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# Deconstructing male violence: a qualitative study of male workers and clients on an anti-violence programme

*submitted by*

*David Gadd,*

*For a PhD in Criminology,*

*November, 2000*

*Keele University*.

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# Abstract

*This thesis analyses the narratives elicited from eleven men the author interviewed using Hollway and Jefferson's (1997) 'Narrative Interview Method'. Six of these men were violent men who were getting professional help to 'change'. The other five were men who worked with violent men to help them change. The primary rationale for analysing these eleven cases was to investigate the extent to which the poststructuralist/psychoanalytic notion of a 'defended subject' helps explain why some men are violent to female partners when other men are not. The relative merits of the various sociological and social-psychological approaches to the study of masculinity are tested against these interviewees' accounts of their lives. The author argues that the notion of a defended subject illuminates a more recognisably contradictory set of experiences of masculinity than other sociological structuralist approaches, as well as enabling one to conceive of a more complex relationship between 'class inequality' and 'destructive behaviour' than criminologists ordinarily acknowledge. The policy and practice implications of positing a defended psychosocial subject are also dealt with in this thesis. In particular, the author takes issue with the broadly cognitivist assumptions that underpin the government's current strategy of research and intervention in this field. The philosophical implications of using psychoanalytic ideas to make sense of other people's lives are discussed in most depth in this thesis' concluding chapter.*

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# Introduction

> *The location of individuals within an array of discursive positionings broke with the traditional asocial subject of psychology; the break with the unitary rational subject, via the notion of a dynamic unconscious with hidden desires, prised open the possibility of making sense of the contradictions and difficulties that particular men experience in becoming masculine. Without this sensitivity to the difficulties of uniting social and psychic processes - often pulling in different directions - it is not possible to theorise masculinity in a way that men will recognise.* (Jefferson, 1994a: 28-9)

After a lengthy period of neglect within criminology, the study of 'domestic violence' gained a high profile during the 1980s and 1990s as a consequence of feminist activism and research with victims and survivors. Small scale, qualitative research in the field, together with work in the refuge movement, suggested what statistics now prove, i.e. that women are most at risk of violence from men known to them. Statistically speaking, heterosexual women are more likely to be assaulted and/or to be murdered by their husbands and boyfriends than anyone else (see Stanko et al, 1998: 20-1 & 28-9).

Probably aided by feminist campaigning and the media denunciation of some high profile men accused of violence towards female partners, the public have become generally more condemning of men who physically and/or sexually assault their partners, and the British government has become increasingly receptive to feminist concerns (Featherstone & Trinder, 1997). In fact, many one time 'radicals' have been commissioned to undertake policy research in this field, contributing substantially to the Home Office's 'What Works?' findings on 'crime reduction' (see Burton et al 1998a; Kelly, 2000; Mullender, 2000). In the meantime, several profeminist male scholars interested in the problem of ‘masculinities’ have come to occupy the aetiological terrain concerned with the causes of men’s violence (notably Bowker, 1998; Hearn, 1998; Messerschmidt, 1997)

This thesis is primarily concerned with this aetiological terrain, although it also seeks to develop theoretical insights of use to policymakers and practitioners. More specifically, this thesis takes issue with several influential profeminist criminologists for their failure to theorise the subjectivity of individual men, their tendency to reduce the causes of men’s violence to wider social attitudes and/or men’s rational self-interest, and their assumption that the masculinities of the broader male population are similarly and straightforwardly premised on the domination of women and children. My argument is that those interested in explaining domestic violence have much to gain from taking on insights gleaned from debates outside of criminology, at the interfaces between feminism, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism. In particular, this thesis takes up Tony Jefferson’s (1994a) challenge to theorise the tensions between social and psychic processes that inform many men’s experiences of masculinity: to see how theorising men’s ‘experiences’ as more recognisably ‘contradictory’ helps explain why some men are violent to female partners, whilst the vast majority of men neither routinely nor sporadically engage in such behaviour.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the ‘masculinities debate’ within criminology and introduces the reader to critiques of the ‘masculinities’ concept from outside the discipline. In so doing, this chapter explains the need for perspectives that do not reduce the social and the psychic to each other at neither data gathering nor analysis stages of the research process. Chapter 2 explains how the methodology I adopted fitted with this prerequisite, as well as detailing the piloting work I undertook, how I gathered my sample, and some of the practical and philosophical concerns that impacted on the design of my interview schedule. The reader should note that the ‘Narrative Interview Method’[1] I used to undertake the research documented in this thesis was specifically chosen because of its capacity to deal with the contradictory answers, confusions and avoidances that usually litter individuals’ reflections on their pasts. The assumptions upon which this interviewing method is founded also underpin my analysis of case material in the following chapters.

