never discussed what made Leon "switch". Over time Leon became more self-assured but also seemed more guarded with me too. He made no reference to his drug use or ongoing involvement in violence in my final interview.

In that interview, Leon did tell me that he felt his relationship with Steve had benefitted him, but he remained unclear as to how. Neither he nor Steve could explicitly articulate the process. For his part, Steve admitted that he had started to feel unable to make any impact as Leon was no longer being as open with him as he had been in the past. It remained difficult to read how Steve was influencing Leon and how permanent Leon's desistance would prove to be. Steve seemed worried that he might be construed as an ineffective youth worker. He cited the fact that he had not been able to see the impact his youth

workers had on him until he was much older. We agreed we would need to follow Leon as he matured to fully understand the consequences of their relationship beyond its termination. For Steve, the process of engaging in the research appeared to be somewhat revelatory and highlighted demons relating to “old squaddie Steve” he had still to exorcise. He suspected some fault lines in his own practice had been laid bare but felt this did not invalidate the measure of success he had achieved in building a strong, trustful relationship with Leon.

A psychosocial analysis

Understanding Leon

Leon’s distressing story of family breakdown and drift into crime serves as a stark illustration of the psychic harm caused by fractured relationships with parental figures and socially stigmatising processes like racism and labelling. Leon’s abandonment by his mother had led to a loss of attachment and respect in that key formative relationship. The problematic relationship with his mother’s male partner had also damaged his bond with his mum and meant he had transferred his attachment to his grandmother. It is possible that this acute sense of rejection still coloured his relationships with the adult women he encountered later in his teenage years, such as the female YOT worker. The injurious stigmatising effect of the incident at the bus depot and the resultant label as violent offender, reinforced through demonising discourses in the media, seemed to have significantly changed the course of Leon’s life. His ongoing tendency to “switch” in the face of provocation could be read as being borne out of a defensive desire to mask his vulnerability with a determination to ‘tough it out’ in the face of attack.

He was neutralising his violence through a range of other denials, such as an appeal to higher loyalties - the defence of his friends or his mother’s name for example. Bearing in mind his conflicted feelings towards his mother, it is possible his violent outbursts when provoked in this way were serving to project these troubling feelings and ambivalence outwards. This use of projective mechanisms was evident also in his description of his relationship with his friend. His efforts to control his friend’s temper placed his own

frightening lack of self-control into an external object where it could be more readily managed and then identified with. This ability to calm his friend down was all part of his investment in an evolving desistance narrative.

Leon was employing a range of neutralisation techniques (Sykes and Matza, 1957) to excuse a number of morally questionable behaviours, such as using a Taser gun, a violent assault on a member of the public and using a stolen mobile phone. He seemed to be denying any injury to his victims and obscuring his own agency in order to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). He may have been anxious about having to describe his violent actions to me – an intersubjective dynamic that may well have manifested in his relationship with Steve too. He seemed to be forgetting (intentionally?) his motivations and the intent and intensity of what he had done (Redl and Wineman, 1962). It is not clear to what extent this neutralization was serving to support or impede his desistance. He seemed neither to accept responsibility for these acts nor be willing to consider that they were wrong. His narrative of desistance (“I’ve changed a lot”) did not seem to be accompanied by any real recognition of the harm he had inflicted on his victims. Just as the cognitive based programmes he had been offered by the female YOT worker focused on his faulty reasoning that had misfired, so his positive relationship with Steve seemed not to have materialised any real determination to acknowledge the harm he was inflicting on his victims.

Understanding Steve

For Steve, the comradeship he found in the army and then exposure to the vulnerability of new recruits probably reminiscent of his own, seemed to lie at the root of his desire to “give something back” to young men like him as a youth worker. Steve believed his own male youth workers had been central to his life trajectory in terms of staving off some of the worst excesses of his socially deprived childhood. These male workers had provided him with positive male figures with whom he could identify at a time when, following rejection at the hands of his mother and brutal violence from his father, he was on the verge of drifting into serious criminality. Steve’s academic success in Higher Education and then final move into youth work was providing him with a powerful redemptive script with

which to make sense of his own life. Becoming a youth worker had given him a route through the social barriers which confronted him as a white working-class male leaving the army with few other opportunities for employment. For Steve, the social mobility provided by his new professional identity seemed to be integral to his permanent desistance, albeit partly established via a splitting off of his former identity as a “one-day millionaire” or “squaddie”. He was now determined to offer the positive “manly” and “big brother” figure to Leon that the youth workers had offered him in his own life. In the face of some severe violence in the community in which he continued to work, Steve’s ability to tolerate danger and remain “un-phased” by violent confrontation seemed to furnish him with considerable leverage with young men such as Leon.

However, the trauma of his time in the army was creating some difficulties for Steve. The long silences and repetitive non-verbal communication patterns he involuntarily presented during interviews (such as within his harrowing accounts of his friend’s suicide and armed combat) are suggestive of the raw feelings being kept at bay. His training in the army had taught him to respond unthinkingly to orders and to repress feelings of anxiety, rejection, fear and vulnerability or displace them onto others through the violence of combat. This approach to managing anxiety found a ready rationale within militarized discourses of masculinity characterised by respect for hierarchy and repression of emotion. Now ensconced in civilian life, some guilt and anxiety surrounding his former self and tendency to “switch” still bothered him. Steve’s nonchalance and use of humour and understatement when describing his own experiences of poverty and violence seemed to be his way of keeping painful memories palatable. This repressive stiff upper lip may have had roots too in his relationship with a father who sought to physically beat out signs of emotional vulnerability in his son. Education and finding a new sense of meaning through his career had provided Steve a means of working through his self-doubts, guided by male figures of authority he could respect such as male lecturers who showed him the acceptance he had lacked as a child and who respected him as a learner.

Understanding the relationship

Leon and Steve’s story indicates that their relationship had dynamic desistance promoting

features. Despite traversing objective boundaries of social identity such as age and racial difference, Leon and Steve identified strongly with each-other on the basis of other social factors, such as local affiliation, class and gender. This reciprocal identification was cemented psychically through their perceived similarity in familial and social circumstances and shared experiences of growing up. Both Steve and Leon had experienced fractured relationships with primary attachment figures and had lost respect for their mothers when asked to accept a new male figure in the family home. We cannot know the circumstances behind these broken parental relationships, or who Steve and Leon blamed for the breakdown, but it does seem to have coloured their relationships with women as adults. Both had been left feeling abandoned by their parents and then struggled with pervasive labelling at school. The anger this created had left them both with a tendency to “switch”. Unlike Leon though, Steve, once he left the army had seemingly managed to bring this tendency under control. He had also managed to overcome the label of academic underachiever. This was not finally cast off until his graduation from University, a fact that might explain why he felt so committed to helping Leon overcome his experiences of stigma.

The dynamic of reciprocal identification and many of Steve’s professional practices did seem to be enabling Leon to take up the offer of new educational and employment opportunities. Leon felt an empathy emanating from Steve and seemed ready to accept Steve’s informal but resolute efforts to offer practical assistance with the external challenges he faced. Steve’s advice and guidance with job searches was more fruitful than the more formulaic, manualised and de-contextualised interventions made by other professionals. Leon’s constant use of familial language to express his relationship with Steve could be read in tandem with the desire he felt for a “manly figure”. This language is in contrast to his more disdainful dismissal of his female YOT worker. It is likely that Leon’s own problematic relationship with his mother and his mother’s partner was permeating his idealisation of Steve as a “big brother”. In turn, Steve wanted to provide this outlet for Leon - the older male figure as “someone to talk to” that was never available to him growing up, once his idealised older brother left the scene. This reciprocity in the relationship means that Leon responds to Steve’s offer of help and begins to talk to him. He claims he can tell Steve “anything”.

They both seemed to be sharing in a broader masculine discourse of forging ahead with new self-determined relationships in the future, whatever the emotional content of the relationships they were leaving in the past. This formed part of Leon's narrative of desistance, which was permeated with a typical "going straight" discourse that echoed Steve's. But Leon's ongoing criminal and violent acts seemed to have fallen off the agenda. Notwithstanding the fact that Leon's attack on the elderly man in the city centre was triggered by inexcusable racist abuse, Leon and Steve had not discussed how or why this has led to Leon "switching" and so violently attacking a relatively vulnerable older man. Leon's reluctance to acknowledge the impact of his actions on this victim and others could have formed part of Steve's interventions, along with other questions and challenges surrounding Leon's neutralisations. Maybe Leon did not want to tell Steve about his ongoing offending because he was worried that this might disappoint his new "big brother" and lead him to be unfavourably compared to Steve who had managed to "go straight".

Steve had not discussed his own traumatic experiences or previous violent behaviour with Leon. Maybe this was because to do so would require Steve to reflect on his own responsibility for creating innocent victims too (such as the members of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland). It seems they both needed to neutralise their actions. This might well have been helping Steve sustain his own desistance journey by keeping his tendency to "switch" at bay and his sense of a good self intact. Meanwhile Leon's tendency to "switch" into violence remained unchallenged, and the unconscious dynamics of his "anger issues" were left unexplored. Steve and Leon's memories of past misdemeanours were being invested into subject positions still imbued with masculine notions of emotional toughness – the "home-grown youth worker" and the reforming "on-road" gangster. These seemed to be interacting in such a way as to keep issues of how as men they might share their feelings of vulnerability and tendency to violence off of their agenda.

Summary

This case shows how male youth workers like Steve with psychic wounds still unresolved (in Steve's case borne out of familial rejection and trauma in the military) might seek to provide a source of identification to younger men. It also illustrates how such workers can

come to strongly reciprocate that identification with young men too. It illuminates how desistance promoting ingredients of these kind of professional relationships can be imbricated with gendered undertones and criminogenic forces. The alignment of outlook and experiences between male workers and young men can cement a working alliance while at the same time leave some defences against anxiety and gendered assumptions unspoken. These psychological defences of, for example denial of one's own guilt and pain (I killed and hurt others; I was once scared and vulnerable) fuse with social discourses (men must defend themselves; boys must not cry or ask for help). This can then lead to neutralisations involving other denials, such as that of injury caused to others, going unchallenged. These defences, if left outside of reflexive awareness and beyond the pale of everyday discussion, may ultimately leave both parties unchanged in key ways. This can hinder the young person's development towards desistance.

This case also aptly illustrates how an individualised cocktail of inter-subjective forces can only be observed with close attention to the biographical details of both parties. These details form the emotional subtext to the subject positions held within that relationship. Enhancing professional practice through this shadowy mire is complex. A compelling case emerges for reemphasising the need to surface such latent and tacit processes in order to maximise their desistance promoting potential further. To do so requires making the time and space for workers to reflect. Such opportunities are seldom created due to the institutional constraints in both the youth work and youth justice fields.

Leon's (possibly gendered) disparaging appraisal of the comparatively, cognitive and one-dimensional approach of his YOT worker and idealisation of the more organic relationship with Steve should in no way be taken as universal features or typical of all workers in these two fields. Practice that builds trust between worker and young person can be present (or not) in both professional contexts and working alliances can form across age, gender, class and racial divides. However, the approaches adopted by youth workers and youth justice workers are likely to be shaped by dominant organisational understandings of best practice, policy, training and professional supervision in those fields. I explore this further in chapter seven. Before that though, we need to consider in depth how the wounded healer worker subjectivity that Steve displays is mediated through youth work professional

development regimes and how this feeds into intersubjective professional relationships and desistance pathways. This also requires a deep interpretive focus, a task to which I now turn in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Mark

“I can look after myself”: Exploring desistance pathways, professional identity formation and the youth worker as a ‘too-wounded’ fractured reflexive.

Introduction

This chapter explores how desistance processes and professional identity formation interweave through the story of white male youth work student, Mark. It follows Mark as he attempts to leave his violent past as a football hooligan behind him and construct a professional, pro-social identity as a youth worker. First, I outline some conceptual tools: including psychosocial explanations of masculine expressive violence, football hooliganism and desistance; the Jungian idea of the wounded healer; and how late modern societies place demands for reflexivity on subjects. I show how moving into the world of professional youth worker demands a reflexivity characterised by an ability to mentalise (Bateman and Fonagy, 2016) in controlled and cognitive, rather than automatic and affective, ways. I suggest that, for wounded healers like Mark the ability to do this and engage in internal conversations (Archer, 2012) can be fractured by their biographical experiences .

Then, a detailed pen portrait of Mark describes traumatic family conflict during his childhood; humiliation and pervasive negative labelling at school, and a long period as an active member of a football hooligan firm. It then charts his progress along a desistance pathway towards desistance marked by sudden realisations or epiphanies and his struggles to avoid relapse. His motivation to reform was driven by a strong emotional investment in an increasingly important personal relationship with a female partner. The portrait forms part of a broader, longitudinal case study that follows Mark for three years as he moves, haltingly, through a youth work training course before emerging as a qualified youth worker seeking employment.

His story serves to illustrate a number of features of masculine violence, desistance pathways and professional identity formation that have been established within existing literature. Taking that literature as a point of departure, a psychosocial reading of Mark’s story is employed to understand the psychic and social forces that both drove his entry into hooliganism and the youth work profession. I show how removing oneself permanently

from violent social milieus can be difficult for men like Mark. A complex, contradictory picture emerges of a boy often left to “look after himself” who then grows into a young man building a reputation of being able to “look after himself” in fights with rival fans. His decision to train as a youth worker presents him with a series of psychological and social obstacles that he has to fight to overcome and he struggles to meet the demands for reflexive awareness that the curriculum places on him.

When he finds himself in a position of “looking after” young men, many of whom he closely identifies with, the ability to build desistance-promoting relationships with them remains elusive. Even though he manages (to some extent) to recalibrate his hooligan personal identity predicated previously on physical fighting prowess, the allure of football violence persists in his psyche, barely concealed. He struggles with the demands for reflexive awareness and mentalising that the course demands. The analysis suggests that for wounded healer youth workers like Mark desistance promoting practice may be hindered as a result of their fractured reflexivity and distortions in their internal conversation. Emotions rooted in their biographical experiences can continue to their colour perception of self and influence their responses to others, especially women, in social interactions. I conclude that in this sense they may be “too wounded” for professional roles such as youth work and that this has implications for how fractured reflexives like Mark might be supported in training and continuing professional development regimes.

Conceptual tools

Psychosocial explanations of violence and football hooliganism

Psychosocial approaches to the explanation of violence (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007; Jones, 2008, 2013) involve integrating insights from psychoanalytically inflected psychology along with social and cultural analyses. Psychosocial theories are particularly apt in this case partly because of the expressive and gendered nature of football-related violence. Following Klein (1946) and object relations theory (Bollas, 1992; Kernberg, 1976) expressive violence can be seen as rooted in an over-utilisation of primitive defence mechanisms such as splitting that function to ward off psychic pain and unbearable states of mind. The marked correlation between football violence and masculinity (practically all perpetrators are male) also becomes more comprehensible when developmental paths are seen

through this theoretical lens and as separated along gendered lines. Accounts of masculine development influenced by feminist readings of Freudian oedipal theory (Chodorow, 1978) suggest that men grow up to worry that weakness, vulnerability or any characteristics that could be labelled as feminine will leave them open to ridicule and abandonment. Men are therefore more likely to create idealised, grandiose selves shaped by identification with hyper-masculine ideals and develop distinctively masculine defences associated with aggression and violence. This possibility is further heightened in cases where boys experience adult carers who might be aggressive or out of control. If this is a feature of childhood experience it can lead to the phenomenon first named by Ferenczi and then Anna Freud as identification with the aggressor. This can involve victims of abuse and violence dissociating from their own feelings of fear and struggling to tolerate differences in others.

By impersonating the aggressor, assuming his attributes or imitating his aggression, the child transforms himself from the person threatened into the person who makes the threat. (Freud, 1993, p. 113).

Approaching the specific exemplar of football-related male violence within society from a psychosocial perspective also offers the opportunity to explore some of its unconscious, emotional drivers. Oakley (2007) argues that football fandom serves to distract the fan from the inner turmoil of (usually) *his* life and is a way of displacing suppressed emotions. He suggests that when experienced collectively in groups these emotions become intensified. The tenaciously held identifications with other men in hooligan groups, the comradeship and close homo-social ties within hooligan “firms”, can be read as a means by which men seek to meet needs for intimacy and belonging.

Late modern conditions

Jones (2012) suggests that, “in the conditions of high modernity, when we are set free of the certainty of bonds of class, religion, community and family solidarity, we are constantly in danger of exposure and isolation” (p249). In these circumstances, he claims, “far greater resources are now required to maintain the narrative of ourselves” (ibid). Harvey and Piotrowska (2013) argue that football fandom serves to concretise and stabilise what they see as dissolving (masculine) identities within conditions of liquid modernity (Baumann,

2000). They speculate that belonging to the unwavering collective identity of a hooligan firm can provide a strong social glue for men many of whom become first desensitised, and then addicted, to violence. The identity provides a sanctuary in what can be an uncertain, chaotic world. Letting go of deeply held loyalties and local affiliations, a prerequisite for entry into a professional occupation such as youth work, presents a considerable psychic and social challenge. This is especially difficult when they are serving to mask hidden fear, vulnerability and trauma.

Desistance theory

This analysis also builds on a number of broad currents within established desistance literature: the first focuses on the determinancy of *social* processes and transitions in adult life (e.g. employment, marriage and personal relationships). These are seen as pivotal in developing the social bonds and social control that then serve to stabilise and sustain new crime-free identities (Sampson and Laub, 2003). The second (Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996) focuses on internal *psychological* processes which re-orientate the offenders' sense of self. These involve offenders reconstructing an internal narrative where past events are reinterpreted to suit the new developing self, sometimes at key turning points. At these moments of epiphany offenders often try to knife off past misdemeanours; that is, sever themselves from harmful environments, undesirable companions or even the past itself.

Giordano et al (2002) and others (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009) have thoroughly charted the *cognitive* nature of these processes inherent in the desistance process. Others, such as Maruna et al (2004) draw on symbolic interactionist theories of identity and labelling (Lemert, 1948; Becker, 1963) to capture the intersubjective processes that underlie desistance. Maruna revives Cooley's concepts of the looking glass self (Gecas and Schwalbe, 1983) and Trice and Roman's work (1970) to claim that

desistance may be best facilitated when the desisting person's change in behaviour is recognised by others and reflected back to him in a de-labelling process (Maruna et al, 2004).

The role of such social recognition within desistance is given a psychoanalytic twist by Gadd, whose work suggests that the idea of societal on-looker within the looking-glass-self metaphor can be supplemented with an appreciation of unconscious psychodynamics. He

suggests “psychic change can come about despite social continuity within offenders’ lives” and that desistance involves offenders “reclaiming parts of themselves that are projected on to victims” (Gadd, 2006, p184). Drawing on Benjamin (2013) he outlines how partners or significant others conferring their recognition on an offender, that is signifying their “acceptance” can lead to a “painful, not necessarily unidirectional” process of self-transformation.

