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“Just give up the ball’’: In search of a third space in relationships between male youth workers and young men involved in violence.

Abstract

This paper critically examines the employment of male youth workers in the field of youth crime prevention. It focuses on how their relationships with young men involved in violence might (or might not) support young men and promote desistance. It does this via the presentation of a single psychosocial case study that examines the relationship between a black male youth worker and a young black man who becomes involved in violence and then falls victim to violence to other young men in his neighbourhood. It illuminates how some male workers’ resources of masculine and street capital may be advantageous in terms of reaching some young men, but may also create barriers to reaching others. The study focuses on how both men in the case struggle to “give up the ball” – a metaphor the paper adopts for the act of conceding masculine capital in the street field. I suggest that for the relationship to provide the support this young man needed it required the creation of a *third space* between him and his youth worker; that is, a vantage point from where they could both examine their masculinity and how this was related to their respective psychic vulnerabilities. I argue that the two men’s investments in *different* discourses of masculinity were more significant (in terms of the desistance promoting potential of their relationship) than the *similarity* in their racial or class backgrounds. The case highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of youth work relationships and for provision of adequate support and supervision for all male workers that incorporates the thorough consideration of their personal and professional identity formation, especially the most heavily gendered aspects.

Key words: Desistance, Masculinities, Relationships, Youth Work, Youth Violence, Psychosocial

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Introduction

The foregrounding of older men as solutions to rising rates of youth violence and knife crime, especially within socially excluded, working class and black communities, has recently found support within the media and political arenas in the UK. Some schemes promote older black men as positive role models (see Home Affairs Select Committee Report, 2007 and the Mayor of London's plan to pair 100 black or dual heritage NEET young men with 100 black men <http://100bml.org>). Other schemes valorise the employment of older men with a history of some involvement in violence (see for example, Taylor, 2007; Bryant, 2011; Keeling, 2016). Such schemes are arguably premised on the hope that these older men may be at an advantage in terms of engaging with young men involved in violence. The hope expressed in such schemes is that young men involved in violence will psychically identify with the older male workers (see parts of themselves in them) and follow their pathways towards desistance. This promotion of workers who are seen as streetwise and 'down with the kids' is coming to the forefront of youth social policy at a juncture when public concern about levels of serious youth violence and knife crime in the UK are rising (Harris, 2019; Dodd, 2019).

The changing professional context of youth work in the recent past (austerity and cuts to services) raises questions as to whether the professional development and managerial structures will be able to provide the financial and ideological sustenance for the intensive support and supervision that these workers may require (Harris, 2019). Practice literature

across the fields of youth justice, social work and probation often highlights the crucial importance of worker/client relationships (e.g. Burnett and McNeill, 2005). Drake et al (2014) express concern that, “The relationship between young people and practitioners is the centrepiece of youth justice provision, yet little research-based knowledge has accumulated on its minutiae” (p22). They argue that this absence calls for a research agenda aimed at delineating a more nuanced understanding of practice relationships.

This paper seeks to provide such a nuanced understanding and critically examine the rhetorical trope of the older youth worker/mentor via a single psychosocial case study of a young black man and his older, black, male youth worker. The case deliberately seeks to counteract dominant discourses that often position young black men from working class backgrounds as hypermasculine perpetrators of violence. It does this by choosing as its focus a young, working class black man struggling to live up to a street-styled tough masculinity who reluctantly engages in violence but then falls victim to violence at the hands of other young men in his neighbourhood. The study focuses on the young man’s relationship with his older black, male youth worker who has his own experiences of violence as both perpetrator and victim. It utilises the psychoanalytic concepts of identification and ‘third space’ in tandem with sociological concepts of field theory, street social capital and intersectionality to develop an integrated psychosocial analysis of the intersubjective dynamics of their relationship. It does this in order to highlight those features of the relationship and of youth work practice in this context that may (or may not) have desistance promoting potential.