Chapters 3 to 7 analyse the life-history accounts offered to me by 11 of 17 the men in my sample. 5 of these 11 were practitioners working for an anti-violence project aimed at helping violent men to change. The other 6 were men who had been violent and were getting professional help to change by either voluntarily attending counselling, or because they were court-mandated to probation programmes. Specifically, chapter 3 introduces the reader to Gary, a violent man whom I interviewed[2]. Gary’s case is used to explain the virtues of a psychoanalytic interpretive approach to the study of violent men’s lives over more rational-realist and discursive approaches. Positing a defended subject, chapter 3 illustrates how the psychic dimensions of experience are implicated in what men remember and say about their violence, as much as the perpetration of violence. This chapter seeks to improve upon James Messerschmidt’s (1997) ‘structured action theory’ by elaborating the significance of biographically driven psychosocial dynamics in determining when and why one particular man physically assaulted his partner.

Chapter 4 engages more explicitly with the sociological and psycho-discursive literature around masculinities and heterosexualities, focussing particularly on the work of Bob Connell (1995) and those social scientists who have critiqued his thesis. In this chapter the reader is introduced to two anti-violence workers, called Ken and Scott, and two men who were seeking help for their violence, called Matt and Ahmed. This chapter deals with the relationship between anxiety, desire and embodiment, presenting a challenge to those criminologists who have overlooked the relevance of the corporeal dimension when theorising the relationship between ‘masculinities’ and the ‘continuum’ of physical and sexual ‘male violence’ coined, most notoriously, in the work of Liz Kelly (1988).

Chapter 5 is probably the thesis’ most ambitious chapter, engaging particularly with those psychological theories that assume a learned ‘cycle of violence’. The case of a man I call ‘Mark’ is presented because his case illustrates a puzzle routinely encountered by practitioners in this field, namely: why do some men reproduce the domestic violence they witnessed their fathers perpetrate even though they consciously articulate a desire to be nothing like their dads. As such, this chapter also deals with theoretical presuppositions implicit in some feminist and profeminist writing about men’s violence. The chapter proceeds to evaluate the relative merits of Freudian, Lacanian and Kleinian psychoanalysis over social learning theory when applied to Mark’s case.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn their attention to a charge facing those studying masculinities within criminology, namely, that their studies of gender have over-shadowed issues of class inequality. This charge is made by Steve Hall and colleagues (2001) who accuse profeminist men of ‘pointlessly sermonising’ to the economically marginalised, and failing to recognise the classed dimension of ‘reconstructed’ masculine subject positions Connell describes. Chapter 6 deals explicitly with Hall and colleagues’ thesis, as well as with James Messerschmidt’s study of the lives of nine violent and non-violent boys (Messerschmidt, 2000). Using the case history of an anti-violence worker I call ‘Jack’, chapter 6 tests out the relative merits of the ‘cultural capital’ approach favoured by Hall et al, against Jefferson’s (1994a, 1997a) and Connell’s (1989, 1995) arguments against reducing ‘the psychic’ to ‘the social’. I conclude that whilst some profeminist work does understate the significance of class on men’s capacity to change, this does not undermine Connell’s point regarding the significance of personality.