The wounded healer

Recently criminologists have explored how ex-offenders’ gravitation towards roles such as youth work can be understood in part through Jung’s (1951) concept of the “wounded healer” (Arrigo and Takahashi, 2006; Maruna, 2001). This describes a subject position whereby individuals feel compelled to heal others as way of healing themselves. LeBel, Ritchie and Maruna (2015) revive the concept, opening up possibilities of considering the emotional and existential aspects of desistance and how these relate to the career choices of offenders. This incorporates Erik Erikson’s (1959) use of the notion of generativity (a desire to contribute to society and benefit future generations). This desire has been shown to be a key feature within the desistance of offenders. It is closely related to needs for meaning, redemption and their aspirations to redeem their past misdemeanours. In some cases, this can take the form of a desire to develop viable professional identities within fields where their desire to help others in whom they see parts of themselves (i.e. identify with) can be fulfilled. In the case of youth work this inevitably exposes students and workers to young people whose own identity construction may also be in flux. This brings the business of distinguishing permanent desistance from lulls in offending (primary and secondary deviance) into sharp focus. Aresti et al (2010) highlight the need to further examine how offenders “negotiate and understand their ex-offender status in terms of its contradictory nature” especially with respect to re-entry into employment. They suggest that,

Specific attention should be directed to the reformed offender’s strategic use of past self-narratives for purposes of professional and public engagement...and the implications this has for his sense of self (p188).

Fractured reflexivity

The social theorist Mary Archer describes how under the conditions of high modernity (highlighted by Jones above) individuals are now increasingly required to engage in “internal conversations” and that this holds the key to their personal agency in the face of structural determinants. She identifies reflexivity, “the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people to consider themselves in relation to their (social) context and vice versa” (2007, p4) as the means by which people mediate agency and structure in their lives. She classifies people for whom this ability to be reflexive has been impeded as a result of traumatic and fractured personal biographies as *fractured reflexives*. She argues these people become fixated on internal dialogues that emphasise and exaggerate their own lack of self-worth, so disabling the effective use of reflexive knowledge. The more they think and talk to themselves, the more they get emotionally distressed and cognitively disorientated. Their internal deliberations do not allow them to deal successfully with their situations and they become passive agents who are at the mercy of their social environment. These fractured or incoherent subjectivities can only be stabilised in the perceived sense of difference from the other.

Burkitt (2012) argues that reflexivity is “not just rational” but also “relational, dialogical and *emotional*” (my emphasis).

Because dialogical reflexivity is bound up in relation to others and populated by their voices, as well as the voices we identify as our ‘own’, the emotions entangled in those relationships animate, shape and colour the way we reflexively see ourselves and the way we consider ourselves in relation to the social context: indeed, it influences the very way in which we see the social context itself. Our own self-feeling’ is coloured by the emotional stance that others take, and have taken, towards us, especially at key or formative periods of our lives, and something of this stays with us in our reflection on the social world and self. This is bound to influence the way people interpret the situation, monitor their own actions and make choices in social contexts. (Burkitt, 2012, p471).

Mentalisation

Bateman and Fonagy (2016) argue that this capacity to monitor our own actions involves a process they call *mentalisation*. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory they suggest that the development of mentalising ability depends on the quality of the social learning environment, the child's family relationships, and, in particular, his/her early attachments. They argue that our sense of a psychological self develops through our perception of ourselves in another person's mind. As children, we must be able to find an image of ourselves mind in the mind of our caregiver. We can then learn that the mind is not the real world but a version of it. Our ability to mentalise underlies how we regulate emotions, control our impulses, and our experience of self-agency.

Bateman and Fonagy identify dimensions to mentalisation that have relevance to this case: the degree to which mentalising is *controlled*, *automatic*, *cognitive* and *affective*. Controlled mentalisation demands awareness, intention, and effort, whereas automatic does not. Cognitive mentalising involves the ability to name, recognize, and reason about mental states (in both oneself or others), whereas, affective mentalizing involves the ability to understand the feeling of such states (again, in both one-self or others). Difficulties with controlled, cognitive and affective mentalising could be seen as major elements of fractured reflexivity. Fractured reflexives may not be able to reliably access an accurate picture of their own mental experience; to step back and respond flexibly and adaptively to the symbolic, meaningful qualities of other people's behaviour. Instead they may find themselves caught in fixed patterns of attribution, rigid stereotypes of response, and non-symbolic, instrumental uses of affect. They may become dominated by automatic assumptions about other people's internal states and find it challenging to reflect on and moderate these assumptions.

This emotional component of reflexivity, I suggest, has important implications for the youth work community of practice. The profession may attract so-called wounded healers or fractured reflexives because of the opportunity for viable employment and generativity the profession offers. As they enter training workers will be seeking to accomplish an identity which is both psychically acceptable to themselves and socially acceptable to others. How might all this affect the desistance promoting potential of their professional practice? And how should training regimes interact with evolving subjectivities that might be contradictory, inconsistent, ambiguous and contingent?

Mark

When we first met, Mark was beginning a 3-year training course seeking to qualify as a professional youth worker. Mark was white, in his 20's, with short hair, a muscular physique and had tattoos on his arms and legs, mainly depicting his affiliation to the local football team. His face showed signs of wear and tear, which he explained were as result of fights he had been involved in throughout his life, but mainly through his involvement in football hooliganism. Although expressing himself fluently appeared to be a challenge at times, he was an enthusiastic participant in the research, often happy to continue with the interviews for longer and keen to know when the next would be scheduled. His involvement in football hooliganism loomed large throughout the initial interviews and he became most animated when talking about these experiences, often launching into detailed expositions of violent incidents with a degree of nostalgia, mixed with reticence and embarrassment.

Home, school and drift into violence

Mark grew up in a socio-economically deprived, white working-class area of the West Midlands. He came from a "big Irish family" with a history of violence; "fighters" who came from the "rough end of shit". He felt his family's reputation for violence had permanently affected how he was viewed and treated by others in his community. From an early age he felt needed to "grow a bit of a back bone" and become self-sufficient.

I've always looked after myself, like, I was the one who could look after myself.... I worried more about them than I did about me.

He recalled needing to "defend himself" from "hassle" because of his brother, who was 12 years older and involved in a range of illegal drug and gang-related violent activity. He felt his physical similarity to his brother marked him out from his peers, and this along with his family's socio-economic position meant he "got picked on".

I was just different to other kids in my class, sort of thing. I was poorer if you will, just a different mentality of, like, growing up sort of thing.

His childhood memories included this vivid account of "the first time that I knew my family was different".

I can see the light coming through the windows; the door knocking, and my Mum, “What have you done? What have you done”? And my brother sat in the kitchen over the sink, blood coming down here (*pointing to his stomach*). He got stabbed on the way back from school I think.

Witnessing the aftermath of his brother being stabbed seemed to have been the beginning of his psychologically desensitisation to violence. “Seeing people hurt” and violence became “normality” for Mark. This was exacerbated by endemic conflict between his brother and father, which on occasion escalated into serious physical assaults where his dad would just “hold his brother down”. These events had left a “big scar” on Mark and left the family fractured too. He acknowledged that this was not something that could be considered “normal”, and he “envied” what he saw as other families’ more routine lives.

At school, Mark, who like his brother suffered with dyslexia that was undiagnosed, found the school work difficult. He felt he was ignored and discarded by teachers. He was told he “wasn’t good at anything” and that there was “no hope” for him, despite not being (in his view) a “trouble-maker”. He was labelled the “dumb kid” by teachers and became the victim of bullying from other children, until he finally lashed out, hitting someone in the playground. His frustration, lack of self-esteem and sense of impotency starkly contrasted to his discovery of potency when involved in fights.

In everything else in my life at that time, everything was confusing. It was just, it was just.... I couldn’t do it sort of thing. The only thing I probably could do was draw. But fighting was simple. I knew what I had to do. There was no like, ‘oh you have to read up on it’ sort of thing. That person is put in front of me, all I have to do is beat him. And that felt good, it felt good to be good at, like, something, sort of thing, and that’s probably what kicked off my liking for it.

Mark remembered feeling that his actions at the time were not “that wrong”, just “self-defence really”. For Mark, instilling fear in others as result of his fighting prowess became a means of extracting revenge against his contemporaries and gave him a “buzz”.

PH: ...the fear that you see in other children at that point...

Mark: ...was probably the fear they saw in me when I was writing, so it was nice to give them something back.

Mark was expelled from school and sent to an alternative education “unit”. By this time, one of his sisters had fallen pregnant and her relationship with the father of the child had turned violent too. Mark’s father then became seriously ill, as did another sister; her spine was “crumbling” leaving her suffering with severe disability. Mark “didn’t want to put pressure” on his mother because it “wasn’t her fault”. He began to resent his brothers and sisters for creating problems for his parents to deal with. He felt as if he “wasn’t top of the list at the time”. His brother, now heavily involved in drug-related crime, stabbed someone during an argument over drugs and went “on the run”, seeking to evade arrest. Despite Mark’s efforts to intervene, his brother was caught and imprisoned. Mark recalled how distressing this was for his mother.

I remember seeing my Mum's face when that actually happened. It was the most painful thing I've ever experienced in my life.

Mark described these teenage years as a time when he continued to be largely self-sufficient, mainly due to his father’s illness and the difficulties his mother was facing trying to support the family.

I've always looked after myself, like. I was always the one who could look after myself. I was always the one who had to do things for himself because while it wasn't my parents fault, they had to concentrate on other things.

Throughout the interview he was keen to stress how law-abiding, “Catholic”, “loving” and “good” his parents were and how he could not “blame it on them”.

My Dad never encouraged it, {*violence*} he only encouraged it to defend yourself. My Mum and Dad are good people. They didn't encourage any of this.

Often in the interview Mark would, without signalling a change in direction, quickly move to enthusiastically describing his involvement in football violence, such as this - his initial initiation and entry into the hooligan “scene” at the age of 18 and his acceptance by what

he called the “big boys”.

I remember the game clearly. I remember it was a real intense atmosphere. I'd never experienced it before. But after the game, there was this cockney bloke in the street and he was mouthing off saying, "oh you Brummie cunts, you're all a bunch of Brummie cunts", and I saw some guy just walk up to him and hit him and then everybody started jumping on him, shouting "Zulu, Zulu, Zulu, and my cousin said "go on do it now, go on do it now". It was just one of those things you'd see in a film, "go on just do it now". So I ran up and kicked him.

This was the beginning of a decision to adopt and then embrace a new “hooligan” identity. Membership of the “firm” came with certain gendered expectations.

If I'm going to hang around with these people, I don't want to be the weakness in this group either, so you have to start acting like you're a man. Like, what you do in this situation? Don't show no weakness.

He drifted into petty crime, selling stolen clothes. Wanting to “get in” with the “big boys” he gradually became a more active member in the hooligan gang, becoming closely acquainted with some of the older men.

It gave me a protection, gave me a form of family, it was an extension of my family, because these people used to look out for me.

He cited some occasions when he had engaged in unprovoked attacks against people who were clearly not interested in hooliganism, simply supporters from a rival club.

We saw some Villa fans outside a pub, like, and we just battered the shit out of them, just literally battered them. At the time, you are just thinking, yes, what a fucking buzz like. But afterwards, like, you just think, like, when I'm sitting there drinking and I'm watching a game, not causing any trouble, they weren't dressed in gear, we just knew it was lads.

Despite this admission, he sought to distinguish himself from “scum bags” who attacked non-hooligan fans claiming that he was “not like that”. He had little respect for other fans who he felt sought to behave as if they were “big boys” but had not proved their

credentials. He felt he had “earned his status”. He attributed his violent behaviour to a desire to assert his masculinity.

It was pure...it was manliness, it made me feel good about myself if I’m honest with you. You have to start acting like you’re a man like.

Epiphanies and desistance

Mark continued to sustain serious injuries fights with rival firms and was hospitalised on several occasions, including once when he was stabbed. He felt his Mum was beginning to “look” at him in a certain way. All the other children in the family had begun to “settle down” and he felt he was “the shit part of the family”. Then Mark’s grandmother died and this seemed to trigger the first of several sudden “overnight” realisations.

You have a moment of reflection and I was, what the fuck am I doing?

Soon after, he met his girlfriend (Sarah) who Mark said came from a “good family” and a “peachy background”.

That’s where my life started to change a bit. At the back of my head I knew that I had something to lose a bit. I think my life was set in motion from that point.

He was attracted to Sarah’s willingness to challenge him and make him “work for it”. He felt that she “saw through him”; more as “her future husband and bearer of her kids” and he started to “open up more” and “rely” on her. Sarah’s family also warmed to him.

It’s kind of nice, ‘cos they don’t see me. They don’t see that side of me, and expect me how to act, they...I can act the way I want to act sort of thing.

However, despite this opportunity to reinvent himself, when Sarah’s ex-boyfriend challenged him to a fight over her, Mark confronted him.

I went around to his house and said like, ‘come on then, if you want some, come and do it then, don’t start mouthing off behind my back like you’re a big boy or something’.

He arranged some of his hooligan friends to threaten her ex-boyfriend. He also admitted

lying to Sarah for some time with regard to his ongoing involvement in violence. After another serious fight he was left with injuries that required an emergency operation. Mark recalled Sarah's arrival at the hospital, when she "burst into tears".

They let her in because she was so distraught, but when I woke up, she said to me, "if you want to stay with me, you're going to have to change and get out of this sort of thing and change your life". Ever since that point, I felt like I've started to get my life together.

When asked to describe how he felt at that moment, Mark drew parallels with previous traumatic episodes in his life.

I was shocked at first because the only person who ever showed me that much affection was my Mum; who worried about me to that extent. It was the first time I felt that since seeing my Mum cry. That pain. I seen my girlfriend cry. Not wanting to see the person you love cry. I think that's one of the worst pain in the world for me. The worst thing in my life, or the most scars on my memory was when my brother went to jail and seeing my Mum cry, that was one of the worst.

Sarah began to police his involvement in hooliganism; attending games with him, especially those at which there was a greater chance of trouble. When trouble flared at on match when she was with him, Mark felt compelled to protect her from danger.

I think that was another moment of clarity. I just saw her face sort of thing. I had to save her, not save her sort of thing, but, like, I had to protect her.

Mark finally resolved to remove himself from the hooligan "firm". However, this proved more of a challenge than he anticipated, because he was so accustomed to having a "reputation". Letting this go made him feel "massively vulnerable" and that people could "take advantage" of him. "Not having that protection anymore" felt like "the worst thing in the world". He continued to attend matches but "didn't get involved". He still "turned up in the gear" and "the place where everyone was meeting" but started putting in what he called "blockers" – people who would not get involved in violence and therefore might prevent him from doing so too. He said it "felt good" not to "feel angry" and he began to

take on the role of mediator, often dissipating violence amongst younger peers, where in the past he would have been an instigator. On one occasion he broke up a fight involving a younger man and his manager where he worked. Mark took pride and satisfaction from this, claiming he had “stopped him maybe even wrecking his future”. But he still faced difficulties overcoming how he was perceived by some of his old acquaintances who were not supportive of his decision to leave. They saw this as a sign of weakness that meant they could “hassle” him. During this time Mark was also forced into taking full responsibility for the family home. This phase of “being a housewife” further threatened his sense of masculinity, especially when the tasks (washing and cleaning, etc.) involved were stereotypically gendered.

Youth work training

Encouraged by Sarah who was studying Social Work, Mark decided he would apply for a place at University to study Youth and Community Work. It was at this point that we first met. In his first interview Mark said he had been out of football violence for about a year. He said he felt “more than happy” and that Sarah inspired him “to better than I am... to become what I can become”. He was looking forward to making his family proud through succeeding at University and already enjoying affirmation from family members, all of which seemed to strengthening his resolve to alter his life trajectory.

I've never seen my Mum really proud and telling my cousin and my aunties my uncles and stuff like that and telling them that I'm going to Uni and the family felt proud of me, my cousins and everything. And everyone is going, “oh, you're going to Uni, fair play, you're doing really well, you're getting your life together”. From that point on, I know I've something to fight for, I've got one shot at life, this is my one shot now, I'm going to go for it.

However, Mark confessed that he still missed the excitement of violence and felt he should be given help with what he saw as an “addiction”.

They have help for alcoholics and gambling addictions but they don't have help for us, we're just jobs. If I'm honest with you I do like violence. I do like it, and I know why I like it.

Mark struggled academically throughout his course and relied heavily on personal support from male tutors, often openly expressing crises of confidence. His relationships with other students and especially female students and lecturers became strained on occasions where his identity or outlook was challenged. He struggled to accept any notion that he might need to reflect on how he was embodying his white, working class, male identity. As he reflected in discussions on his early experiences of poverty, deprivation and abuse, he found it difficult to recognise that his gendered and racialized identity – as a young white man - afforded him any degree of power, choosing instead to focus on what he felt was his disadvantaged class position. When challenged by female members of staff or female students he would often seek counsel with male lecturers.

For his first fieldwork practice experience he was placed in an alternative education unit where he felt he could closely identify with the pupils, all of whom (like him) had been excluded from mainstream provision. He found it difficult to develop meaningful relationships with the mainly young men in the unit. In his second interview (at the end of his first year) he confessed to feeling deeply conflicted. He struggled to express why.

I just am, like...like... I'm still torn between two realities in, in a massive...like... I'm not still fully accepting of Uni, sort of thing, and, and I'm still not, like, I still don't feel comfortable in this environment at all. But yet I'm starting to not feel comfortable in the other environment. So it's sort of like... And I don't... I'm just at... I'm just like... I'm fighting an internal battle, trust me. I'm just trying to feel like... trying to find a place.

This 'fight' was testing his psychological stamina and resolve.

'Cause it's a constant challenge, coming here, isn't it? It's constant, like, it's a constant... It's, even though I'm not fighting physically, I'm in a constant fight coming here. So, it's sort of like, it's sort of tiring after a bit, like.

He felt discernibly different to his younger, mainly female, student peers, especially in terms of his worldview. He envied their “intelligence” and “rosy” vantage point but felt they lacked sufficient experience of the environments they were to work in. Simply being in the classroom became a source of deep anxiety.

How can I have a situation where I’m not scared to stand in a room with twenty people who want to beat me up but I’m scared sitting in a classroom? I’ll lose sleep over that, but if I’ve got people after me that’s the, sort of, normal way of existence.

Despite managing to secure some good grades he still “despised” academic work. In a later interview (now in his final year) he had come to the conclusion that his treatment in school amounted to “abuse”. In his final year he was placed in a local community football project, at his own request. Although he could quickly build rapport with the young men at the project, his relationships with them remained fairly superficial. This exchange from another interview shows how he struggled to make sense of how he felt “weird” at that time.

Mark: It's just... I don't feel at ease. So when I get there, it's sort of like, I can deal with them. That's why I can speak to them, I think, like, sort of thing. I can, I get quite a good relationship with them quite fast, sort of thing, like. Because I just engage on a normal level. But...

PH: You said, you said it feels weird, but it also feels normal. So it's obviously both?

Mark: Yeah. Again, I told you I'm in constant conflict in my life, sort of thing.

PH: Yeah, that's okay. But what's weird about it, you know?