The analysis specifically and intentionally focuses in on some of the more gendered elements within their relationship and the struggle both men have to “give up the ball” – a metaphor I adopt for the act of conceding masculine capital in the street field. I argue that if the worker

had felt more able to disclose his own vulnerability this may have opened up an intersubjective *third space* between himself and the young man; that is, a vantage point from where they could both examine their psychic investments in the pursuit of masculine capital. The case exemplifies how the offering of the older, racially symmetrical male subject position as a self-evident solution to youth violence can sometimes obscure important gendered and unconscious factors within professional relationships that eclipse the demographic match of characteristics such as class and race. It concludes that this highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of youth work relationships and provision for the adequate support and supervision for all male workers incorporating the thorough consideration of their personal and professional identity formation, especially the most heavily gendered aspects.

A psychosocial conceptual frame

The body of empirical and theoretical work that emerged under the auspices of psychosocial studies from the University of East London in the early 1980s and the psychosocial criminological field that has since emerged (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007) seeks to offer more than the combination of psychological and social factors to explain behaviour. This conception of psychosocial 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). It is distinguishable by its concern to blend contemporary branches of psychodynamic thought, notably Kleinian object relations (Klein, 1946, 1957) and relational psychoanalysis (Aron, 2008; Ogden, 2009) with post-structural, sociological insights (Foucault, 1980) into a range of cultural phenomena. The subject becomes both a centre of agency and the subject of external forces. This allows the consideration of psychodynamic processes such as identification and defence 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 (e.g. Clark et al, 2008; Jones, 2013). Psychosocial researchers anticipate that individual psyches will alter how subjects position themselves (and psychically invest in) competing discourses (Foucault, 1980) and social identities in the form of class, gender, and race, seeking to capture the psychological function this serves for them.

As LeBel (2015) and Maruna (2001) have argued, for some men with a history of involvement in crime and violence, working as professionals with younger men opens up possibilities for generative (Erikson, 1959) activity (i.e. that which seeks to benefit future generations and meet their own needs for meaning and redemption). The belief within policy and professional discourse that these relationships will have desistance promoting potential can bring adult men with a need to make sense of their own lives together with young men struggling to make sense of theirs too. These relationships can involve processes of *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). This process of identification, along with other unconscious processes such as transference and projection, can operate back and forth (with more or less reciprocity) in dyadic, intersubjective professional relationships (Drake et al, 2014).

The field of relational psychoanalysis has identified how the use of these processes of reciprocal identification and self-disclosure by therapist or professional can create a *third space* (Aron, 2008) within relationships that avoids the emergence of a two-way, 'doer and done-to' dynamic (Benjamin, 2007). The concept of third space refers to a reflexive space in subjects' minds outside the dyadic relationship that creates a vantage point from which both

parties can view the other and the self. Ogden's notion of the analytic third (2009) seeks to verbally symbolise the nature of this experience of the pair – the interplay of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in a therapeutic space within which each individual creates, negates and preserves the other. Ogden claims this space can be used by professionals to create a new matrix of meanings around past experiences – a past created in the now – which can be used to examine behaviour, including impasses that are stymying healthy interaction and development.

Bourdieu's spatial metaphor of *field* (1975) allows us to conceive of all social actions as taking place within hierarchical, nested domains with an internal logic; a set of durable dispositions, values and practices, both linguistic and embodied. Within these domains, social actors exist in relation to one another and struggle over particular "profits that are at stake" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p97). 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 physical and symbolic arena of 'the street' can be conceived as a semi-autonomous field that offers actors within it some locally-specific empowering discursive positions. The concept of street social capital (Sandberg, 2014; 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 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 marginalised young people. In the