Mark: What's weird about it? What's weird about it is obviously the situation I'm in. Because theirs is worse than mine, sort of thing, like. I mean, I go on about my stuff, which is sort of like, which is... But then, like, I get to go home to a nice sort of like, you know... I get to go... My mum and dad are at the house. Like I said, I have a good relationship. I get to go home to mum and dad. I get to go home to a girlfriend. I don't have that bad a life, sort of thing, like. So, but then... like... but then... but then I have... like...you know, there's stuff in my past which people wouldn't ever sort of do. And it's just like... And it's just... How can I... I can't... I can't describe it.

Other extracts from his reflective writing show how his ambivalent emotions meant he found the transition to professional status problematic. When he witnessed some malpractice in a work placement he found it difficult to shift his worldview despite engaging in considerable internal deliberation. He saw it as an “grassing” and an “act of treason” and initially defaulted to his “natural reaction” which was to “shut down”. With support, he eventually decided to tell his manager, but his reflection shows how he struggled to make sense of this at the time.

I thought to myself why am I like this? I always lose the point, maybe because I am so insecure about being seen with weakness. And now the thought of somebody finding out that I had informed on them and the label that would give me in the end. All I could think is it could be something left over from my childhood.

Approaching qualification, he felt his actions were still being affected by what other people thought of him, “rather than what they actually would think about me”. His final reflections show him determinedly articulating an account of his struggle to a point where he now felt he could offer something to young people at the community football project as a “role model”. This seemed to offer the promise of meaning and purpose in his life going forward.

I feel that reflections have helped me become a more positive role model and how my actions can affect the young people I work with. I've learnt to understand the benefits of a role model for these young people. I realise that the young people I work with have a lack of role models in their life and the importance of coming to a centre like the ***** foundation which has good role models from many different backgrounds. Some that are academically gifted ones or ones who come from disrupted backgrounds. I have realised it's about achieving something and in showing young people it's not where you come from it's where you finish. For me through reflection I realise that when I had nobody I fell into the wrong crowd of people that influenced me to act the way I did and I've demonstrated through reflecting in action at placement how my actions towards young people changed to be more positive and more productive.

This self-portrait of a reformed character, submitted for his final formal assessment, contradicted with his testimony from a final interview where Mark admitted he felt he was

only “starting to fight the stuff from my past now” and that this was “getting messy”. He still felt more “at ease” with his former identity and “normal” environments still felt “weird”. Significantly he admitted “if something went wrong” he could still go “off the rails” and that he was still “stuck massively in between”.

The question I ask myself is: if it was made legal, would I still do it? I’ve gotta be honest with you. I don’t know if I wouldn’t still be doing it if it wasn’t, you know, if it was legal sort of thing.

Two months after his graduation I contacted Mark by SMS to check on his progress with finding a job. He said he wanted to work with young people in a job with “links to sports in some way”. He secured an interview at a local football club as an education development officer with a local football club but had not been successful. The club had offered him a job in another area. His SMS read that it, “wasn’t for me to be honest. It’s a bit of a struggle”.

A psychosocial analysis

Understanding Mark

A number of apparent contradictions can be observed throughout Mark’s vivid depiction of his time growing up and his time at University. The different subject positions that he adopts and the emotional dynamics that run through his narrative amount to more than a story of mere desensitisation and addiction to violence. His story suggests that a childhood of enforced self-sufficiency (“looking after himself”) morphed first into a defensive formation as the hard man hooligan (“I can look after myself”) and then finally into the role model male youth worker who could look after young people. His world view seems to have begun as deeply gendered and paternalistic, and even by the end of his training he was still constructing a man’s world of his own making. His accounts of all his significant relationships were structured around a psychic split (Klein, 1946), manifested as a beauty and the beast type narrative that either idolised or demonised significant others along conventionally gendered lines. He described Sarah as the “peachy” girl and himself as the rough and ready man. His sister was depicted as “crumbling” with a spinal disability, while his brother was the black sheep of the family who he blamed for much of family conflict,

despite seeing him experience alarming physical abuse at the hands of his father. Mark did not understand his brother's pain and eventually broke off all contact with him entirely. He idolised his mother as an angelic bit part player in the traumatic drama of his childhood, helpless and in need of constant protection. By way of contrast, he berated his formidable, violent, but increasingly vulnerable father.

Understanding Mark's hooliganism

In order to ward off feelings of powerlessness Mark seems to have dissociated from any sense of victimhood and instead identified with the male aggressor (Freud, 1993) within his father. He becomes like him, drifting into crime and recreational expressive violence as a member of a hooligan firm. Choosing football violence as his modus operandi meant he could adopt a brand of violence with a more psychologically palatable code than the domestic variety he had witnessed at home. His account of entry into hooliganism includes an element of him first loitering on the fringes of a hyper-masculine enclave, wanting to be in with the "big boys", needing to "step up". He has to repress his vulnerability to be accepted. It is at least possible that Mark's eventual membership of a hooligan group may have facilitated a sub-conscious desire to express affinity with other men, allowing him to be together with men within an environment of collective warmth but one still laced with hostility and aggression (Oakley, 2007). Mark's possessive psychic identification with his local club, other fans, the players, and the excitement of violence facilitates his escape from the both mundane and traumatic nature of his social world (Harvey and Pioetrowska, 2013). The aggression and unprovoked, bloody random violence for which he is responsible, seems to have been catalysed and then fuelled by deep inner insecurities generated in humiliating experiences at home and school. Educationally challenged and economically disadvantaged, Mark comes to experience rival fans as arrogant and cocky. His aggression seems to have been driven by complex and contradictory emotions which were then discharged in forms of violence sanctioned by the hyper masculine enclave to which claimed allegiance (Chodorow, 1978). Driven by envy of the status of the "big boys" and the "buzz" that fighting brings him, he simultaneously adopts principled positions that can use to excuse his actions, such as not targeting

non-hooligans. But he conspicuously fails to adhere to his own code. This contradictory behaviour could indicate that he was engaged in an internal struggle to ward off feelings of fear and vulnerability generated within his family, riven as it was with trauma, conflict and danger. This was exacerbated by the shame, emasculation, powerlessness and humiliation he must have felt as a result of the bullying and negative labelling he suffered in school.

Understanding Mark's desistance

Events in Mark's social world such as his father's and sister's illness seem to have triggered some psychic introspection. The death of his grandmother, to whom he seems to have been close and may have provided much needed unconditional love, produced the impetus for his first epiphany. The social stigma attached to his violent hooligan activity was probably also leading to some self-doubt. Then, noticing women's pain (etched on the *faces* of his mother and girlfriend) again stops him in his tracks. It took an ultimatum issued by his girlfriend following his hospitalisation for him to begin to take ownership of the fact that he was an important part of their life. This ultimatum eventually begins to drag him away from his addictive attraction to violence and homo-social bonding.

He seemed to welcome Sarah "seeing through him"; a vital psychic recognition (Benjamin, 1990) from a significant female other which may have met an unconscious need for someone to see his vulnerability, if only in snapshot. However, he responds to this recognition by creating "two Marks"; it is some time before he really begins to let himself be fully known or open to her. His strategy to permanently desist and live without the allure of violence involved removing himself from his male hooligan peers and the offending opportunities associated with them. Surrounding himself with "blockers" is an example of strategies offenders use for the psychic knifing off of past misdemeanours (Maruna and Roy, 2007). For Mark this proved to be a painful task but one in which he took some pride. Once partially removed from the morally stigmatising hooligan milieu, Mark chose to adopt another, still masculinised persona, that of the "bigger man"- the peacemaker trying to dissipate conflict. This internal shift in his personal identity was solidified by the social

bonds engendered by his choice to go to University and the different world views this exposed him to.

Understanding Mark as a trainee youth worker

However, entering the restraining environment of a professional training course also brought new demands. During his training he seemed to oscillate between self-belief and self-doubt. His identity construction, especially surrounding his accomplishment of masculinity, remained precarious. Studentship served to bridge the gap between his two identities and provide a tangible route which allowed Mark to become the man he (and Sarah) wanted him to become. His struggles to express how he felt during his training (“weird” “massively stuck in between”) and his descriptions of his fellow, mainly female, students as hopelessly “naïve” suggests a degree of blurring of his thought processes. The partial surfacing of previously unacknowledged emotion seemed to be fracturing his reflexive capacities (Archer, 2007) causing him to mentalise in an automatic, rather than more controlled manner. His halting and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to describe his relationships with young men on the community football project he was placed in suggests his difficulties managing his own affect was hampering his more cognitive mentalising abilities. Without ongoing support and supervision this was likely to continue to limit the desistance promoting potential of his practice.

A career in youth work offered Mark the opportunity for material change in his social circumstances; a route to employment and active citizenship and a way to meet his responsibilities for his family. The potential for paid employment as a sports-based youth worker provided him with a means to de-label (Maruna and Roy, 2004) and a powerful generative script (Erikson, 1951), whilst remaining attached to his love object (football). However, working effectively required him to be able to build relationships with young men that offered them more than mutual or reciprocal identification. Engaging with vulnerable young men, some of whom may have suffered similar abuse the pain of loss, required something more than simply reproducing the same, culturally fixed dynamics.

Mark's vivid recall of the violence he witnessed and perpetrated suggest an ongoing psychic investment in the highly gendered and social act of organised, collaborative peer-group violence. The near-fictionalised accounts in which he revisited the scenes of violence, suffused with a palpable nostalgia, indicates his new pro-social professional identity was brittle. His eventual admittance that should hooliganism be legal he could not be sure that he would not still be involved suggests that he was wary of his past. Entering a professional environment where job opportunities were scarce meant that Mark's efforts to consolidate his identity, despite the social recognition offered by graduation, could still be frustrated by events outside of his control. His efforts to reconstruct a new identity and maintain his desistance seemed to remain heavily reliant on his "peachy" female partner, which raises the question of the sustainability of that support should a less idealised, more realistic picture of her emerge. A desire to protect this relationship seemed to be driving his self-enforced isolation from his violent male peer group. His need to stay away from former male friends, associates and rivals shows how he was still struggling psychically with the loss of excitement, sociability, masculine status, loyalty and sheer fun that gendered violence offered. The prospect of him entering into professional relationships with young men who, like him, may well be struggling with social and emotional deprivation throws up real concerns over the stored-up troubles in his inner world. Should the social and relational factors in his life change, how susceptible would Mark be to a return to his struggle to manage his emotional conflicts and violent offending? The potential long-term outcomes for Mark, and the young people with whom he engaged seemed most likely to remain, therefore, far from certain.

Summary

Mark's story may well mirror that of many young men who become involved in violence, football related or otherwise. As such this analysis could conceivably shed light on the underlying causes of violence as committed by some young men. It can offer some insights which youth workers and other professionals may find useful as

they seek to understand those with whom they are engaged. His story of movement into the youth work profession also raises some other pertinent questions for the training and continuing professional development of youth workers, currently positioned (somewhat precariously) within the Higher Education sector in the UK. Whilst acknowledging that Mark's may be an idiosyncratic case, it does give some indication of the importance of creating pedagogical spaces where youth workers and students who are receiving formal training can stand back from, and work through, their own biographical experiences. This includes recognising how emotions can interfere with the internal conversations that make up the mentalising ability and reflexivity required to build and maintain relationships with young people involved in violence. Some of these young people will be similarly characterised by fractured reflexivity too and this may be hampering their ability to overcome structural determinants in their lives. If workers are to build young people's agency, professional development spaces need to accommodate routes through which students can grapple with the complex psychic and social complexity that Mark's story illustrates.

If Mark's story is in anyway paradigmatic, it might raise a note of caution around current trends in the recruitment and selection of male youth workers and mentors. Training programmes have traditionally incorporated opportunities for youth workers to engage in practical face to face work, under close observation and supervision for at least three years. The popularity of schemes and programmes that valorise reformed male role models with their own experiences of crime and violence, working closely with young male offenders, seldom involve such demands. That raises the prospect of adult males, some of whom might be characterised as fractured reflexives or wounded healers, intervening in young men's lives without the tools to do so effectively (at best) or worse, simply engraining socially problematic gendered behaviours. I now turn to explore this through an alternative theoretical lens, considering further how broader societal contexts, such as the nature and availability of cultural resources surrounding gender and racial identity construction, feed into intersubjective professional interventions and behaviours.

Chapter 6: Darren and Chris

“Just give up the ball”: Black masculinities in the street social field, recognition and finding a third space in youth work relationships.

Introduction

This chapter further explores how relationships between male youth workers and young men operate to promote desistance; focusing on why they can falter even when some elements of social identity such as race and class appear to be shared. First, I outline some sociological and psychological conceptual tools, one from Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory – street social capital, two from relational psychoanalysis (psychic recognition and intersubjective third space) and one from James Gilligan – unresolved shame as a primary cause of violence. I present two portraits, firstly Darren - a vulnerable, young black man who falls victim to violence to other black young men in his neighbourhood. This is followed by a more detailed portrait of Chris - an older, muscular black male youth worker with a strong local professional reputation for engagement with gangs and with his own history of violent behaviour. The narratives illustrate the convergence and divergence between their personal biographies and how they came to psychically invest in different discourses of locality, race and gender. I follow Chris and Darren’s respective trajectories through childhood, school and then adulthood, and explore the nature of their involvement in crime and violence as victims and perpetrators. The case serves to illustrate the difficulties some young black men face in avoiding the effects of racism, deprivation, and violence in street-social environments in urban communities. A psychosocial analysis of their relationship then shows how they both deployed defensive strategies to mitigate against the shame and vulnerabilities these challenges presented them with and which eventually generated a mutually detrimental silence around masculinity within their relationship.

I argue that in professional relationships such as this, processes of identification, rooted in social and demographic similarity can become emphasised at the expense of a more

pressing need for psychic *recognition* that can tolerate differentiation and separateness. Chris identifies with Darren as a troubled young black man. However, his own investment in a muscular, black, politicised masculinity and need to decontaminate violent and sexually abusive behaviour in his past inhibits him from conceding his own vulnerability and offering the recognition Darren appeared to need. Darren is a young man struggling to live up to a street-styled tough masculinity. I suggest that if Chris had been able to open up an intersubjective third space between himself and Darren – a vantage point from where they could both examine their biographical experiences that have resulted in feelings of shame – Darren’s eventual withdrawal from the relationship and the support it might have provided could have been prevented. Meanwhile, Chris’s go it alone approach to personal betterment and professional practice, heavily reliant on masculine and street capital, ultimately produces a heightened risk of his own descent into professional burn-out. The case concludes that this again highlights the need for the adequate support and supervision for male workers with their own history of offending. I suggest this needs to incorporate the thorough consideration of their personal and professional identity formation, especially the most heavily racialised, gendered and shame related aspects.

Conceptual tools

Bourdieu’s field theory and masculinities

Bourdieu’s spatial metaphor of *field* (1975) allows us to conceive of social actions as taking place within a hierarchical, nested domain with an internal logic; a set of durable dispositions, values and practices, both linguistic and embodied. Within that domain, social actors exist in relation to one another and struggle over particular “profits that are at stake” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p97). The physical and symbolic arena of the street, or the world of white middle class business or politics, can be conceived as semi-autonomous fields that offer actors within them some locally-specific empowering discursive positions. However, it may be that only certain fields are available to certain actors and only some can take positions up within those fields. Other actors within the field may struggle to find ways to structure and make sense of their position within the field.

The concept of street social capital (Sandberg, 2008; Ilan, 2013) captures how profits within the field of the street are desired and attained, as well as the competencies and resources mobilised by actors within youth subcultural environments. It can be understood therefore as, “the resources available to individuals through social networks which allow them to thrive within the street field” (Ilan, 2013, p19). This could be knowledge about, for example, local histories, geographies, and dialects which are valued within groups of socially excluded and marginalised young people, and especially young men. In the hands of a youth practitioner who shares a *social* identity rooted in those localised, racialised and gendered constructions, this knowledge can form part of a streetwise professional identity. Workers who embody this streetwise identity may seek to capitalise on it to engender credibility, acceptance, approval and permission from (and therefore access to) sections of the community who occupy so-called no-go areas (Glynn, 2014).

Part of the trading of street social capital may include competition for masculine capital (De Visser, 2013). Who wins and loses in this competition will be determined by how masculinities are positioned intersectionally (Crenshaw, 1991) in more or less hegemonic, complicit or marginalised forms (Connell, 1995). In the street field, young men with an alternative habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) – a different cognitive and behavioural disposition - must quickly learn to perform like ‘real’ men or develop viable alternatives. As Les Back (2004) argues, alternative positions within the field can be disproportionately limited for young black men, as a dominant perception of them as “undesirable, violent, dangerous and aggressive” (p32) works to further constrain the subject positions that they might adopt to the ‘hard man’ or gangster.

Psychic recognition, third space

Psychic investments in social discursive positions such as street masculinity are mediated through biographical experiences within families and with peers. They are also subject to change through the formation of new relationships, including those young people develop with adult professionals. As we saw in the case of Leon and Steve these relationships can involve *identification* - “those mental processes that involve imagining parts of ourselves to be similar to, or compatible with, qualities we perceive in others” (Gadd, 2006, p182).

Recognition occurs when a subject feels the other as a like subject but with a distinct, separate centre of feeling and perception (Benjamin, 2007). Recognition involves being able to connect to the other's mind while accepting the other's separateness and difference. Benjamin draws an important distinction between this and a relationship in which one person is idealized at the expense of the other. Recognition, like identification is an interaction between subjects that has a reciprocal, mutually influencing quality.

This aspect of relationships and its role in the desistance process has been explored by others such as Gadd (2006) who argues that "recognition plays a critical role in facilitating psychological change" (p197). Desistance, he argues, can hinge on the balance struck between psychic identification and recognition. As individuals encounter and begin to exert influence on each-other that balance can tip either way. The field of relational psychoanalysis has identified that striking the right balance between the two involves the creation of a *third space* (Aron, 2008); a reflexive space in the mind outside a dyadic relationship that creates a vantage point from which both parties can view the self.

Guilt and shame

This third space may also be one where men might consider how unresolved moral emotions (Eisenberg, 2000) such as guilt and shame are driving their behaviour. Jones (2013) suggests a distinction between these two emotions. Whilst guilt "is associated with negative feelings about particular acts that we have carried out" shame "emerges from a negative evaluation of the self" (p117). In his book "Violence: Reflections on a national epidemic" (1997) James Gilligan explores this distinction and how this relates to violent behaviour, using psychoanalytic theory. He argues that violent men may not feel guilty for their actions but they do often feel "acutely ashamed". He suggests, "The purpose of violence is to diminish the intensity of shame and replace it as far as possible with its opposite, pride, thus preventing the individual from being overwhelmed by the feeling of shame" (p111). This threat to the sense of self can lead some men to repress their shame feelings, leading to what Lewis (1987) called *bypassed* shame. This refers to "where shame seems to be clearly present and affecting people's behaviour, but they are not able to talk about and reflect on it" (Jones, 2013, p117). This can be a "powerful trigger to violent

action” (ibid). When men perceive themselves as having no non-violent means of diminishing their feelings of shame (such as through socially rewarded achievement, or high social status) they can become suddenly and seriously violent.