hands of a youth practitioner who shares a *social* identity rooted in those localised, classed, racialised and gendered constructions, this knowledge can form part of a so-called streetwise professional identity. Youth 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). The inability or unwillingness to concede masculine capital, having the resolve to admit vulnerability and 'walk away' from confrontations, either those of a physical nature or those issued through social media platforms, can be an important factor in the triggering and escalation of street violence between young men (Harris, 2018). These confrontations are often conducted within locally specific rule structures that Elijah Anderson has conceptualised as the 'code of the street' (1999). Who wins and loses in these confrontations and competitions will be determined by how men's masculinities are constructed in more or less hegemonic, complicit or marginalised forms (Connell, 1995). Connell's (1995) theory of multiple masculinities has become a prerequisite for understanding the construction of masculinities and 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 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 that are available to men from middle class (hegemonic) backgrounds. In response they turn to the

mobilisation of one of their only resources, physical strength and to the defence of their own turf. Denied the respect of others they create a subculture that revolves around machismo, masculine power and respect.

As Les Back (2004) argues, alternative positions within the field can be disproportionately limited for young working-class and marginalised black men, as a dominant perception of them as hypermasculine, “undesirable, violent, dangerous and aggressive” (p32) works to further constrain the subject positions that they might adopt to the ‘hard man’ or gangster. Majors and Bilson (1993) characterized black young men’s identity construction as *cool pose* – an embodied masculine 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, 1947) in wider society.

In the street field, young, black working-class men with an alternative embodied masculinity and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) – a different cognitive and behavioural disposition that emphasises, say, intellectual ability or emotional openness - must quickly learn to perform like ‘real’ men or develop viable alternatives. Some young men, such as those John Pitts met in his study “Reluctant Gangsters” (2008), become involved in or affiliated to violence involuntarily and “first and foremost, by a concern for their physical safety” (p101). This may present a distinct set of challenges for older male youth workers whose embodied masculinity allies with the ‘cool pose’ construction, especially when they are seeking to engage with young men who do not fit the dominant perception of them as hypermasculine.

Intersectional analyses of identity (Crenshaw, 1991) explain how the full range of markers of social difference, such as race, class, gender, sexuality and age all intersect to create diverse identities and cumulative experiences of oppression. Such analyses argue that intersectionality offers a framework which can aid understanding of the ways in which oppression can become additive, cut across traditional binaries (male/female and black/white) and change over time. An intersectional frame highlights that more one-dimensional models of power and oppression risk failing to capture the reality of contemporary life for young people from different class, racial and ethnic backgrounds. Criminologists (e.g. Potter, 2015) have increasingly begun to argue for the utility of intersectional analysis in the context of crime. For example, Philips and Webster (2013) have explored how “complex configurations of identity and difference” require a

more considered and serious view of the complexity of ethnic identities, the changing and negotiated nature of identities, their blurring and simplification through reduction in racialisation processes (p185).

Male workers working with young men involved in violence could therefore be conceptualised as a group of social actors operating within a street field that offers up, but also constrains, discursive masculine identities. This field may be one where older and younger men might identify with each-other but at the same time be engaged, consciously or unconsciously in the pursuit of masculine capital and also, as defended subjects, be unaware of how vulnerability operates in their two-way dyadic relationships. The prospect of opening up a third space (Ogden, 2009) between them – an intersubjective psychic space in which they might be able to examine their vulnerabilities and psychic investments in the social discursive identities available to them in the street field, might offer the possibility of moving

beyond the culturally fixed dynamics that can restrict their personal development and progress through desistance pathways.

Methodology

This case is drawn from a wider doctoral study that sought to examine relationships between male youth workers and young men involved in violence in the U.K. The study adopted a psychosocial epistemological frame (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007) and is based on a series of Free Association Narrative Interviews (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013) conducted with a young black man - Darren (2 interviews, each 1 hour long) and an older black male youth worker - Chris (2 interviews, each 1 ½ hours long). These interviews were supplemented with material selected from ethnographic observation, field notes, text messages, telephone and informal conversations gathered over a 2-year period. During interviews an effort was made to consider not only what respondents said but *how* they said it, what they struggled to say and what they could not or did not say. Silences and pauses were included within transcription in order to produce provisional hypotheses based on contradictions, inconsistencies and avoidances.

As with all case study work, the study did not seek to offer objectivity, generalisability or replicability but rather to reveal the meaningful links between experience and structure within the selected relational encounter. 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. The

distinctive formulation of this case (as longitudinal and therefore incorporating dynamic change) strengthened the opportunity for meaningful theoretical generalisation, despite the n=1 sample size.

Data analysis was underpinned by the principle of *gestalt* i.e. the belief that it is impossible to achieve an understanding of structured totals by starting with the ingredient parts which enter into them. The portraits were read and re-read in conjunction with youth work, desistance and psychosocial literature. 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 in an attempt to engender synthesis of their disparate elements into a whole. These were then offered for discussion with colleagues from other methodological traditions who offered their alternative interpretations. This helped to ensure that interpretation was informed by a dialectic between psychosocial theory and alternative conceptual frameworks.

The research was approved by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee. Both participants were regularly reminded of the option to withdraw from the research, given contact details of independent support/counselling agencies and provided with a clear complaint procedure. 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.

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 working-class community in which he had grown up and was very well-versed in the territoriality of the various local neighbourhoods. Chris 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. He commented that he was one of the only local boys who, “had a dad, father in the house” and described his family as being “not gang members, not violent, not criminals” but “known” as “bruisers”.

He had since been diagnosed as dyslexic as an adult, but this was not detected at school. By the age of 15 Chris had begun to lose interest in mainstream education and was spending most of his time in class “dossing”. He would often be “kicked out” of the classroom for “silly stuff” and was demoted to the “bottom set” something he said he was “happy about”. He left school with no GCSE’s but managed to 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 he attacked another student following a minor dispute. He was suspended. Chris was allowed to return to college but felt he was perceived differently by the teachers from then on.

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.

Chris 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, but he found that he had an affinity with the ideas being discussed and he did well enough to apply to University to train as a youth worker. There, he met an older black lecturer (John) who seemed to rival his father as a figure of identification and to whom he attributed huge influence.

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?

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. I don't know why I'm getting so emotional *****, you mess me up today...

Chris secured a youth work job in the area where he had grown up. Using his physical presence to confront the young men, some of whom overtly challenged him, and his local knowledge and reputation as leverage, he was able to initiate various sports and educational

projects, mainly focused on issues around identity development. Chris's working practices were not always in line with local policies and procedures (keeping the building open for longer than officially sanctioned for example) but his line manager, who seemed to like Chris and was supportive of his approach, turned a pragmatic 'blind eye'. Chris came into 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 he was able to reduce violent incidents involving young people significantly.

Darren

Darren was a quietly spoken and slight in stature 19-year-old British African Caribbean young man living in a working-class inner-city neighbourhood. He was keen to depict himself as distinct from his peers and took satisfaction in employing a wide vocabulary. His whole story was pervaded with a continuous struggle to avoid "trouble". At 11, he entered his local secondary school. Fights with other boys triggered by minor disputes would 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.

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 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.

When Darren witnessed another boy being stabbed in a fight, he came to the realization that continued association with his peers could 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.

However, removing 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.

Outside of formal interviews, Darren told me that he thought Chris's practical advice and efforts to offer counsel had had real 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 conversations that flowed organically between them had prompted Darren to consider alternative pathways in his life. That said, he still seemed to be aware that any protection Chris could offer was not 24/7 and could not offer immunity from the violence within his environment. Chris acknowledged this too, but felt he had aided Darren's passage through what was, and continued to be, a very challenging period in his development.

At the time of our 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 weeks later, 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 to me the nature of this "mental state" and closed down any further discussion of his past, and his relationship with Chris. Chris confirmed that he had also not been closely involved with Darren for some time.