Gadd and Jefferson (2007) cite Scheff (1994) who theorises shame as deeply relational in the sense that it arises when we see ourselves negatively “from the viewpoint of others” (Scheff, 1994, p42). They argue that how shame is processed, denied or displaced relationally needs to be part of an adequately psychosocial explanation of violent behaviour. How might the balance between identification and recognition to create a third space and the prevalence of shame as psychosocially conceptualised operate in relationships between youth workers and young men involved in violence? And how is this all affected by those relationships being built and sustained within social street fields that offer up, but also constrain, discursive masculine identities?

Darren

Darren was a 19-year-old British African Caribbean young man living in the same urban, inner city neighbourhood where Chris, his older black male youth worker, had also grown up. Chris introduced me to him as a young man he had worked with who had managed to steer a trajectory away from violence, unlike most of the other young men he had worked with. Darren was also keen to depict himself as distinct from his peers. He took satisfaction in employing a wide vocabulary, was quietly spoken and slight in stature, all of which gave the impression of a somewhat aloof and intellectual persona.

Childhood and home life

Darren explained he had always lived with his mum, who had instilled a respect for her authority.

I’m from the environment that if my mum tells me to do something, I do it.

Darren made no reference to his father during the interviews. His whole story was pervaded with a continuous struggle to avoid “trouble”. At 11, he had entered a secondary school with a predominantly African Caribbean intake. Fights with other boys triggered by minor disputes would then escalate, especially after school. Darren tried to avoid them but there was a critical mass of young men all competing to be the “alpha male”, encouraging him to get involved. When one such argument became violent, Darren was badly hurt. His mother made the decision to move him to a school in a different neighbourhood with a predominantly Asian intake. In the minority and a target simply for being “different”, Darren remembered his first week as “hell”. The fighting began to extend to young people from rival schools and from different ethnic minority groups.

It was on the way home and I couldn't avoid it. It's not something you could avoid if you were wearing the uniform from your school. You get bullied by wearing the same uniform as other kids that are starting the fights, so you're either in it or you don't catch the bus.

Darren began to feel the need to move in a group, for reasons of safety.

There would be like thirty of us going to anyone point at any one time. Even if you're going home, you'd probably go with someone who lives on your road because it's better than on your own.

Epiphany and recognition

When Darren witnessed another boy being stabbed, he came to the realization that continued association with his peers would more than likely result in him suffering the same fate. In the midst of another subsequent fight soon after where knives were again involved, Darren narrowly avoided being injured himself. However, this time, whilst punching his assailant, he “realised something”.

Shit, if we're in this environment now, what if it's the other way around, I'm the one getting beat? I don't want this to happen to me.

Sustaining an agentic decision to remove himself from the violent milieu was virtually impossible for Darren because of the persistent threats he encountered in the local

environment. Instead he chose to retreat from his peers and into a self-enforced social isolation.

Every time I go outside there's trouble. You tell me 'Don't get involved with certain people'. 'What do you mean, don't get involved? 'I'm going outside, I'm going to see them. I can't not see them'. So, you know what, I'm just not going to go outside.

At the time of our first interview, Darren - aged 19 - was working for a local I.T. firm and claimed that he was finally managing to stay clear of violence and trouble. However, several months after our first interview, Darren, who up to that point had been a willing research participant, sent the following text message.

I'm not in the right mental state to be talking about past events right now (I frankly just don't want to) so it's best if we don't.

Despite offers of further help and support, Darren was reluctant to describe the nature of this "mental state" and closed down any further discussion of his past, and his relationship with Chris, so rendering his thoughts and feelings a no-go area. Chris confirmed that he had also not been closely involved with Darren for some time.

Chris

Chris was a black British male in his early thirties, the son of migrant Caribbean parents. He was tall, physically fit and muscular, partly as a result of his ongoing involvement in martial arts. He lived and worked in the same inner-city community in which he had grown up and was very well-versed in the territoriality of the various local neighbourhoods. He had substantive experience of working closely with young people involved in crime, violence and gangs, having previously spent several years working within the Local Authority Youth Service. A year previous to our meeting, he had resigned, somewhat acrimoniously, from the youth service, citing lack of support from managers and disruption to his job as a result of cuts and restructuring to the service. Interviews with Chris often involved me asking only one opening question after which he would talk without pausing for over twenty or thirty minutes, becoming visibly upset at some points. Despite what had been a bruising juncture in his youth work career, Chris still had a reputation locally as someone who was able to

engage with some of the most heavily gang-involved young people.

Childhood, school, and violence in teenage years

Chris had attended a local primary school with a well-nigh homogeneous black pupil intake. His early relationships with other children outside his ethnic group were limited. He described his family as being “not gang members, not violent, not criminals” but “known” as “bruisers”. Chris was one of the only local boys who, “had a dad, father in the house”. He had mainly fond memories of his early childhood, although money was “tight” and he recalled that certain other areas in the city were “no-go” areas for him and his friends. As a teenager, this fear of attack and a strong sense of territorialism had resulted in him seldom leaving his immediate neighbourhood.

His father, keen for Chris to understand his origins, sent him to a Saturday school where he studied black history. Although he recalled resenting the lack of freedom at the time, in hindsight Chris felt this had been a positive influence. He began to lose interest in mainstream education altogether and was demoted to the “bottom set”; a decision he said he was “happy” about. He would often be “kicked out” of the classroom for “silly stuff”. In retrospect, he felt strongly that his disengagement from school was a result of the euro-centricity of the curriculum and the absence of teachers with whom he could identify. Only one teacher seemed able to exert some influence; a male black drama teacher. Chris and his friends used to call him a “coconut” because of his accent, which appeared to them to be feigned and more redolent of a someone white and middle class.

By the age of 15 Chris was spending most of his time in class “dossing”. He had since been diagnosed as dyslexic as an adult, but this was not detected at school. He left school with no GCSE’s but managed to conceal this from his parents and gain a place at college. Now in a predominantly white environment, his father advised him to just “hold it down”. Chris began to enjoy college until a serious incident where, suddenly subsumed with rage, he attacked another student following a minor dispute. He was suspended from school. He still felt this decision was unjust.

What went against me was that they all started from the conflict. It didn't start prior to what he had said to me, the build-up and what he was saying to me, that triggered the argument.

Chris was allowed to return to college but felt he was perceived differently from then on. At the weekend he would spend his time in the city centre trying to meet girls. Sometimes these encounters with girls would develop into so called 'line-up' scenarios where the boundaries between sexual consent and coercion were, he admitted in hindsight, at the least blurred, if not crossed altogether. Chris seemed unwilling to go into any detail regarding these incidents, describing them as "disgusting and inappropriate".

On one occasion in the city centre, Chris was accosted by a group of young men who forced Chris, at knifepoint, to call himself a "dickhead"; an incident Chris described as leaving him feeling, "distraught, not for the fact that they came at me with knives, but they made me say I was a dickhead". The humiliation was still raw for Chris.

That really hit me. That was my ego, my pride. To this day, I can't understand how one individual allowed me to say that I am a dickhead.

Entry into youth work training and reversion to Islam

Chris then suffered a serious leg injury, which brought to an end to his aspirations for a basketball career and cut off a "vent" for his aggression. He started attending a local youth club, where the workers persuaded him to enrol on a local youth leadership course. This was difficult for Chris as the other young people attending were from rival neighbourhoods. Despite that, he found that he had an affinity with the ideas being discussed and he did well enough to apply to University. There, he met an older man, a black lecturer (John).

I remember being in a session and John was speaking. I think it was something on identity and it was so profound. I was just like wow, who is this dude?

Chris's identity construction was set on a twin-track trajectory from this point onwards. During the week Chris would study and at the weekends he would socialise with cousins

and friends who were still involved in “clubbing, fighting, and drugs”. In one incident Chris was attacked with a baseball bat and threatened with a firearm. He was badly injured, ending up in hospital.

Around this time, Chris also came under the influence of an uncle who had converted to Islam. This world-view and spiritual pathway contrasted with that of his father and mother who were Rastafarian and Christian respectively. He began attending a local Nation of Islam group. This was the beginning of what Chris later called his “re-version” to Islam. He retained a strong investment in this feature of his identity and he attributed much of the redirection of his life’s trajectory to his reversion. He acknowledged the inconsistency between two emergent identities at that time – one of the Muslim revert and conscientious student training for a professional career and the other “on-road” and still bound up in violence.

It's almost like a double consciousness. When you're here, you're fine. When you're with young people, you're fine. But it seems like when you're with your cousins and you're with these extra characters, you're almost a completely different human being.

At University, the curriculum continued to focus on a theoretical examination of identity development. Chris recalled resenting an exercise during a ‘Black Perspectives’ module where students were asked to explain the etymological roots of their name. Whereas others were able to do so, he could not. This triggered a period of “soul searching”. He invested more time and energy in his studies and all the while his admiration for John, his lecturer increased.

The ‘Black Perspectives’ module, which was his module, that really radically changed who I was, who I perceived myself to be.

He “fell in love” with Malcolm X and following in his footsteps, undertook a geographical, but also psychological pilgrimage (Haj) to Saudi Arabia. On his return he found his perspective on the local Nation of Islam group had changed. He came to see them as “cultish” and eventually left to follow what he felt was a more orthodox route within Islam. He completed his degree. Recalling his final graduation and the presence of the lecturer who he so admired, Chris became upset. The memory of their relationship brought to mind

his earlier formative relationship with his father, and the relative scarcity of figures in his life who he felt he could really rely on for support.

(voice wavering, clearly upset) Anytime you go to John's office there is a picture of me and John and no one in my life, apart from my Dad, has made me feel like John.

Entry into and exit from youth work

Chris secured a youth work job in the area where he had grown up. He remembered feeling perplexed as to why there were so few other applicants for the position. He soon found out. The previous youth worker had been physically attacked and staff were feeling intimidated by the levels of violence in the neighbourhood. Chris was apprehensive. He was given a list of names of young people who had been barred from the centre but decided instead to use a "strategic move". He called all the local gang members and told them he was now working at the youth centre. Using his physical presence to confront the young men, some of whom overtly challenged him, and his local knowledge and reputation as leverage, he initiated various sports and educational projects. These mainly focused on issues around identity development.

Chris's working practices, for example keeping the building open for longer than officially sanctioned, were not always in line with local policies and procedures. His first male line manager, who seemed to like Chris and was supportive of his approach, turned a pragmatic blind eye. Chris soon came in to contact with local community activists, including an older black male with whom he met regularly and called on for advice. He continued in the job for four years, and according to Chris violent incidents involving young people reduced to almost none.

With the onset of the financial crisis in 2011 and the beginning of a policy of austerity Chris's professional life abruptly changed. Severe cuts in youth service provision meant he was forced to re-interview for his position and he lost his job at the centre where he had been working. When he told the young people, they reacted angrily. Chris had to introduce his replacement - a white worker with a very different persona and approach to the work - to the local young people. In retrospect, Chris acknowledged he had deliberately undermined

his successor, refusing to smooth the transition and withdrawing his support. When a fight between rival black and Asian gangs broke out in the youth centre he had been redeployed to, Chris, still able to fluctuate between an old street and new professional identity attempted to break up the violence directly, entering the affray. He was reprimanded by his new female line manager for ignoring risk assessment procedures.

Chris increasingly felt unsupported and this culminated when the service refused to support his efforts to gain a Masters Degree. Local gang members immediately offered to pay the fees in full. He turned down their offer, feeling it “didn’t sit right” with his “new” identity.

I thought to myself “Look at that. These are so called gang members, so called violent people that are more loyal than people that I work with.”

Finally, when a young man with a strong connection to a local gang was stabbed, rumours began to spread that Chris was acting as a “spy” and he increasingly felt isolated and physically vulnerable. Chris was called to a meeting with service managers who told him that they felt he was acting unprofessionally. Chris filed a complaint. He described how he felt towards his female manager at the time.

The reality is, you don't have the knowledge and skills to be able to engage in this community. And you don't have the knowledge and skills to manage someone like myself that has a wealth of knowledge in the particular area.

Chris resigned from his post soon after and set up his own independent youth organization.

The relationship in focus: Darren and Chris

Darren met Chris when he started attending the local youth club where Chris worked. Fights would break out there too, often outside on the basketball court. Darren remembered the advice Chris had offered him at that time.

[He said] “You’re small, you’re going to get bullied by them, because you’ll get bullied off the ball. It will happen; just give up the ball”.

Darren ignored Chris's advice and refused to back down and as a result, he was violently attacked by his peers.

D: A fifteen-year-old tried to take the ball off me and I was like, you ain't getting it. So, I put the ball through his legs, brought it back to me, then he decided to smack me across the face. So, me like a kid with no brains and all balls, (I) ran up to him and punched him in his face. That didn't end well, but I learnt from that.

PH: When you say it didn't end well?

D: Well, he kept beating me to the point where everyone else stopped and was like, "we gotta stop this fight as this is so stupid; it's not even a fight 'cos he's just hitting him now 'cos he can".

Darren described how Chris had highlighted the transitory nature of Darren's friendships and tried to advise him he was perhaps better removing himself from his peers entirely.

He tried to explain this to me, like, you're not going to get what the other kids get 'til you are part of it, because you've made yourself separate from them. You don't get it, you don't understand it 'cos you're not with them. You've separated yourself from them. I thought, ah shit, so if I was with them, I'd get all this stuff about stabbing and that.

Outside of formal interviews, Darren told me that he thought Chris's practical advice and efforts to offer counsel had had some impact, including contributing to his sense of educational aspiration. Darren had taken note of Chris's highlighting of the transitory nature of his friendships. The project work Chris instigated and the conversations that flowed organically between them had prompted Darren to consider alternative pathways in his life. That said, he was acutely aware that any protection Chris could offer was not 24/7 and could not offer immunity from the violence within his environment.

Chris felt he had aided Darren's passage through what was, and continued to be, a very challenging period in his development. That was until his redeployment enforced by service cuts and his slump into burn out eventually brought the relationship to a premature end.

Their relationship seemed to have continued once Chris left the service and they both seemed to value it, however, neither Chris nor Darren party were able to offer any explanation of why it faltered in the first instance. The demise of Chris's youth work career within the local authority meant his contact with local young people waned. Darren saw less and less of Chris, so compounding his isolation.

A psychosocial analysis

Understanding Darren

Darren's hapless story of his efforts to escape violence and search for the boundaries that characterised his childhood points to the depth of his need for safety, acceptance, belonging and status. He identified strongly with his mother, but she had struggled to protect him from the violence in the neighbourhood outside the family home. In the minority at school ethnically and with insufficient resources of masculine and social street capital, his relationships with peers had become tinged with antagonism and risk. He had lived in fear of isolation and attack but also the possibility that his own retaliatory, defensive actions (prompted possibly by his bypassed feelings of shame and humiliation) might land him in serious trouble. He fluctuated between avoiding confrontation with alpha males or somewhat recklessly, facing it head on, with damaging physical and psychological consequences.

His psychic investment in an image of himself as an underdog – a hero prepared to courageously defend his integrity and masculinity in the face of overwhelming odds - could be read as a means of fending off the intense feelings of shame, emasculation and impotency that threatening experiences in his social world had engendered. The fight he engaged in as a perpetrator with his peer appears to have prompted Darren to re-evaluate his actions and desist from direct involvement in violence. Struggling with the pursuit of "profits at stake" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) within the masculine street field he chose to negotiate and mobilise an alternative masculine subjectivity. This valorised intellect and career progression and seemingly allowed him to present himself as empowered rather than submissive. Removing himself from a street field that normatively framed maleness

in a form he could not successfully inhabit was perhaps his best chance of succeeding socially and avoiding the stigma of weakness. He realised that, unlike his peers and Chris, he was unable to draw on physical power to shore up his increasingly precarious self-esteem. So, he adjusted his own identity in order to coexist with, rather than be diminished by, the emasculating force of alpha males within the street field.

Within this field his peers - and Chris - continued to retain more masculine capital and power. This refashioning of his identity had not halted a gradual erosion of Darren's freedom and self-expression. He felt impelled to withdraw not only from the street field but from the broader social world too. For Darren, the chaotic, frightening environment of the street field and the fact that he felt he could not rely on his male "friends" or Chris to protect him, had finally resulted in his retreat into a reclusive, solitary lifestyle. He was burying any feelings associated with emasculation, shame or humiliation. Darren's retreat into a self-imposed shell was still not providing the psychological space he needed to discharge emotions induced by years of living with physical and psychological threat. If not worked through, this affect could have the potential to emerge or manifest in other forms at a later date. Ultimately, although Darren had escaped and desisted from the violent behaviour that characterised his teenage years, it is hard to see how this might be interpreted as a wholly positive outcome for him.

Understanding Chris

Despite having grown up in a family home somewhat acclimatised to violence Chris had also experienced a level of discipline and aspiration embodied in the authority of his parents, especially his father. Like Darren, he remembered school to be an environment insufficiently controlled by adults. In his case academic failure seems to have triggered feelings of shame and humiliation too, despite his defensive statement that he was "happy" about being in the bottom set. Like Darren, these feelings were kept tightly wrapped and emptied of emotional content through a reconfiguration of the experience as trivial and insignificant to him. He had also gone through a personal and professional reinvention, the most significant of which being his reversion to Islam. This followed in the wake of strong identifications with a number of black male figures: his father, Uncle, University lecturer

John, Malcolm X and finally his professional mentor in the community. His growing awareness of the inequitable impact of racism, catalysed through these figures, came to form part of his retrospective interpretation of his school experiences. It also seemed to drive his ongoing motivation to work with black young people suffering as a result of racism, deprivation and violence.

There was some ambivalence in his account of his own racial identity development. He regretted his mis-judgment of his black drama teacher as a “coconut”; a sign possibly that he was beginning to re-evaluate his own prior investment in essentialised notions of racial identity. His dismay at his inability to trace a direct route to his heritage via his name whilst at University, his idealisation of strong black male figures who he perceived to possess the authenticity he so desired, and his reversion to Islam, points to a level of psychic investment in an ethnically pure identity at that point in his development. Such an aspiration was proving to be increasingly un-sustainable as he encountered the more fluid and intersectional reality of identities in the social world around him. Chris was utilising his political education and nascent knowledge of sociological theories of race to construct an identity as an embattled black man in a white world struggling with “double-consciousness”.

However, his account (which included some newly divulged memories of very troubling behaviour with women as a young boy) also indicated some blind-spots in his self-awareness around his own sexual identity, possibly as result of his attempts to bypass (Lewis, 1987) the shame these memories engendered. His recounting of the reprimand at the hands of a female manager and the “dickhead” encounter in the street (which still rankled with him) showed the extent to which he felt psychically emasculated and humiliated by those experiences in his social world. Chris still appeared reluctant to relinquish his defensive strategies, some of which were designed to retain forms of masculine power over women he perceived as weak or insufficiently streetwise. He remained heavily invested in a discursive identity centred on street masculinity and political blackness. Fusing this with a pure Islamic identity may have been serving to decontaminate feelings of regret and guilt arising from his shame-inducing behaviour towards women. Although fruitful as part of his own pathway to desistance, this investment in a muscular,

political, Islamic blackness risked obscuring how such heavily racialised and gendered identities can simultaneously become complicit (Connell, 1995) in the oppression rather than liberation of women (Crenshaw, 1991).