A psychosocial analysis

One reading of this story would seek to foreground the structural and intersecting constraints bearing down on these two black men growing up in a socio-economically deprived inner-city neighbourhood beset by endemic violence. Darren and Chris's story illustrates the difficulties some young black men face in avoiding the intersecting effects of class disadvantage, racism, deprivation and violence in some urban communities. It provides further evidence of how some young men can become "reluctant gangsters" (Pitts, 2008) as a result of their need for personal safety and status. During the time I observed Chris he had formed lasting meaningful relationships with many other young men, many of whom were gang-affiliated or 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. His resources of street capital were viewed as an asset in terms of reaching the marginalised young working-class black men in the neighbourhood where he now worked as a youth worker. However, to fully appreciate the form and function of his relationship with Darren we need to understand both Chris's and Darren's personal journeys through adolescence into adulthood. A psychosocial analysis can help illuminate how their different psychic investments in different discourses of masculinity may have been a hindrance to some types of change for Darren, and therefore perhaps, other young men like him.

Chris had grown up in a family where he had 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 public, Chris seemed to

have acquired the resolve to walk away from direct physical confrontation with other men, whilst 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. He felt comfortable within the physical geographical no-go areas of inner-city neighbourhoods where violence was prevalent and where his local knowledge and social identity gave him access, credibility and acceptance.

However, his recounting of the “dickhead” encounter in the street (which still rankled with him) showed how he could still feel emasculated by those experiences in his social world. Conceding any physical vulnerability remained more difficult than continuing to rely on his physical and emotional toughness. His ongoing psychic discomfort when recalling this incident indicated that there may have been, at the time of the interview (and therefore when he was engaging with Darren too) still some residual no-go areas within his own sense of self. Whilst inhabiting the role of male mentor to young men like Darren, Chris may have had to expend considerable emotional energy refashioning his own identity and containing feelings that had the potential to upset and disorientate him, as his comment “I don’t know why I’m getting so emotional” indicates.

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 secondary school ethnically and with insufficient resources of masculine and social street capital in his peer group, his relationships with peers had become tinged with antagonism and risk. His

alternative masculine subjectivity that emphasised intellect and career progression meant him struggling with the pursuit of "profits at stake" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) within the masculine street field. He had lived in fear of isolation and attack but also the possibility that his own retaliatory, defensive actions 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 a brave underdog could be read as a means of fending off the feelings of emasculation and impotency that threatening experiences in his social world had engendered. The fights he engaged in as a perpetrator with his peers appear to have eventually prompted Darren to re-evaluate his actions and consider desisting from direct further involvement in violence. 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 self-esteem in the face of 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. Eventually, Darren felt impelled to withdraw not only from the street field but also from the broader social world too. For Darren, the frightening environment of the street field and the fact that he felt he could not rely on his male "friends" to protect him, had finally resulted in his retreat into a reclusive lifestyle. This 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

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 this as a wholly positive outcome for him.

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 working-class black men had grown up in the same, locally and culturally specific violent subculture that encouraged displays of stoicism, brazenness and physical prowess as part of masculinity. Their meeting created the opportunity for Darren to verbalise some of his own painful experiences that otherwise may have remained unexamined. The reciprocal identification between the two men on the basis of some shared and intersecting aspects of social identity – race, gender, class and local knowledge - seems to have eased the building of rapport.

When Darren became the target of other young men's bullying on the basketball court, Chris advised him to acknowledge his separateness, concede his vulnerability, and "give up the ball" to avoid a fight. But Darren, on this occasion at least, seems to have ignored Chris's advice. Physical and gendered signifiers of strength, power and manliness, more accessible to Chris, were not as available to Darren. He seems to have concluded that to back down in the face of threat meant losing too much 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 conflict within his identity construction and to influence his decisions and actions.

Moreover, these gendered motifs also featured within his intersubjective interactions between him and Chris. Darren's decision to *not* "give up the ball" and throw himself into a reckless violent attack, indicates his own reluctance to relinquish his psychic investment in discourses of masculine toughness, which in the end trumped Chris's well-intentioned advice. 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 his violent altercation with the other boy during his last fight. In this moment he was at least 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. When he came off worse in that fight and realised the potentially life-threatening implications of this, he chose to revert to an alternative, less physical and muscular masculine identity as "all brains".