In public, Chris seemed to have acquired the resolve to walk away from direct physical confrontation with other men, knowing he still retained the capacity to physically assert himself. He implicitly and explicitly deployed this capacity in his professional role with young men involved in, or affiliated to, gangs. But conceding any physical vulnerability, or even accepting that his distinctively masculine style might not be appropriate, had proved difficult. His disparaging appraisal of his female line manager revealed the extent to which he had come to see her as weak, despite her challenging both his questionable practices, and his perceptions of himself as indispensable, streetwise and authoritative. Chris's reaction to his removal from the community in which he grew up - undermining of his white, more subordinate successor - exposed how youth work with younger men was vicariously meeting his own emotional needs. These may have included a subliminal need for his relationship with young men to be imbued with respect and status and for his efforts to be heralded by others, thereby reducing his own feelings of shame and humiliation. His description of the local young men's reaction to his removal from the area could also be read as displacement and projection of his own feelings of loss and anger onto them. Perhaps Chris was seeking out relationships where he could be to young men what his (exclusively male) personal mentors were to him, a desire driven by both gratitude to his mentors, but also some envy of their status too.

Still reliant on street and masculine capital garnered from his contacts on the street, he had to expend considerable energy resisting the temptation to take the help of men involved in gang-related crime to pay for his college course. This indicates the extent to which he remained in a struggle to unify the dual consciousness that had blighted his identity development as an adult. He felt comfortable within the physical geographical no-go areas of inner city neighbourhoods where violence was prevalent and where his social identity gave him access, credibility and acceptance. But his ongoing psychic discomfort and defensiveness meant there were persistent no-go, bypassed areas within his own sense of self. Whilst continuing to inhabit the role of male mentor and wise counsellor to young men

like Darren, Chris was still having to expend considerable emotional energy refashioning his own identity and repressing feelings of guilt and shame. That psychic pressure, combined with the impact of social events, including cuts to youth services and his professional isolation, seemed to be behind his descent into professional burn-out.

Understanding the relationship

Chris had in his own father and his mentors a blueprint of how to walk a younger man through experiences of identity construction. As an older male mentor offering practical advice on how to navigate through the challenges within the street field, Chris may have presented to Darren as the father figure otherwise conspicuously absent from Darren's own narrative. These two black men had grown up in the same, locally and culturally specific violent subculture that encouraged displays of stoicism, brazenness, objectification of women and physical prowess as part of masculinity. Their meeting created the opportunity for Darren to verbalise some of his own painful and shame-ridden experiences that otherwise may have remained unexamined. The reciprocal identification between them - a meeting of minds rooted in their shared inhabitation of a social identity within a specific social field – may have eased the building of rapport.

So, why did Darren ignore Chris's advice such as to "give up the ball" on the basketball court to avoid a fight? He could have chosen to read Chris's advice as a call to "be the bigger man" by temporarily accepting a subordinate position in the street field in order to accrue some profit later within a wider social field, beyond the constraints of his local subculture. But Darren seems to not have seen it like this. Physical gendered signifiers of strength, power and manliness, valuable to Chris, were not as available to Darren. He seems to have concluded that to back down in the face of threat meant suffering the shame and humiliation of losing credibility and capital within the street field. Darren's description of himself as a kid "all balls with no brains" aptly illustrates how masculine discourses continued to run through the intersubjective interactions between him and Chris and how these can influence decisions and actions. Darren's decision to retain the ball seemed invested in these social discourses more than Chris's 'streetwise' advice. Reverting to an identity as "all brains" came at some psychic cost for Darren and his relationship with Chris.

It eventually dwindled as a result of Darren's withdrawal and Chris's redeployment but also possibly because of the mutually detrimental silence around masculinity that their respective vulnerabilities had generated. Perhaps masculine capital was not yet a fully shareable entity in Chris's mind, but remained a prize to be fought for competitively, possibly even within his relationship with Darren.

Darren's struggle to secure the social resources available within the field of the street illustrate a deeper asymmetry in how they were positioned within it and significant divergence in their inner, psychic worlds. If Chris was going to help Darren to move beyond his avoidance and attack strategies, Chris, as the one with responsibility for helping Darren, needed to be able to distinguish between his mind and Darren's. He needed help to *recognise* the nature, extent and separateness of Darren's male subjectivity, including his emotional fragility and vulnerability. Darren needed Chris's advice and support but also not to experience Chris as a further threat to his subjectivity, or as a repetition of past injuries. Darren may well have experienced Chris as a purveyor of gendered messages reminiscent of those delivered in his past from peers and other authority figures. Chris was holding on tightly to an idealised subjectivity of the all-knowing mentor persona, partly because he needed to protect his own fragile, ambivalent sense of self from feelings of shame and vulnerability too – some of which bubbled up within the interview process. Despite Chris's best efforts to appear empathic, Darren seems to have experienced Chris and his advice to "give up the ball" as more of a coercive demand issued *at* his masculine subjectivity. This is notably in contrast to how his violent altercation with the other boy during his last fight which allowed him to recognise another subject - somebody 'at home' in the other - who deserved empathy. In this, unlike his interactions with Chris, he was able to be the author of his own decisions. Darren felt free to confer meaning onto that scene and then respond out of his own sense of agency.

The persistence of violence within the street field and the complementary "two-ness" (Benjamin, 2007) that arose between Darren and Chris created an impasse from which Darren could not extricate himself. Chris's capacity to open up new ways for Darren to manage conflict and vulnerability was impacted by his own defensiveness around his bypassed shame and self-image that discouraged reflexivity. To be effective, Chris needed

to acknowledge to himself the harm he had caused to others in his past, including the young women who were victims of sexual assault. He also needed to suspend his own need to be heralded as the role model to Darren that his older male mentors were to him. Despite Chris's valiant efforts at straight-talking, the persistence of powerful sub-cultural notions of acceptable ways of being a real man was cutting off routes to emotional openness that might have benefitted them both.

Unable to access the more vulnerable parts of Chris, Darren had withdrawn into a "mental state" which he felt ill equipped to talk about, as his SMS withdrawing from the research testified. With psycho-dynamically informed supervision Chris could have been helped to see how his relationship with Darren could also have triggered some self-judgement in Darren ("I'm not a real man like Chris"). Both he and Darren, although they were able to express conscious feelings of guilt for past misdemeanours, seemed to be avoiding conscious acknowledgement of feelings of shame, humiliation and masculine inadequacy. Despite adhering to different models of male socialisation, in the end, they both seemed to be left struggling to process what it all meant. Chris could have called on Darren's collaboration in figuring this out, so creating a third space (Aron, 2006) between them, but also outside, their dyadic relationship. For Darren to change, Chris had to change too, accept his own shame, loss and fragility, and find compassion for himself as well as for Darren. If he had felt able to be more transparent and able to communicate the truth of his own feelings, not offer up some essentialised de-contaminated version of himself, this might have prevented the impasse that led to Darren's withdrawal.

Summary

There is of course an alternative reading of this story; one which would seek to more explicitly foreground the structural constraints bearing down on these two black men growing up in a socio-economically deprived inner-city neighbourhood beset by endemic violence. It is also worth bearing in mind that black working-class men are not the only men who choose to adopt empowering embodied social personas to disguise psychic vulnerabilities (this research was conducted during Donal Trump's presidency). During the

time I observed Chris he had formed lasting meaningful relationships with many other young men, many of whom were gang involved. On occasion this meant putting himself in dangerous environments that others would find intensely challenging and disturbing. His willingness and ability to go the extra mile with young men facing considerable social disadvantage meant he was well respected and liked in the area.

Whilst holding all this in mind, this case illuminates how the efforts of male youth workers like Chris to help young men make agentic decisions to turn away from violence can be frustrated by their own psychic vicissitudes and how these are inextricably linked with overarching social factors. The psychosocial analysis offered here amounts to an attempt to disentangle how, within the street field, male youth workers' own gendered and racialized social identities can overlap and interact with those of the young men with whom they are engaged. This operates in tandem with processes of psychic identification and recognition and can be interrupted by the persistence of unresolved feelings of shame and humiliation.

The case also illustrates how finer details of difference within social constructions of gender and ethnicity, and the challenges inherent in recognising them in the field of the street, can inhibit good practice. Youth work relationships rooted in male worker's resources of social street and masculine capital and processes of identification may have desistance promoting potential but those workers also need adequate support to avoid being overwhelmed by the psychic and social challenges they face, both in their internal and external worlds. This, and the danger that this will skew how they see women with whom they need to live and work productively, adds fuel to calls for adequate training and supervision for male youth workers that incorporates a psychosocial sensibility and the thorough consideration of their personal, professional and gendered identity formation. I now turn to look at how male workers might productively use self-disclosure as part of psychosocial sensibility within their practice and how this can release deadlock in the field of their relationships with young men if organisational contexts support rather than frustrate their efforts.

Chapter 7: Daniel and Jim:

“I used to drink around here”: Inter-subjectivity and worker self-disclosure in professional relationships with young people.

Introduction

This chapter incorporates a psychosocial theorisation of the worker/young person relationship as a fully intersubjective field; a system of ongoing, reciprocal, but not always symmetrical influence where worker and young person negotiate the meanings and subject positions that are created between them. I illustrate how professional engagement with young people exhibiting violent behaviour (especially when that behaviour is rooted in experiences of maltreatment, loss and fractured attachments) may need to incorporate a deeper sensibility to relational psychodynamic processes and how these are imbricated with social forces. I argue that such a sensibility can strengthen the desistance promoting potential of some professional practices, such as the reflexive use of self in the shape of worker self-disclosure.

To begin with, I discuss issues of boundaries and self-disclosure in professional relationships. I then introduce a psychosocial perspective on inter-subjectivity and organisational defensiveness, arguing this provides an apposite framework for work with young offenders. A detailed dyadic case study then follows a young man - a care-leaver (Daniel) with a history of maltreatment and abuse - and his male worker (Jim), charting their own biographies and their experience of each-other in a homeless hostel for young people over five months. The story includes Jim's attempts to engender shifts in Daniel's perception of himself and others around him via an approach rooted in dialogical and empathic practice. A psychosocial analysis employs object relations theory to explore the aetiology of Daniel's violent behaviour. I then view this in tandem with selected excerpts from Jim's own biographical narrative to plot the processes of inter-subjective recognition

(Benjamin, 2007) and asymmetrical power relations (characterised as master-slave (Lacan, 1977) dynamics) that feature within the dyad. I highlight Jim's decision to disclose an aspect of his own biography that renders him more fallible in Daniel's eyes. I show how that begins to shift the asymmetry within that dynamic, thereby generating an opportunity for Daniel to construct an alternative, less pervasively violent subjectivity.

However, as the case ultimately unfolds and reveals, this opportunity is quashed by endemic organisational failures within the hostel where Daniel was living. Inept professional practice, inadequate supervision and the dominance of professional discourses that valorise dispassionate, bounded engagement, stymy rather than enable Jim's practice. I argue that these systemic failings and limited practice repertoire of Jim's co-workers represents (if replicated elsewhere) a serious shortcoming in services that purport to look after and rehabilitate young people like Daniel, many of whom are in dire need of professional adult support. The paper concludes that workers like Jim might be able to offer meaningful support to young people like Daniel. However, if their work is to have maximum desistance promoting potential, youth services and professional development regimes may need to develop their understanding of the psychosocial nature of intersubjective dynamics within relationships and organisations.

Conceptual tools

Professional relationships, boundaries and self-disclosure

The National Youth Agency ethical code of conduct (2004) states that workers should,

recognise the boundaries between personal and professional life and be aware of the need to balance a caring and supportive relationship with young people with *appropriate professional distance* (my emphasis) (p6).

How this might translate into practice remains ambiguous; inevitably perhaps, as any evaluation of appropriateness can only ever be meaningfully explored in detailed case

studies that provide the necessary contextualization. Merry (1999) argues that workers taking an objective, distant and uninvolved stance can have the effect that young people see workers as only having a professional interest in them; that they are not really concerned about them as individuals with unique life stories. Aron (2013) argues that clients in psychoanalytic therapy often probe their therapists in an attempt to penetrate his/her professional calm and reserve. They do this because they need to connect with others emotionally, “where they are authentic and fully present” (p80). There is some empirical evidence of young people expressing similar views on their relationships with workers. Feaviour and Acres (2000) identified that young people highlight shared experience as a key factor they look for in workers. Mike Seal and I (Seal and Harris, 2016) also found that young people involved in violence needed to feel youth workers were willing to show themselves to be fallible as part of mutually trustful relationships. Workers disclosing their own experiences, particularly those that echo young people’s, might help facilitate a working alliance (Bordin, 1979) with the potential to effect beneficial changes in behaviour, such as desistance from crime and violence.

This suggests it might be worthwhile drilling down into the complexity of professional relationships and the use of self-disclosure by workers taking into account intersubjective and unconscious dynamics. Psychosocial approaches to criminality (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007; Jones, 2008) seek to blend psychoanalytic and post-structuralist insights in order to capture how subjects position themselves within a number of competing discourses and the psychological function this serves for them. Adopting such a framework encompasses an acceptance that aspects of the self will always (consciously and unconsciously) be communicated verbally and non-verbally within the intersubjective field of personal and professional relationships. In settings where young people have experienced maltreatment, loss and abuse, this unconscious transmission of unwanted parts of the self, such as shame, if not contained by another (Bion, 1962) can often be repressed or projected outwards. This can give rise to greater challenges for workers seeking to develop productive relationships. What may be required of the worker therefore is to develop a finely tuned understanding of how to use these unconscious inter-subjective dynamics productively. This requires a solid conceptual basis.

Inter-subjectivity

The term inter-subjectivity has been used variably within philosophy (Habermas, 1970; Hegel, 1807; Honneth, 1995), symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) and psychoanalysis (Benjamin, 2004). For Mead, human self-consciousness derives from the ability to adopt the standpoint of the other toward the self (the 'me' as opposed to 'I'). Benjamin uses the term to emphasise the mutual *recognition* of subjective mental states in the other as well as in oneself. Each person experiences the other as a like subject - another mind who can be felt with, yet has a distinct, separate centre of feeling and perception. Benjamin sees the ability to recognize the other in this way as a developmental attainment that begins with the mutual gazing between care-giver and infant. This leads to attunement with the other as part of processes of attachment (Bowlby, 1958). These early relationships with external others or objects (Klein, 1946) are internalized as internal objects and live on in forms of relating to others in adult life. If the child's environment is one of prolonged instability, neglect and abandonment this can precipitate painful feelings of shame and envy. These are then either split off from conscious awareness or manifest later in life as intense feelings of aggression or paranoia.

Lacan (1977, p58) states that "man's . . . first object of desire is to be recognised by the other". Without intersubjective recognition, human beings have no identity of their own. As Vanheule et al (2003) explain,

Human beings do not so much acquire an identity by assuming certain characteristics but by ascribing characteristics to someone else and positioning themselves with regard to such characteristics (Vanheule et al, 2003, p327).

Following Hegel, Lacan conceptualizes human relations as unavoidably enmeshed within an asymmetrical, master-slave dialectic, by which he means that self-definition is a corollary of the way subjects define others within their experiential field. He suggests a discourse operates within inter-subjectivity that institutes the positions taken up by any two subjects within relationship. Self-consciousness is created through encounter with the other that makes individual subjectivity relative. Subject positions are causally related and characterised by the dominance of one over the other. This can forestall the possibility of

change, thereby becoming counter-productive to either party's self-development. It is possible to navigate out of this dialectic - to reconfigure one's sense of self - via a reorientation of the master-slave position. This involves the development of a meta-perspective on the relationship structure itself, so allowing parties to go beyond existing contours. This change of position (and therefore identity) can only be achieved by reflexively assigning another place to the other. "The redefinition of the other's identity implies a redefinition of oneself" (Vanheule et al, 2003, p327).

Jean Piaget's staged model of cognitive development (1936) suggests that the reaching of the concrete operations stage at adolescence is an important staging post in the human ability to be reflexive and maintain two perspectives in the mind at once. He suggests that young people begin to look intensely at others around them and make inferences about how they look at them. Conceivably then, the space between young people and workers is one within which young people may come to view the self as subject *and* object and the other as subject rather than object too, as with Mead's (1934) formulation. Within professional relationships this might involve the young person internalising the worker's image of him/her - a form of reflected appraisal of identity.

Thus, professional relationships can provide, amongst others in young people's lives, a fertile potential space for interactions that trigger introspection and the building of reflexive self-awareness. This can furthermore strengthen young people's sense of subjective agency in the face of psychic and structural determinants. A psychodynamic conceptualisation of this process would anticipate that much of this interaction may go on unconsciously. Young people's observations of workers might provoke anxiety as they may recognise aspects of the worker that they cannot or do not want to recognise in themselves. At other times, young people may observe aspects that they wish to emulate or notice that they their workers have been moved affectively by them. Young people may need to feel that they have reached the worker in some way and that the worker is different with him/her than they are with other young people.

Post-structuralist thought (Foucault, 1975) has questioned the very existence of unitary identity seeking instead to deconstruct the human subject. This means that the term intersubjectivity would perhaps be better seen as referring to relations amongst multiple

identities and voices. The building and development of a young person's identity, a sense of 'I' and 'me', requires therefore the marshalling of these voices into some form of cohesive whole with some continuity along with an ability to tolerate some contradictions too. In order to promote this the worker needs to first develop a coherent sense of his/her own self, reflect upon that self as an object of his/her own investigation and then seek to influence the young person to do the same. One way of achieving this might be the sharing of how they achieved this as part of a process of reflexive self-disclosure. This process becomes especially challenging where worker and young person carry the psychic residue of their own histories of neglect, abuse, trauma or addiction with them into the intersubjective encounter. Moreover, this all occurs within surrounding social discourses (Foucault, 1975) which provide the chalk lines for subject positions and routines that emerge in intersubjective interaction, especially that within professional contexts and across indices of social identity (for example, race, class, gender and age).

Moreover, a professional context such as a hostel providing continuous care for vulnerable young residents could be understood as a social system where often over-stretched staff deploy psychic defences to deal with young people's aggression, anger, shame, hatred and envy. This will lead to staff experiencing (and then perhaps disavowing) their own intense and sometimes ambivalent emotions, such as fear in the face of aggression or self-doubt as to their capacity to do their job. Menzies Lyth (1960) identifies how these psychosocial processes that occur in such institutions, at both conscious and unconscious levels, can lead to persistent cultures of professional detachment, minimal individual discretion and high staff turnover. These organisational cultures will inevitably affect the quality and nature of intersubjective relationships between workers and young people and therefore their desistance promoting potential.

Daniel

Daniel, a 22 year-old white young man, was living in a homeless hostel for young people when we met. He was introduced to me by Jim, who was not his allocated support workers but had been working with him for several months. Jim had suggested Daniel as a participant on the basis that he had been involved in several violent altercations in the hostel.

Childhood

Daniel told me he was “born into the wrong type of family”; that he had in fact “never really had a family” at all. His birth parents were related (brother and sister) and he was a product of their incestuous relationship. He had learnt this from reading his personal Social Services file at age 15; an experience he described as like, “sticking a knife in your throat and pulling it out”. The records revealed that his birth parents had tried to drown and suffocate him in infancy (probably in a bid to conceal his existence). As a result of this he had been placed in foster care from the age of 18 months.

He was adopted at age four but felt little emotional connection with his new family or where he was placed, which was, to him, “just another house, just other people.” There were plenty of “other people” in the house – ten children in all, six brothers and four sisters, all of whom, according to Daniel, “had their Dads” and “their family”. Daniel felt “pushed out”. He became a target for ongoing physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his older brothers and sisters, who hated him “with a passion”. The feeling was mutual; Daniel described his adopted siblings as “boisterous, arrogant twats”. He “got on well” with his adopted mother at first, but at age 11 his relationship with her deteriorated. She had told Daniel that she suffered abuse at the hands of her father and this, he felt, had led her to have a “mental breakdown”. She began to hit him regularly, sometimes with metal poles, leaving him badly bruised. Sometimes she would lock him in cupboards or tie him to a chair and throw darts at him. On one occasion she had put a knife to his throat. This abuse escalated until it was brought to the attention of Social Services and he was finally removed from the family.

Entry into the care system

Daniel was sent to a children’s home far away from where he had grown up. Other residents would sometimes steal his belongings such as cherished games consoles, mobile phones and clothes. This triggered his first outbursts of violent behaviour. He felt that the staff in the care homes could not understand his problems. They had “not been through that situation” and were only engaging with him as “professionals” who “finished their job at 5 o’clock” and would then “go home to their families”. He remembered lashing out in anger at anybody who tried to help him and deliberately breaking or taking their

belongings, especially items that he knew “meant something” to them. At school, his status as a child in care marked him out from his peers. He was relentlessly bullied, “pushed into lockers”, “strangled” and “punched”. When he became more violent he was eventually moved to another school for young people with similar behavioural issues. From age 11-16 he was moved 148 times between different care homes. This had left him with a sense that all professionals were engaged in a personal vendetta against him and had moved him “for no reason” other than to “save money”. He felt his life had been “stunted” within a care system that was “like prison” and had dehumanized him as “just a number in a system”.

The only older man he had ever felt close to was his grandfather. This relationship came to a tragic end when his grandfather was violently murdered by two young people that Daniel knew. They were convicted and imprisoned, leaving Daniel, by now 16, devastated at the loss but also desperate for revenge. Feeling like he had nothing left to lose he began to recklessly commit petty crimes such as shoplifting and was regularly involved in fights, often where the odds were heavily stacked against him. He was referred to a psychiatrist but felt the sessions had only made him “worse”. He felt the psychiatrist’s interpretation of his behaviour - that he was “acting out” - was unfair and unduly invasive. Finally, in one session, he grabbed the psychiatrist “by the throat” because “of the stuff he was saying” and he was arrested in the psychiatrist’s office.

You sit there, and you open up to a psychiatrist and you say, “I’ve had this, this, and this, and this.” The psychiatrist doesn’t understand it in a personal way, but they’ll understand in a way, because they’re trained to physically understand that kind of stuff, but there is no way you can understand someone who’s been through hard times if you haven’t been in that situation yourself. Until you’ve been put in that situation yourself, you’d never have a clue.

His final move before leaving care was to a “really nice house” in a “posh village” where he became friendly with some local young men who invited him back to their homes. The persistent label of looked-after child led him to experience another crushing rejection; this time from the parents of his new-found friends.

They wouldn’t let me near the children. I’d never have friends, could never have friends, because people will automatically judge you for being in care.

Exit from care

Days after his 18th birthday Daniel left the care system and was offered a place in a hostel that he described as a “crack den...not a home, just a place where you put your head”. He felt his social workers had “lied” to him as they had promised him his own flat if he could prove his ability to cook and manage finances. He admitted he “didn’t really know how to stand on his own two feet” but that was because he had not had the “right people” to support him. Unable to cope with life in his new accommodation, Daniel’s life went from “bad to worse”. He left the hostel and lived on the streets where he met some members of a travelling community who offered him employment. He also met a 15-year-old girl (Tracey) who became his girlfriend. Unable to find accommodation together they moved back to Daniel’s home town and lived on the streets until they were offered a place in the hostel where they were living at the time we met.

Daniel felt his allocated (female) support worker at the hostel (Mary) was “a waste of time” and “didn’t give a shit”; she was “useless”, “arrogant”, “cocky” and “stuck up her own arse”. They had met once in five months even though they were supposed to have weekly meetings and she had not helped with practical things such as organizing a passport for Daniel. She had failed to “read up” on Daniel and suggested that he might seek to make contact with his birth parents. This had “wound” Daniel up, not just because of what she said but “the way she said it”. He felt he needed “professional” help but that it needed to be someone who “knew what they were doing”.

His relationship with his girlfriend Tracey became increasingly turbulent, including many break-ups. In his final interview Daniel told me that Tracey had fallen pregnant. The prospect of being a father was leading Daniel to feel that he had to “grow up and act like a man”.

I am not going to give up on my child like I was given up on. I am not going to turn round and throw my child into the fucking middle of the ocean and let it survive on your own. I am going to rear my child how I was supposed to be reared. I am one of them people that will stand up for my child. I will do anything for my child. I want to be able to just do something with my life that is actually meaningful, instead of fucking up all the time.

Jim

Jim was a 40-year-old, white male who after some years working in a car factory, a spell in custody for a serious violent offence and battle with alcoholism, had retrained as a youth worker and found employment in the homeless hostel where he had met Jason.

Youth offending, depression and addiction

Jim had fond memories of a “decent upbringing” in a “strict” family where financial resources were limited but not “love and care”. After leaving school he found work and began to spend his wages “drinking and partying” at weekends. At aged 23 he was involved in a serious violent incident that led to his arrest for attempted murder, although this charge was later dropped for a lesser offence. He was reluctant to disclose the details of the offence, except to say that he was found guilty and spent “some time in prison”. He felt the offence had “stuck” with him, but on release, despite his criminal record, he was offered a job at a local car factory. He continued to drink heavily until he was involved in a “nasty” car accident as a passenger, seriously injured and left needing several major operations. The driver (his female partner at the time) was pregnant and lost the baby as a result of her injuries. His drinking escalated and he fell into a deep depression.

I was on the bus one morning about 3 months before I stopped drinking with a can of beer, going into town in the morning time. I got off the bus at.....for some unknown reason I started walking up the top onto the Express Way and I was gonna jump straight off it....erm...right? Got to the top. My mother normally phones... I speak to my mom nearly every day, and I wasn't at that time in my life... and she phoned my mobile, just at that time...erm....

PH: Just by chance?

Just by chance... and there was no questions asked, there was no....it was gonna happen ... that was it....it was all over...snapped out of it, don't know how...don't know...God knows what. Then the Police come along, took me to the Police station. They were gonna arrest me for trespassing. I had an interview with the Police.... sort of got my thought pattern together.

Jim described this time as “the worst 3 months of my life”. Before his first operation he abruptly decided to stop “drinking, smoking and gambling” and began a course of cognitive behavioural therapy.

From that time, I worked on myself. I had to strip myself back to the core. First of all I had to give up alcohol, 'cos that was fuelling the depression, get rid of that, and then the depression was clearer - that's what it was...so I muddled through that and from that day it just kind of fell into place. I sat down I evaluated what's going on in my life, what the positives are, what the negatives are and the positive outweighed the negatives. I looked at the reasons why I was going to do that, the impact on that. I shiver to think about it even today. Then I looked at when I go into work with people, I want to do my best possible and that's it...I've not drunk or smoked for 4 ½ years since.

He began to explore other career options and found himself drawn to working with young offenders. He enrolled on a youth and community work training course at a local university and found employment in the homeless hostel where he had met Daniel.

The relationship in focus: Daniel and Jim

Jim described his first meeting and conversation with Daniel as one where Daniel "ranted" and Jim simply listened to him so he could "let off the steam".

[Daniel] turned around and said, "Who the fucking hell are you anyway?". So, I said, "Well I'm somebody who's just stood here and listened to you for five minutes, all right?" He went, "Oh, okay, all right then. Well I'm Daniel." So, I said, "That's good, I'm Jim. Right, so now we've got past that then. So, was that your worst? Or was that your... is there more? Because I'm just starting here".

Jim quickly became a "buffer" between Daniel and other staff at the hostel, who according to Jim could not "handle the aggression" and "handed out warnings left, right and centre". According to Jim, communication between Daniel and the hostel workers (many of whom were female and temporary staff who spoke English as a second language) was a problem due to "language barriers" and their overly "authoritarian" approach. When Daniel met Jim, he felt Jim was different as he intervened in conflicts, remained calm and offered Daniel opportunities to "think outside the box". He could see Jim was frustrated at times, but when he told Jim to "fuck off" Jim would still return and seek to resolve the issue. This made him appear more "human" to Daniel.

He's good; he'll sit there and he'll find a way. He's not generally my support worker but I've had more support off Jim than I have off my own support worker because he understands

where I'm coming from. Not only that, he understands I'm 22. In order to get through to me, you've got to speak to me like I'm a 22-year-old. Don't speak to me like I'm a 15-year-old, don't speak to me like I don't know what I'm doing, because I've been there, I've done it.

Daniel felt that some of the incidents in his past would "scare people" but that Jim might be able to understand. The relationship felt more authentic to him than others he had encountered in interactions with professionals. It was very important to Daniel how Jim *looked* at him.

Jim looks at you like you're a human. He doesn't look at you like you're a youth; he looks at you like you're just a normal human being that needs help.

Daniel did not share all the details of his past with Jim although he felt that if Jim was allocated to be his support worker he might "open up" to him eventually. Then, on Christmas Eve Daniel showed Jim a SMS he had received from his adoptive brothers. It included a picture of Christmas presents they had been given and a message gloating that Daniel was not as fortunate. Daniel began to cry within sight of the hostel staff. Jim said they just "tutted" and "sucked their teeth".

I kind of put myself in his shoes within a split second and thought to myself, how would I deal with this? And how can I deal with him as a support worker to kind of diffuse it for him?

Jim saw something in Daniel that reminded him of his own experiences and sensed that Daniel could see this too.

I've got life experiences – somehow he's picked up on that...I could see him getting himself into bother. Sooner or later he's going to do some damage to somebody.

Daniel knew very little "personal" information about Jim because he felt he was not "allowed to know". He sensed Jim had been through some similar experiences to his own, for example that Jim, "wasn't all sweet and innocent as a kid", "probably had his problems", had "struggled in life" and "could look after himself". He felt this was somehow linked to Jim's choice to work with young people.

He's had something happen to him to make him want to do this kind of work, because to do this kind of work it's not one of those things where you think, "I'll do that job." He's been through some of the stuff that we've been through.

Jim initially felt he could not share any details of his own past with Daniel and sought to maintain "solid personal-professional boundaries". He felt a lot of the young people in the hostel had no "father figures" in their lives and was concerned that Daniel may become too "dependent". Jim arranged to bring Daniel into University to meet me, a choice that other staff at the hostel felt was "risky". They doubted Daniel would get out of bed but he was dressed and ready when Jim arranged to pick him up. During the car journey Jim and Daniel discussed Daniel's violent behaviour and the prospect of his ensuing fatherhood. They passed by some of Jim's old drinking haunts and this triggered some nostalgia on Jim's part. He spontaneously said to Daniel,

I used to drink around here. I tell you one thing, if I hadn't have stopped drinking, I definitely wouldn't be going to University, and I wouldn't be taking you along.

Daniel did not reply, but Jim felt it "got his attention" and that there was a "shift" in Daniel's perception of him and in the dynamic within their relationship.

Jim: I could see the cogs going round he was thinking about stuff....it may have brought us down to kind of a level...I'm not this wonderful support worker who knows all; sees all. The way his reaction was, without even saying anything, when he looked at me kind of, it was more of a oh right ... ok, so you've got your issues yourself then.

PH You sensed something different?

Jim: Yeah, it was more of a...it was really odd...

PH A non-verbal communication?

Jim: Yeah it was – if he'd said something it would be easier to...but sometimes non-verbal is more powerful than verbal. On the way back he said, "Thanks for taking me out." So, I said, "Well, you know, that's okay." And he went, "No, no, in general, because I don't really go anywhere." And when he went back to the ***** [hostel] he apologised to the member of staff. He told quite a lot of people that he'd been out, "I've been to the University. I've been to the University today. Guess where I've been? University." It was like Christmas for him.

In his final interview, Daniel felt that he was no longer liable to “throw the first punch” in conflict situations because he was “not that kind of person anymore”. He was at pains to draw a distinction between himself and others in the hostel who he felt were “scumbags using the fact that they had been in care to kill someone or to deliberately hurt someone”. However, he still had “flashbacks” and “panic attacks”, especially if he was ever immersed in water above his waist or in large groups of people. His behaviour in the hostel remained unpredictable especially when he felt “threatened” which would sometimes still trigger an “automatic” response.

Daniel wanted Jim to be his allocated support worker but was told by a manager that a written request was required and Jim was not allowed to help or encourage Daniel to fill out the form. Before this could be arranged Daniel became involved in an altercation with another resident and was evicted from the hostel. Jim regretted not “pushing” the transfer more.

I think if I’d spent more time with him and done more work on him, it would have been a different outcome. I think with the right guidance and understanding he would have been a different kettle of fish. He would have addressed his anger. I think to just evict him, that was a bad mistake, or a bad outcome.

A psychosocial analysis

Understanding Daniel

Daniel’s bleak story amounts to an archetypal account of how maltreatment and fractured attachments in childhood can determine violent behaviour in adolescence, and corroborates findings from other studies (Renn, 2002; or see Cashmore, 2011 for a comprehensive review). His story, including the shocking account of abuse at the hands of a mother suffering with her own mental health issues accounts for his complex, acute needs, the persistent sense of persecution that characterised his relationships in adulthood, especially those with female support workers. His struggle to sustain the tension between his own needs and those around him leads to his needs becoming steadily more pressing and his isolation and erratic behaviour more pronounced. His anxiety when in “water up to his waist” or in “large groups of people” could be interpreted as a result of

the trauma he experienced in infancy (notably his birth parents' attempt to drown and suffocate him). The violent abuse at the hands of his adoptive family seems to have left him trapped in a fearful, angry attachment pattern. Gripped within an intensely vulnerable affective state he was adopting a veneer of self-sufficiency to mask and defend against intolerable feelings of terror, shame and envy. Those around him who he felt possessed the objects that he lacked – material possessions, and above all, a family to belong to and a place to call home - became the target of his violence. When his psychic defences failed in the face of rejection or disappointment more paranoid psychic processes emerged including hypervigilance for further signs of shaming or rejection. Real or perceived slights gave rise to him unleashing his anger and hostility on those nearest to him who threatened to harm his fragile state, such as fellow residents or professional staff. His shoplifting and violence is triggered primarily by his need to protect and hold onto his own external objects (e.g. games consoles) or precious internal objects (Klein, 1935), such as his grandfather. His turbulent relationship with his younger and equally vulnerable girlfriend could also be attributed to his inability to cope with unbearable feelings, for example fear that she might hurt or abandon him too.

His rage at being abandoned, rejected and then failed by everyone in his life, combined with the inadequacies of some inexperienced, demotivated workers meant his relationships with professionals was infused with a deep mistrust. Daniel comes to see first his social workers and then the hostel staff adults (many of them women) as persecuting, conspiratorial masters who are responsible for the grave injustices he has suffered. The fact that some of the hostel staff are from socially different backgrounds in terms of race and gender intensifies his split view of them, transforming them from poorly trained (and paid) inadequately supervised people struggling to manage other challenges into starkly negative caricatures. Daniel's disparaging (gendered?) appraisal of his female support worker and (racialized?) frustration around the language barriers between him and other staff (shared by Jim) shows how social indices of identity can become entangled with psychic processes.

His violent assault on his psychiatrist seemed to be driven by this mistrust and his sense of a dispassionate psychic detachment on his/her part. The psychiatrist's (presumably well-intentioned) efforts at interpretation misfire disastrously because of Daniel's

defensiveness, but also because the psychiatrist has difficulty communicating with Daniel across a psychic experiential divide. This divide opens up in Daniel's mind because he perceives the psychiatrist to have no experience that mirrors his own. This fissure may well have deepened as a result of Daniel's perception of a difference between him and the psychiatrist in terms of social class too. Maybe it was easier for Daniel to demonise all these professionals than to grieve the loss or lack of his own personal relationships, such as his family or friends. There were serious deficiencies in the way some of these professionals had treated him, such as overtly ridiculing him when he became upset. This confirms Daniel's all or nothing view of workers as people who would "never have a clue". His view is then cemented by the prevailing discourse of professional boundaries and the foregrounding of different racial and gender identities within the hostel. This leads him to experience his relationships with professionals as framed within a sharply defined master-slave dialectic (Lacan, 1977). He becomes a "number in a system", trapped in a "prison"; "not a person anymore". This self-perception translates into an arresting sense of coercive dependency where he feels done-to, not like an agent helping to shape a co-created reality (Benjamin, 2004).

Understanding Jim

Jim's empathy with Daniel arises in part from his own struggle with the repercussions of having a criminal record. This experience gives him an understanding of how hard it can be to shake off externally imposed negative labels and stigma. He knows how it feels to suffer from depression and addiction in the form of alcoholism. His mother's concern and ongoing support sat in stark contrast to Daniel's horrific experience of abuse. His own epiphany and desistance, triggered by his accident resulting in the loss of his unborn child and then his drift into depression and close shave with suicide, seems to have left him with a determination to help young people going through similar tribulations. His choice of career allowed him to generatively restore and redeem damaged parts of himself by seeking to help others. Jim's own experiences of beginning to work through his own issues via a course of (clearly helpful) cognitive behavioural therapy and his professional training seem to have built up a degree of reflexivity. This had enabled him to overcome some of the psychic and social barriers that had determined his life trajectory hitherto. These included struggles with guilt and shame at the loss of his potential child and the impact of his alcoholism on

those close to him. This was all inextricably tied up with notions of real manhood, fatherhood and exacerbated by the stigma he still carried as an ex-offender. His halting description of his aborted suicide attempt showed that these memories were still imbued with considerable affect despite his course of CBT. His initial reluctance to talk openly about parts of his biography that threatened to destabilize his new professional identity illustrates the presence of psychic residue from those events, including some regret and shame, and on-going investment in discourses of male stoicism. These issues needed to be worked through in professional supervision if they were to be better contained when challenging social circumstances arose – a resource that was never made available to Jim or any other staff in the hostel.

Understanding the relationship

This story provides insight into the complex intersubjective dynamics within evolving relationships between young people and workers in settings such as the homeless hostel where Daniel was living. The focus of this psychosocial analysis is less on how Daniel's biographical experience is related to his violent behaviour and more on how it colours his relationships with the many professionals he encounters in the system, and especially Jim. Formulations of professional relationships that emphasise more conscious processes of empathy and dialogue struggle to capture the dynamics between way Daniel, Jim and the other professionals involved. They are all continually negotiating and renegotiating their respective subject positions within surrounding social discourses. The workers' lack of empathy and apparent defensiveness may have been a product of the difficulties they were having diffusing their own fears and anxieties (Menzies-Lyth, 1960). Having responsibility for young people in such distress and dire circumstances would test the most experienced professionals, let alone the often unqualified and unsupervised workers in the hostel.