Darren's struggle to secure the social resources available within the street field illustrates a deeper asymmetry in how he and Chris were positioned within it. 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 (consciously and unconsciously) experienced Chris as a purveyor of gendered messages reminiscent of those delivered in his past from peers and other authority figures. The persistence of violence and discourses of masculinity within the street field clearly created some difficulty for Darren in terms of managing his feelings of vulnerability. Chris's capacity to open up new ways for Darren to manage this could have been impacted by Chris's own understandable reluctance to disclose his own experiences of vulnerability. Despite Chris's valiant efforts at straight-talking, the persistence of powerful sub-cultural notions of acceptable ways of being a 'real man' may

have been cutting off some routes to emotional openness that might have benefitted them both. Lacking any wider support, Darren had eventually withdrawn into a “mental state” which he felt ill equipped to talk about.

Perhaps, 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. However, the persistence of violence within the street field and the complementary ‘two-ness’ that arose between Darren and Chris created something of an impasse. His feelings continued to box him into a resist or submit dynamic that made it difficult for him to think through his past, present or future options. Chris’s capacity to open up new ways for Darren to manage conflict and vulnerability may have been impacted by some defensiveness around his own self-image that discouraged reflexivity, so creating silences around aspects of masculinity. One alternative approach with Darren would have involved Chris calling on Darren’s collaboration in figuring these aspects of masculinity out, thereby creating a ‘third space’ (Aron, 2006) between them, but also outside, their dyadic relationship. For example, Chris could have perhaps acknowledged the harm he had caused to others in his past and his own experiences of humiliation and vulnerability, such as in the ‘dickhead’ encounter where he too had been forced to (metaphorically) ‘give up the ball’. Sharing his thoughts about this with Darren would have required suspended some of his need to be to Darren what his mentors were to him. For Darren to evolve, Chris had to evolve too, accept more of his own 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, this might have prevented the impasse that may have led, in part, to Darren’s withdrawal.

Conclusion

This case provides some insight into what has sometimes been called the 'black box' of criminality and desistance (Maruna, 2001). The case illuminates important detail of how youth work and crime prevention work is delivered on the ground within professional youth work relationships. In this case we see how demographic symmetry between workers and young people can offer opportunities but also challenges in terms of successful youth work. Integrating psychodynamic with post structural and Bourdieusian theoretical frames shows how, the offering of the older male subject position as a self-evident solution to youth violence can obscure important gendered and unconscious factors within professional relationships. It illustrates how finer details of difference within social constructions of class, gender and ethnicity, and the challenges inherent in recognising them in the field of the street, can inhibit best practice. It illuminates how the valiant 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 linked with over-arching social factors. The psychosocial analysis offered here amounts to an attempt to disentangle how, within the street field, processes of psychic reciprocal identification operate in tandem within gendered, classed and racialized social identities.

The simplistic promotion of racially symmetrical relationships rooted in male worker's resources of social-street and masculine capital and processes of identification risks exacerbating the stigmatizing effect of discourses that ignore the heterogeneity and strengths of black families and rework what are structural and economic factors into a discourse of moral dysfunction (Myers, 1982; Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Robinson, 1995). Such relationships

may have desistance promoting potential but for them to form part of a meaningful response to youth violence, male workers from all backgrounds also need adequate support and supervision to make sense of the psychic and social challenges they face in their internal and external worlds. The psychosocial approach taken here, and especially the idea of a third space as applied to youth work relationships between older and younger men, might usefully be deployed in training and supervision regimes in a wider youth work and youth justice context, specifically in the training of development of male workers with a history of offending. This could include active encouragement for such men to share their own experiences of vulnerability with each-other in training and then with young men with whom they seek to engage in practice. Reflexive self-disclosure by male workers of their own experiences of vulnerability for example might, in the hands of well-trained and experienced professionals, provide opportunities to break impasses in relationships and open up new possibilities for young men in search of alternative non-violent identities. This adds fuel to calls for the routinised and 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.

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