Jim roots his approach to Daniel in notions of dialogic, empathic practice, mutual respect, authenticity and integrity. Importantly he is able to recognise the separateness of Daniel's subjectivity and the differences between their respective childhood experiences and parental relationships. Jim's persona, rooted in his biographical experiences and social identity as an older, white, working class man who can "look after himself" seems to have surprised and engaged Daniel. He feels that, unlike other professionals he had

encountered, Jim sees him more as an adult and fully “human”. The visit to the university allows Daniel to begin to internalise Jim’s more positive appraisal of him by an older man (Jim) and then a professional male (me) and begin to make some different choices in terms of his behaviour. The experience is in stark contrast to the pervasive negative labelling he experiences from the other workers, some of whom were female. These relationships may well have been subject to negative transferences in Daniel’s mind following his mistreatment by his mentally ill adoptive mother. This all allows Daniel to begin to call into being an alternative less destructive subjectivity based in a more affirming standpoint of the generalised other towards himself (Mead, 1934).

It is far from certain that any worker could have marshalled the disparate voices within Daniel’s subjectivity into a more cohesive whole in such a short timescale. However, Jim’s impromptu decision to allow Daniel to see his own fallibility by disclosing his struggle with alcohol seems to have eased Daniel’s sense that only he was the only young man “born in to the wrong type of family”. It shows that other men can experience internal conflict too. It moves Jim from a master subject position in Daniel’s mind that could have otherwise left Daniel feeling that Jim owned him and that he had nothing to give back. The prominence of this dynamic within his relationships to other professionals was leading to an impasse. When Jim simply contains (Bion, 1962) Daniel’s rage it pulls Daniel up sharply enough for him to ask “who are you?” Not accustomed to Jim’s calm acceptance, he begins to see Jim’s professional interpretation of his behaviour as supportive rather than judgmental and this triggers a potentially transformative internal conversation that seems to have led Daniel to seek a different way to regulate his emotional responses. He begins to experience Jim as a subject like him. The pair move beyond a doer and done to (Benjamin, 2017) relational frame. This prompts Daniel to see the need to apologise to another female professional in the hostel that he feels he has wronged in the past. If Jim had had the opportunity to express more of his own vulnerabilities by becoming his support worker this might have amplified this new voice within Daniel and created room for Daniel to construct a subjectivity less centred on violence. In the end the frailties of the system frustrate Daniel’s emergent agency and induce a recapitulation of Daniel’s long list of broken attachments. Hostel staff are drawn into his re-enactments of previous relationships with his mother and siblings and then they defensively retreat into their own impersonal professional identities.

Any potential to promote desistance is foreclosed because Daniel is again pushed out; evicted by workers who are unwilling or unable to tolerate his challenging behaviour, leaving him abandoned to fend for himself once more. The opportunity to explore the underlying reasons for his violent behaviour and continual conflict with professionals is lost. The implications of all this for Daniel, his equally traumatized and damaged female partner Tracey, and their unborn child (despite Daniel's resolve to desist and redeem himself by being the kind of father that he never had) are deeply troubling. Notwithstanding this, it appears that it was Jim's willingness to share his fallibility that led him and Daniel to fully recognise each-other as subjects. That recognition seemed to generate the most promising route out of the chaos, criminality and violence that had characterised Daniel's life up to that point.

Summary

This case illustrates the potential for desistance promotion that male workers like Jim bring to their work with young men who have a history of maltreatment and loss. It shows how, even within limited time frames, empathic male youth workers can contain young men's emotional affect and defensive projections. If they can do this without retaliating or retreating into their own defensive and/or gendered personal/professional identities this can begin to modify young men's violent behaviour. If they can be reflexive with regards to how their identities have been formed, they might better equipped to discuss with young men how they might do masculinity differently. Specifically, it shows how worker reflexive self-disclosure can form part of a meaningful professional response to youth violence.

Furthermore, it demonstrates the way in which psychosocial theory can be used to explicate offending behaviour, the intersubjective dynamics between young men and male youth workers and how organisational cultures can quash good practice. Interpersonal relationships form a significant part of professional interventions with young people in many contexts, including criminal justice, education and social care. If replicated elsewhere, the systemic failings highlighted by this case paint a worrying picture of some support services for young people like Daniel. Workers in organisations like the one Jim was working in need training and supervision that incorporates a sensibility to the intersubjective, gendered and unconscious dynamics within their relationships and within

the institutions in which they are employed. Training in related fields such as social work and probation in the UK, via the CQSW, traditionally included a consideration of psychodynamics (Vanstone, 2004). This single case study adds weight to the case for maintaining an understanding of psychodynamics within worker training, possibly via the adoption of a psychosocial conceptual framework. Daniel and Jim's story illuminates how individual psyches and social discourses shape the identities and practices of young people and adult workers, the intersubjective dynamics between them and within institutions. Understanding this further might in turn increase the likelihood of achieving more positive outcomes for young people like Daniel who are in dire need of competent adult professional support.

Chapter 8: “Down with the kids”?

Reconceptualising the youth work relationship

In our book ‘Responding to Youth Violence through Youth Work’ (2016) Mike Seal and I argued that youth workers could occupy a prime position in terms of their ability to understand and prevent youth violence. This study set out to scrutinise that claim, by focusing specifically on one aspect of the youth work offer to the field of violence prevention - professional relationships between male youth workers and young men involved in violence. This overarching research aim was distilled into a specific research question – *how do professional relationships between adult male youth workers and young men involved in violence operate to promote desistance?* This question arose from a supposition – that the nature and function of relationships between male workers and young men has perhaps been talked about too loosely, both within and outside the profession, and that this is exemplified by the ‘down with the kids’ discourse being actively championed within policy circles. The intention was to tighten up that loose talk and challenge the orthodox formulation of these youth work relationships on several fronts.

In chapter one I argued that the distinctive formulation of youth work relationships as voluntary, along with the emphasis on improvised, critical practice, presents an opportunity for youth work to secure a distinctive place alongside other professions seeking to engage young people who are involved in crime and violence. I suggested that the current policy context of youth justice in the UK, has become focused on replicable programmes, generalised assessment tools and actuarialism. This means that the youth work profession needs to consider how it conceptualises its professional relationships with young people if it wishes to secure a place on the terrain of desistance promotion. The case studies have shown that a key feature of this repositioning may require an enhancement of the training and support for male workers, especially those who embody the wounded healer, ‘down with the kids’ subjectivity. This final chapter now sets out a vision for how that re-conceptualisation and enhanced training regime might materialise

via a psychosocial framing of male worker and young men's subjectivities and the often intersectional, intersubjective processes within their relationships.

Firstly, I discuss to what extent it might be possible to generalise from the limited number of single sex cases presented in the study. I argue that some generalisation in terms of male to male relationships is possible when the cases are interpreted in conjunction with the wide range of theoretical tools that underpin them. However, without bringing the experiences of women such as those described by the men in these cases lives into much sharper focus, broader implications for work with (and by) women need to remain contingent. After reviewing the cases I offer some insights generated through their interpretation. I set out a rationale for why and how youth work relationships between male workers and young men might be reconceptualised using a psychosocial frame. I argue that this involves the youth work field overcoming its resistance to psychodynamic ideas. I then identify key practice and policy implications for the youth work community of practice and important/critical lessons for the training and support of workers drawn from this application of a new methodological approach to youth work research. The thesis concludes by outlining the promise that a conceptual shift towards psychosocial youth work might reinvigorate debate about youth work relationships generally and their desistance promoting potential.

A word on generalizability

As in all case study work, the selection of the cases and their generalisability can be subject to challenge. According to conventional wisdom individual case studies "cannot provide reliable information about the broader class" (Penguin Dictionary of Sociology, 1984, p34). So, to what extent can these five single sex cases (n=5) produce generalisable findings for the field as a whole? Maruna and Matravers (2007) argue that even sample sizes of 1 (n=1) can offer a "unique opportunity to understand deviance across a life course" (p428) and can be a means of "appreciating and engaging with human subjectivity" (p429). Larger sample sizes according to Gadd and Jefferson (2007) can only offer "depleted caricatures" instead of "internally complex, socially situated subjects" (p4). What is needed, they argue, is detailed observation of everyday interaction.

It is the working through of the entirety and complexity of the data, as it applies in very particular contexts, that enables how and why questions to be adequately broached (p5)

Flyvberg (2011) argues that if case studies are carefully and strategically chosen, intensely and reflexively observed, they can still meaningfully add to the field of academically accumulated knowledge, especially if the case in point contains distinctive or exceptional features. For example, it maybe that the case bucks a trend, in which instance, detailed examination of it could reveal something conceptually about processes, variables and causal mechanisms and yield new concepts. He states:

One can often generalise on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas the 'force of example' and transferability are underestimated (p305).

Were the four male workers chosen for the case studies exceptional, for example with regards to the extent to which they had suffered trauma and loss in their own biographies? Were they unusually fractured or wounded and therefore not representative in any way of the wider pool of male youth workers working in the field of youth violence reduction? Do their stories actually represent idiosyncratic shortcomings in their specific route through professional development that is not replicated in the majority of other male workers? All the cases (except Mark) display differing degrees of emotional intensity. What might we have learned from exploring more cases where this intensity was absent or when young people declined the relationships offered by youth workers?

It is notable that, other than Mark, who was identified early in the research process as having a history of involvement in violence, neither Steve, Chris or Jim gave any sign of the offending and tribulations they later revealed during interviews. They were not chosen for participation in the study on that basis; rather on the basis that they were well-established in youth work roles where violence reduction was a central objective. They were perceived locally as male youth workers with the befitting professional personas and life experiences needed to engage with 'hard to reach' young men. All three had strong professional reputations and were trading on their own personal experiences as part of their

professional offer to young people and the services in which they were employed. If they were atypical, then it could be argued that their cases were still paradigmatic within a professional context such as youth work, where personal experience is often valued as part of worker personas. It is at least likely that men such as these will continue to be drawn to professions such as youth work.

It is the *relatability* or fittingness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of these cases (i.e. the extent to which a reader might recognize them) that I suggest is a more useful concept than generalisability. These stories may have echoes on a wider scale, and there may be some generalisations that can be drawn from each, especially when taken in conjunction with the conceptual tools that accompany them. As real-world manifestations of abstract ideas the cases offer a means to test and refine theories around social constructions of masculinity and young men's pathways to desistance.

That said, as Connell (1995) argues, the social construction of masculinity is always conducted in relational to parallel, but asymmetric, constructions of femininity. The fact that the youth workers and young people were all male, means that how their gendered world was experienced by women is rarely brought into focus. Instead women were presented through the lens of men's projections and banter – and hence not taken seriously. They are depicted as unable to cope with their son's behaviour (Germaine); idealised as angels, or "peachy" and redemptive lovers (Mark) or glossed over as victims of sexual assault with little agency and in need of men's protection (Chris). Through this lens women are seen as the done to, not the doers, reproducing the patriarchal values that underscore the various working-class masculinities vying for the hegemonic position (Connell, 1995). At times their stories of victimisation are edited out as a result of the men's shame, guilt and embarrassment. Hence, we do not know how these women perceive the behaviour and attitudes of their sons, brothers or partners. Bearing in mind Connell's (1995) identification of the persistence of a patriarchal "dividend" that is available to all men, the psychosocial insistence on the need to account for the trials and tribulations within the construction of individual masculinities (Jefferson, 1995) sits uneasily with the need to give voice to the experiences of these women who suffer from the pains of that inequity. Acknowledging the roots of violence in the pain of men's idiosyncratic subject formations creates a need for this to be balanced with research focusing on women's

experiences. This is especially pertinent if the youth work field is to meet the challenge of visioning and building political action on a wider scale.

With that partial focus in mind, can these accounts of young men and male youth workers (and the journeys they take together) still meaningfully inform our understanding of male to male professional youth work relationships? Can we identify how they might be complicit or shake-up patriarchal and heteronormative world views? Why do some of these relationships between men sustain and others break down? How do those that seem to bring about desistance differ from those that do not? How should training regimes shape male youth worker professional identities and incorporate critical gender education? What are we to make of the 'down with the kids' discourse that has come to the fore within the political and professional arena in which youth work operates? And how might a psychosocial framing of relationships inform youth justice policy and systemic efforts to tackle youth violence more widely?

Reviewing the stories

In chapter three, a young black man (Germaine) recounted his childhood experience and how he came to feel the absence of a psychologically available father figure in his life. When his white male youth worker Steve stepped in, Germaine overcame his initial scepticism based on some racialized pre-conceptions and, after exchanging some banter, eventually accepted him as a surrogate father figure in his life. He began to take heed of Steve's advice and moved away from the violent peer culture that had, until then, held sway over him. The case exemplified a relationship between a younger man and an older male youth worker that seemed to have promoted desistance. However, it also illuminated how these relationships contain generationally specific, gendered and unconscious features that a simplistic portrayal of a male worker as a role model to be admired and imitated cannot adequately capture. It questioned how the relationships between male workers and young men that are supposed to challenge the latter collude in the shoring up of street masculinities. It also began to lift the lid on how these relationships are experienced by the adult workers. What emotions and memories do they trigger for them in terms of their own biography and how might these need to be managed and processed as they evolve?

In chapter four we again saw Steve, coping with the trauma following his time as a soldier in the British army, still managing to hold down his job and deliver some effective youth work practice with a young black man (Leon). For both Leon and Steve, the arrival of a new father figure in their childhoods had led to a weakening of their attachment with their mothers. Both had formed a strong attachment to alternative parental figures such as youth workers and some strong, nurturing older women too (grandmothers and local community members). Leon's tendency to "switch" into violent behaviour had brought him into contact with the youth justice system, but the mainly cognitive interventions he experienced there had had minimal impact on his offending. Like Germaine, Leon resolved the losses of his childhood by idealising Steve, the youth worker-cum-father figure. I speculated that his rejection of his female YOT worker may be attributable to the disruption of her largely cognitive-based interventions by the unconscious transference of his feelings of abandonment. These may have originated in his fractured attachment with his mother. However, despite Leon's claim that he could "tell Steve anything", he withheld information about some of his most violent offending. Leon became afraid of disappointing Steve, insecure about what would happen if Steve realised that he was not perhaps heading in the direction Steve wanted him to go. Steve's empathic identification with Leon had led to a reluctance on Steve's part to shake up Leon's life-world by challenging some of his neutralising (Matza, 1964) behaviour. This is an example of how orthodox ideas within youth work training regimes that emphasise the need for worker empathy need to be supplemented with an awareness of the dangers of over identification and projection within relationships. With more support and supervision Steve may have been able to identify how his over identification with Leon was preventing him from challenging Leon about the harm he continued to inflict on other more vulnerable young men around him.

Chapter five began to unpick how some of these questions might be related to difficulties wounded healer youth workers might have in terms of their professional development. It pointed again to the centrality of questions raised at the end of chapter three: what happens if a male youth worker, whose ability to be reflexive has been fractured by damaging prior experiences, seeks to move into generative roles such as youth work? It followed one such wounded practitioner (Mark) as he struggled through the tribulations of becoming a professionally qualified youth worker. Forced to "look after himself" as a child

he was eventually drawn into the hyper-masculine world of football hooliganism, where he took great pride in his ability to “look after himself” in physical fights. For Mark, the issue was not his father’s absence, but his abusive presence and the brutal violence he directed at Mark and his brother. Rather than accept the role of vulnerable victim that he had witnessed his mother intimidated into, Mark eventually identified closely with his father’s powerful and brutal aggression. He coveted allegiances with other violent men and targeted those he perceived to be weaker than himself. Then, according to his account, he met a “peachy” woman who he idealised and thought saw him differently. He experiences an epiphany triggered by the fear of losing her and the social acceptance she offered. As this acceptance increasingly assuaged his own negative self-appraisal, he sought to reverse his offending trajectory. Seeking out an alternative generative future self he embarked on training to be a youth worker. However, Mark’s ability to be reflexive - the capacity to observe the self, whilst being oneself and holding the perspective of the other in mind – was fractured by his early experiences of abandonment and violence. A key feature of this fractured reflexivity lay in his restricted ability to mentalise in a controlled and cognitive rather than automatic and affect-laden fashion. Despite his attempts to reflect on some of his personal baggage, the reflexivity the professional job he sought demanded continued to elude him. His story reiterated the challenges faced by the young men that he was *too wounded* to then go on to work with. Many of these young men were trying to overcome the same psychic and structural determinants as Mark. As a professional working in conditions of high modernity he needed to build his own reflexivity before he could offer the young men an alternative to their ongoing expression of their frustration through violence. The case suggests that a focus on building mentalising ability as part of reflexive cognition and practice would enhance this aspect of professional development regimes.

In chapter six we saw how the muscular, black convert to Islam (Chris) was able to build strong, positive relationships with young marginalised black men, some of whom were gang affiliated and actively perpetrating violence in a socially deprived neighbourhood. When he met Darren, a young black man who was a victim of violence at the hands of his peers, he soon built up a strong, trustful relationship with him. Then, when Darren fell victim to bullying on the basketball court in the youth club, Chris, in an effort to prevent Darren getting hurt, told him to “give up the ball”. I suggested that this could be read as a

metaphor for Chris's approach to supporting Darren in managing his relationships with his male competitors in the street field. Chris was urging Darren to avoid becoming a victim by conceding defeat; an act that would have required Darren relinquishing his defence against shame and vulnerability. This intervention failed, as Darren ignored Chris's advice to back down and hurled himself headlong into further reckless violence. Eventually Darren retreated back into social isolation and Chris, feeling unsupported in the workplace, resigned. Chris needed help to see how his own experiences as a young man, including violence towards young women, had led him to bypass feelings of shame and humiliation. This partly accounted for his creation of a muscular masculine persona that was not easily accessible to more vulnerable young men like Darren. Much of Chris's violent behaviour in his own youth had been a defensive response to trivial disputes and a need to preserve his reputation with other men. Chris needed to process his own guilt arising from this past behaviour, and with support and supervision begin to address how he was bypassing deeper more inaccessible feelings of shame. Drawing on theoretical ideas from relational psychoanalysis and the work of James Gilligan, the case showed how Chris may have missed an opportunity to distinguish between his feelings of guilt and shame and then create a "third space" (Aron, 2013) between him and Darren. In such a space Chris and Darren could have thought through how to support each-other as men who had both perpetrated violence and fallen victim to it too. The case identified this ability to adopt a third position as an active ingredient in enabling agency and therefore desistance promotion with young men. This insight from Gilligan's work and relational psychoanalysis could also feature more prominently in the training and support of male youth workers, supplementing more orthodox notions of dialogical practice.

Finally, in chapter seven we saw Jim, an older man with his own history of offending and alcohol addiction trying to negotiate boundaries for his professional relationship with a singularly vulnerable abuse victim (Daniel) in a homeless hostel for young people. The case employed object relations and Lacanian theory to understand Daniel's violent behaviour and the unconscious roots of organisational defensiveness in the hostel. The case illuminated how youth work relationships can become embedded in a master slave dialectic of doer and done-to. It also showed how this can be shifted when a male worker is willing to be vulnerable. Jim broke the deadlock within his relationship with Daniel by

disclosing his own biographical struggle with addiction. By saying “I’ll go first” Jim disrupted the cycle of shame and blame enveloping Daniel and created the possibility of an absence of coercion within his relationships with adults. In the face of sustained verbal attacks from Daniel, Jim managed to disassemble both his own and Daniel’s defensiveness so they could more fully recognise each-other’s subjectivities and begin to share their vulnerability. Through an act of calibrated self-disclosure Jim found a way to move beyond Daniel’s perception that he was merely being done to by hostile aggressors. These aggressors included female professionals whose help he had declined and a male psychiatrist who Daniel eventually attacked. Jim’s resolute offer of help seemed to enable Daniel to develop a new sense of personal agency.

However, despite generating signs primary desistance within Daniel, Jim’s efforts ultimately floundered in the face of poor and in some cases indefensible professional practices. Drawing on the work of Menzies-Lyth (1960) I suggested that some of these practices, like hiding in offices and behind overly bureaucratic systems, were rooted in the hostel workers’ need to employ their own defences against anxiety. Again, in the absence of sufficient support and supervision, these individual defences then burgeoned into a wider organisational defensiveness that was systemically failing young people like Daniel. Psychodynamic theory (including in its Lacanian guise such as the master-slave dialectic) can enrich the Freirean notion of dialogue by capturing how acts of worker self-disclosure can have potentially transformative psychological impacts within dialogical interaction. Again, these insights could be usefully incorporated into professional training and support regimes.

These dyadic case studies all sought to provide different answers to the question of how relationships between male workers and young men can promote desistance from violence. Each focused on different features of the intersubjective processes that exchanged between the male workers and the young men. All of these men (both the workers and young people) were to a greater or lesser extent, coping with histories of offending and trauma in their own biographies. All three workers appeared to ascribe to a greater or lesser extent to the ‘down with the kids’ trope. They had all built meaningful relationships with young men that other professionals had found hard to reach.

The leeway granted by the informal nature of youth work methodology, especially the voluntary, improvised nature of the relationship, seemed to open up possibilities for desistance promotion that had eluded other professionals. This may have been as a result of the mandatory requirements placed on professionals in those other fields and/or the gendered, racialised assumptions of the young men. The workers were all older men with life experiences that meant that they could identify and empathise with the young men they encountered. This experience also meant that they were not shocked by the crime, violence, aggression and, in some cases brutality, they encountered. However, each of these seemingly proficient male youth workers were faced with struggles in their psychic and social worlds. Some of their past experiences had left a persistent psychic residue that, in the absence of sufficient support and supervision, was leaking into their practice, hampering its effectiveness. This psychic residue had also amalgamated with their investment in classed, gendered and racialized discourses. This meant that, until more reflexive processes were triggered within the research process, the possible impact of that residue on the effectiveness of their working practices was left largely tacit.

Practice and policy implications

Restating and reconceptualising the centrality of relationships versus risk management programmes

The emergence of a new orthodoxy of actuarialism and risk management in criminal and youth justice, combined with demands for greater accountability for resources, require the youth work profession to clearly delineate its own objectives and techniques when operating on the terrain of crime reduction and desistance. Risk assessment technologies and programmed cognitive skills training programmes that pervade practice within Youth Offending Teams, despite their strengths in terms of standardising practice, will not easily translate into the more fluid, intersubjective youth work interventions described in preceding chapters. These stories chart some male workers' success and failure, but any attempt to seek to isolate variables to replicate would overlook and obscure the intrinsic complexity of the psychic and social factors at play. These include male workers and young men making psychic investments in a range of social discourses such as, for example, 'surrogate fathers', 'bad men' and 'ex-bad' men who are 'down with the kids; or 'peachy'

women who can turn 'bad men' into 'better men', or who need a male partner to impose discipline on unruly sons. This suggests that the desistance promoting potential of youth work relationships identified within the stories cannot be easily quantified or standardised into models of best practice.

That said, this study demonstrates that elements of transformative practice do not entirely elude description. It may be that, whilst not offering a model with universal applicability, the conceptual insights generated through this small psychosocial study can inform research and practice in both youth offending teams and youth work settings. The cases provide evidential support for at least equal emphasis to be placed on exploring intersubjective dynamics within practice. This means focusing on 'who works best with whom and how' questions as much as identifying the relative efficacy of programmatic interventions (what works).

Moreover, the cases also suggest that the orthodox Rogerian and Freirean framing of youth work relationships, outlined in chapter 2, need reconceptualising if practitioner skills rather than programme ingredients are to be foregrounded. These theoretical frames are powerful as a basis for forming empathic relationships and as an antidote to hard psychological and sociological determinism. But they struggle to capture how such relationships might help young people overcome the psychic resistance and social determinants that can derail desistance pathways. The psychosocial frame explicated in this thesis opens up new possibilities. It can theorise how reflexive male workers, operating at the intersection of agency and structure and as figures for identification, can provide the means for young men facing multiple disadvantage, to engage in new, less destructive internal conversations. It can help explain how young men involved in violence can invest in new, maybe less violent subjectivities. Other formative figures in these young men's lives, such as female partners, mothers or even their own children, can then engage in ongoing conversations as young men travel further along their desistance pathways.

Assets and shortcomings of the male-worker-as-role model

The cases show that understanding how male workers arrive into the worker-as-role-model subject position, what baggage they bring with them, and how and why they continue to psychically invest in that discursive identity, is key to understanding the desistance

promoting potential of their practice. They show the extent to which professional youth work relationships can be transformative but also reach an impasse. Young people track their youth workers, consciously and unconsciously, and this requires male workers to be open about the way their own unconscious processes enter in to the mix. They need be willing to accept the cycles of rupture and repair that inevitably disrupt but also form their relationships with young men. They also need to be able to see their own complicity in the inevitable re-enactments that are at the heart of any relationship-based work.

So-called home grown male workers bring a kind of insight into the community that an outsider might not have. On first impressions workers in this mould seem to bring much to the task of responding to violence, especially when the young men to be engaged are often mistrusting of adults. Through growing up in the area they have often acquired a large dose of street social and masculine capital with the young men in their area. This can then be cashed in when they need to gain access to key figures in the community. Their empathy for the personal and social challenges faced by the young men can help them to fully recognise young men's evolving subjectivities in ways that others professionals might find harder to do. Informal and resolute efforts to offer practical assistance and other advice and guidance provided by male youth workers may ultimately be more fruitful than more formulaic and de-contextualised interventions designed to manage risk.

However, the study highlights that the male youth worker as role model or 'down with the kids' subject position should not be so idealised that it becomes immune to critical analysis either. It cannot and should not avoid questions of young people's responsibility for their violent actions or the choices that they make. If young people avoid responsibility for assaults and violent attacks on others (as we saw in the case of Leon) they can go on to inflict further physical and psychological trauma on new victims. This denial of responsibility ultimately also leads to their own continued entanglement in the criminal justice system that further restricts their opportunity to build a purposeful, fulfilling life for themselves. Where interventions do not yield results in terms of different choices and desistance this needs to be seen as a serious practice shortcoming. The cases reveal some of these shortcomings in terms of worker over identification with young men and reluctance to self-disclose. If a psychosocial, relationship and skill-based approach with young offenders is to be offered as an alternative to risk based approaches to managing

young offenders, the emphasis on relationships needs to be stringently evaluated. This evaluation needs to use the same benchmark in terms of success and failure as that directed at programmed interventions.

The ready availability of a discourse of father deficit means that young men often do invest in an idea of older male youth workers as mentors and father figures. However, male worker's professional identity formation can interweave with their personal biography in ways that neither party are consciously aware of. Like young men, some older male workers who are attracted to the youth work profession may also be struggling with feelings of loss and envy, some of which may be fuelling the psychic idealisation or vilification of women in their lives. Some of the cases presented in this thesis show relationships that were probably meeting the needs of the worker more than the young men and where the worker's own perturbations had become inseparable from the task.

For male workers with their own history of offending, finding employment within youth work can provide them with much needed social mobility. The journey from early involvement in criminal activity and move into a more generative stage in their own life cycle as a youth worker may provide a powerful redemptive script with which to make sense of their own lives. Professional qualification provides a route through the social barriers which confront them. Finding meaning and purpose through the generativity offered by a youth work role can cement their own secondary desistance and therefore reduce, or even remove, the possibility of more victims of violence (Maruna, 2001). However, without sufficient training and support such 'down with the kids' workers can become prone to *going* 'down with the kids' too. That is, they can descend into professional burnout and even, should their circumstances change, return to the more troubling aspects of their former selves. The changing professional context of youth work means it is unlikely that professional development and managerial structures will provide the financial and ideological sustenance for the intensive support and supervision of workers that these cases suggest is required.

Nothing new?

All of the helping professions (social work, probation, drug workers, peer mentor schemes, youth justice) face the same difficulty of how to prevent burnout and maintain worker

reflexivity, especially where workers bring their own history of offending to the role. Researchers within probation and psychotherapy have long recognised the need for workers to be aware of their values and their ‘baggage’ (Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Crits-Christoph et al, 2006; Rex, 1999). There are limited existing examples of criminological research that has observed the construction of wounded healer subjectivities and how this enables rehabilitation, along with some more problematic aspects such as over identification (LeBel et al 2015; Maruna, 2001). This study augments this research in that it has focused on a professional field (youth work) that has arguably not grasped the nettle of worker wounds and reflexivity as determinedly as other professions such as psychotherapy. Through the longitudinal observation of youth work professionals *in action* it has provided some much-needed detail as to how their relationships with young people operate inter-subjectively. The specific area under consideration here, relationships between *male workers and young men*, had not been examined in such depth within the youth work literature previously. The application of a specifically psychosocial criminological perspective, and especially psychodynamic ideas, within this context for youth work is uncharted territory. The lessons generated, I suggest, extend beyond a concern about worker reflexivity and burnout. They highlight the benefits of a psychosocial re-conceptualisation of subjectivity and inter-subjective processes within these youth work relationships.

The value of a psychosocial conceptualisation of youth work relationships – incorporating psychodynamic perspectives

Without a comprehensive theoretical framework much youth work, especially that conducted with the aim of desistance promotion, risks becoming not fit for purpose or irrelevant. A psychosocial configuration offers such a framework, but it involves taking psychodynamic perspectives on subjectivity and inter-subjectivity seriously. This does not mean the youth worker’s role becomes one where he/she sits neutrally outside the relational field conducting some kind of psychic surgery. Rather the worker is located squarely within it; not as some reified objective detached observer but as someone seeking to understand and make sense of a co-created reality. This involves making him or herself available to the young person as another thinking, feeling being within whom young people can see there is another subjectivity ‘at home’. Workers need to be willing to be affected

and moved by what young people say, fully aware of how it reverberates within their own lifeworld. As Frogett argues,

What appears to be lacking in much current practice is an understanding of the generative intersubjective space in which the relationships between practitioners and the people they work with are the prime medium of intervention. (Frogett, 2002, p92)

Adopting a psychosocial frame also opens up the possibility of employing key psychodynamic insights into inter-subjectivity and relationships rooted in the notion of the unconscious mind, such as transference and countertransference. These insights enrich a model of relationships between the young person and youth worker in that they acknowledge the interaction between two unconscious minds. These minds are operating within power relations that are both symmetrical and asymmetrical. What emerges is a view of relationship in which two defended subjects, both knowing and unknowing, defend against each-other and the altering patterns of their interpersonal relationships. The challenge for workers becomes whether they can form a fundamentally interdependent relationship - a third space. In this space which they and the young people can identify with each other, but also recognise and contain each-other too. This opens up possibilities for the worker to utilize his/her feelings towards young people for the young person's benefit through self-disclosure. Behaviour such as violence becomes more comprehensible within dyads if both parties can avoid foisting on the other a template of previous relationships imbibed in the course of development. The impact of past biographical experiences within these relationships may be out of either party's conscious awareness. Promoting desistance therefore involves sustaining recognition processes that can apprehend these different experiences, separate positions of self and other, and acknowledge interdependence.

Working with youthful masculinities: Implications for feminist inspired single sex work with young men

The reflexive use of social street and masculine capital (Ilan, 2013; Sandberg, 2014, de Visser et al, 2009) by male youth workers can be effective when seeking to engage with young men. This is especially the case with young men whose psychic, linguistic and embodied investment in discourses of strength and invincibility may be serving the purpose

of warding off feelings of vulnerability. However, there are political and ethical tensions inherent in the practice of male youth workers who seek to provide new means for identification for young men for whom hyper masculinity has become a preferred gender performance. Professional identities can become complicit in the continued sustenance of patriarchal power. Constructions of men as “down with the kids” “gay”, “booky”, or “geeky”, and of women as “peachy”, “promiscuous” or “angels” can all serve to reinforce essentialised gendered identities. Workers need space to reflect on these constructions before engaging in work with young men and women who may adopt these identities themselves or use them to dominate and disparage others. This has pressing, and in some ways, paradoxical implications for anti-sexist, single-sex work with young men. Before young men can adopt new, less defensive gender identities, male workers may need to find ways to relinquish their own embodiment of these identities. Only then can they enable young men to relinquish the power such identities grant them in the street field. In a paradoxical sense male workers need to disempower aspects of themselves as adult men in order to empower young men to dis-empower themselves.

Maximising the desistance promoting potential of their practice involves male workers going further than simply offering a mixture of practical advice and emotional support as role models for young men to imitate. Reciprocal identification can drift into over identification and pre-reflexive complicity with some aspects of a hyper-masculine identities. This may be part of the reason why, despite male worker efforts to intervene, some young men’s desistance is piecemeal or their violent behaviour and misogynistic attitudes continue unabated. This task is further complicated when intersections of class, race, and sexuality inflect male subject positions that are being constructed within contemporary late modern society. Hegemonic discourses still endorse norms and serve the ideological purpose of maintaining power inequities by idealising or devaluing certain subject positions. Intersecting identity categories are not necessarily coercive, foreclosing and oppressive; they can facilitate growth. However, achieving differentiation without splitting and essentialism is a challenge for male workers. For example, we have seen how the social construction of a youthful black masculinity that valorises not backing down mandates a psychic splitting in order to avoid the loss of social approval. Male workers need to understand how culture forms and enters into their relationships with young men,

many of whom will be differentially positioned within these intersecting indices of identity. Professional youth work training needs therefore to incorporate consideration of how intersectional identities coalesce into male worker dispositions and how these relate to late modern youthful masculinities.

There is still a need to accumulate more case studies to better understand how young women are constructing their identities in late modernity and how this might be drawing them into violent subcultures either as perpetrators or victims. Further research could apply the psychosocial lens to focus on relationships between male and female workers and young women. This could examine how male and female workers might actively seek to disrupt gender norms and help young women extricate themselves from abusive or sexually exploitative relationships with young men.

Holding onto the social

Youth work's commitment to critical practice need not be diminished via an engagement with these psychosocial conceptualisations of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. The body of *relational* psychodynamic literature, with its emphasis on mutuality, offers a complementary addendum to the Freirean notion of dialogue. Incorporating a psychosocial perspective does not necessarily mean that problems such as youth violence become abstracted from their social context. Rather it demands that workers consider the impact of social factors such as poverty, discrimination and repressive social policies on young people's lives. As is evident in this study, a psychosocial lens can reveal the continuing pervasive influence of these structural (outer world) factors on young peoples' psychically constructed (inner) worlds.

For example, while acts of violence perpetrated by young people do and should attract disapproval, state neglect or abuse of power (sometimes administered through professionals) is harder to recognise. Psychosocial case studies can incorporate analysis that views this abuse as a tacit form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991). This social violence is experienced by young people as an ongoing, creeping sense of malaise that can begin to shape their view of the world and of the professionals engaging with them. For example, this study has revealed a youth workforce bedevilled by short term funding and penetrated by intrusive forms of managerialism. It has shown how, if left unaddressed,

misguided social policy can result in the collapse of potentially transformative intersubjective spaces under the weight of bureaucracy, organisational defensiveness and poor, indefensible professional practices. This can leave young people, many of whom have already experienced loss, rejection and abandonment feeling even more isolated, hopeless and likely therefore to lash out at those trying to help them. Rather than fostering desistance promoting relationships, policy and practice can fuel young people's violence and exacerbate the sense of anger and fear within the wider community. This then leads to renewed calls for further oppressive state and professional action. It is essential that all youth workers understand how their own practice could act to collude unintentionally with this cycle of symbolic violence and find meaningful collective ways to challenge it.

Final word

In sum, this study has shown that training and support for male youth workers working with young men involved in violence could and indeed, should, include the cultivation of a psychosocial sensibility. This sensibility incorporates a deeper, psychosocial understanding of worker reflexivity and its significance within the distinctive practice of male youth workers working in the field of youth violence. In turn this implies an urgent need to reinvigorate a professional commitment to high quality, routinised worker supervision. This professional supervision, especially that conducted with male workers who have their own history of involvement in violence, could emphasise and utilise a number of well - established psychodynamic concepts. These could include: reciprocal and over-identification, projection, transference, recognition, containment, mentalisation and its function within reflexivity, a distinction between guilt and bypassed shame, the function of third space within professional relationships, and the deleterious impact of personal and organisational defensiveness. These concepts should not be seen as a replacement for, or alternative to, the Rogerian and Freirean orthodoxy that has dominated youth work's theoretical base. Neither does the valuing of these concepts preclude the need to focus on wider social factors in young men's desistance, such as the impact of local subcultures, hegemonic discourses of masculinity, persistent social deprivation and lack of opportunities. Rather they should be seen as fruitful supplements to the orthodox conceptualisation of youth work relationships that offer the means to enhance the

desistance promoting potential of the practice of male youth workers, especially those that embody a 'down with the kids' subjectivity.

The study has also shown that the fusing of two seemingly contradictory epistemologies is at least possible, if not entirely comfortable. The uneasiness of the epistemological encounter comes from the tension between the grounded and participatory methodologies associated with youth work research and the more top-down imposition of theoretical precepts associated with psychoanalysis. I hope to have shown how it is possible to manage this tension and adopt a dialogical approach to theory and data analysis in psychosocial research. This may encourage youth practitioners and students already engaging in a degree of reflective practice to adopt these methods in their own research practice. Youth work is a relational endeavour and therefore requires relational methods to understand it fully. This study shows how power can be mediated within those relationships to transformative effect. It leaves room for some hope that despite the persistence of structural inequality, amidst highly gendered and often racialized preconceptions, it is possible for workers' relationships with young people to create meaningful change through inter and intra-personal processes. Youth workers are unlikely (and should not seek) to ever operate as highly skilled psychotherapists, or for that matter cognitive behavioural therapists or person-centred counsellors. The conceptual intricacies detailed here need translating into the day-to-day praxis of the average face-to-face youth worker in youth clubs and communities across the UK. I do suggest though that a greater psychosocial sensibility on the part of youth workers is at the very least an achievable aim. I hope that this study's call for such a sensibility can at the very least reinvigorate debate as to what youth workers can offer to the wider endeavour of youth violence prevention.

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Appendices

Chapter 7 forms the basis of a published article.

Harris, P. (2017) "Inter-Subjectivity and Worker Self-Disclosure in Professional Relationships with Young People: A Psychosocial Study of Youth Violence and Desistance". *Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 56, 4, p516-531

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