Chapter 7 begins with a discussion of the discursive construction of the ‘good family men’ in the centre-left’s political campaigning in the UK and the US. This chapter problematises the link between the ideology of the ‘good family man’ and the discursive construction of safe/familial and dangerous/inadequate masculinities in the recollections of four men. Two of these four men (Dan and Joe) were unemployed men who had been violent to their female partners. The other two men (Mike and Simon) worked with violent men in order to help them to change, but had hardly ever been physically violent themselves. I argue that in the current political climate, the dominant discourses around family life render most domestic violence illegitimate, explaining why perpetrators typically rely on techniques of neutralisation to mitigate their culpability. Why some men are violent when others are not is better explained by reference to the recursive impact of social disadvantage and emotional distress on the subjectivity of individual men and their partners than by reference to social discourses alone.

The penultimate chapter, chapter 8, examines some of the research and practice literature on interventions for perpetrators of domestic violence. Those familiar with this field will not be surprised to find the work of the CHANGE project, Everyman Centre, DVIP, and Nottingham AGENDA reviewed here. In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate how insights from the masculinities debate can be brought more squarely into the field of practice. In this chapter I urge practitioners to take advantage of the strengths of qualitative case analysis when evaluating the effectiveness of their interventions. Similarly, I argue that policymakers and project managers need to think about how work which ‘ensures the safety of women and children’ and ‘reduces re-offending’ also contributes to a broader social project of ‘reconstructing masculinities’.

The concluding chapter draws implications from the various case analyses reviewed above, and makes suggestions as to how research in the field of domestic violence should proceed. This chapter also devotes particular attention to the ethical issues of reading life-histories in a psychoanalytically-informed way. The implications discussed with regards to positing a ‘defended subject’ in social research should be of interest to those interested in the strengths and limitations of social science enterprises, as much as they are to those interested in issues of gender, violence and crime more generally.

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[1] Since renamed the “Free Association Narrative Interview Method” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

[2] A version of this chapter has now been published. See Gadd, 2000.

# Chapter 1

# *Theoretical and Policy Implications of the Masculinities Debate*

## Abstract

*This chapter asks to what extent the study of 'masculinity' has furthered the understanding of men's violence, particularly towards women within the UK. By comparing changes in the terms of research and policy agendas with the progression of the 'masculinities debate', inside and outside of criminology, the author makes the case for (1) bringing theoretical insights about the nature of masculinities and subjectivities more squarely into the public domain, and (2) encouraging theoreticians to turn their attention to questions raised by the government's research and policy agenda within this field.*

# Introduction

The issue of violence towards women has remained topical in academia, the media, and in policy-making throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century. In criminology, theoretical attention to the relationship between masculinity and violence blossomed, although often at a distance to the policy debate. This chapter thus reviews theoretical developments in the study of masculinity over the last ten years, and asks how theory might better inform the government's current policy and research agenda on domestic violence.

Writing in *International Feminist Perspectives in Criminology* back in 1995, Frances Heidensohn highlighted some of the ways in which feminist concerns about women's victimisation 'sold' within academic criminology and British politics during the 1980s and early 1990s. Heidensohn explained that on the one hand, feminist research into the nature and extent of women's physical and sexual victimisation by men persuaded policy-makers to improve both the quantity and quality of services for victims. On the other, some feminist work on women's victimisation was subject to media caricature, the attention to victims inadvertently lending political credibility to the British Conservatives' 'back to basics' criminal justice policies. Heidensohn's sentiments were shared by others who noted how populist readings of feminism typically attributed women with 'universal victim status', whilst overlooking the fact that women are, statistically speaking, most at risk of assault from men known to them (Owen, 1995). Against those who argued that the discipline's boundaries inevitably militate against the deconstruction of crime (e.g. Smart, 1990), Heidensohn hoped the study of men and masculinity would transcend criminology's shortcomings:

> the further study of 'masculinity' must be vital. Without it there will be no progress in understanding the violence women experience at the hands of men, or in exploring male criminality, which still remains the significant problem for criminology and society. (1995: 81)

## Taking Stock and Making Plans

Three documents, currently occupying space on my desk, testify to the way in which men's violence towards women is currently featuring within research and policy agendas. The first and oldest of these is a pamphlet entitled *Taking Stock* produced by those academics who received funding from the ESRC's 'Violence Research Programme' (Stanko et al,1998). The pamphlet documents the vast body of statistical knowledge criminologists have produced about the nature and extent of violence, not just to women and children, but also to ethnic minorities, prisoners, gay, lesbian and bisexual people, and professionals working in the community. *Taking Stock* leaves the reader in no doubt that men are the primary perpetrators of violence (committing 88% of all homicides), that men's 'domestic' violence towards women is pervasive and persistent (with at least 30% of women having ever experienced it), that offenders are disproportionately, but by no means exclusively men known to female victims (four fifths of assaults against women involve a partner or ex-partner), and that few 'domestically' violent men receive any form of criminal justice sanction (between 15 and 24% of women who experience violence contact the police). What the pamphlet also tells us is that in spite of all this statistical information we still know relatively little about the men, ordinary or otherwise, who perpetrate this violence.

The second document is a far more controversial publication, namely the Home Office report *Domestic Violence: Findings from a new British Crime Survey self completion questionnaire*. The report, compiled by Catriona Mirrlees-Black (1999), presents the findings of the 1996 sweep of the BCS gathered using new Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing. The survey found that as many men as women (4.2%) had been physically assaulted by a current or former partner in the last year. But women were twice as likely to have been physically injured by the assault, three times more likely to have suffered frightening threats, and more likely to have been assaulted three or more times. 23% of women compared to 15% of men had been assaulted by a partner at some point in their lifetime. Victimisation rates were highest amongst those aged 16-24. Women who were separated from their spouses, council tenants, in poor health or facing financial difficulties were most at risk, as were unemployed men, cohabiting men, and men with financial difficulties.

This publication caused disquiet at the 1999 *British Criminology Conference*. Researchers and activists within the field feared such information could generate a ‘backlash’ against work with female victims of domestic violence, in spite of Mirrlees-Black’s eagerness to explicate the complex and tentative nature of the findings. Some of these fears were born out as television documentary makers were rumoured to be approaching practitioners in search of ‘battered men’, but in general the media’s response was more measured and disinterested than it could have been (for example, see Travis, 1999). The Channel 4 *Dispatches* team produced one of the more sensitive programmes on the topic of ‘Battered Men’ as a response to their earlier programmes on the abuse of women. The *Dispatches* programme[1] demonstrated that although some ‘battered men’ are also perpetrators, there are groups of men who do not retaliate when their female partners perpetrate chronic violence against them. Like many female victims, these male victims of domestic violence were found to be prone to experiencing low self-esteem, depression, and social isolation.

The third document entitled *Living Without Fear* and published by the Women’s Unit, (1999) includes details of the Labour government’s much anticipated, and generally progressive ‘strategy framework’ in relation to the problem of men’s violence towards women[2]. The document acknowledges and addresses the need for better service provision for victims of violence, promises a research led agenda in terms of police and probation interventions, as well as a programme of public re-education and prevention, with concomitant budgetary commitments. A co-ordinated, consultative response between health, social and police services is advocated throughout. The document judges psycho-educational probation programmes to be the most effective form of intervention for men convicted of violence towards partners, at least when combined with proactive support for female partners. *Pathfinder* projects have been set up to find out which psycho-educational/cognitive behavioural interventions 'work'. The government also indicates its eagerness to support programmes that enable men to refer themselves voluntarily to those non-statutory programmes conforming to the guidelines set out by the *National Practitioners' Network.* As with the previous two documents the issue of 'masculinity' remains oddly unspoken in *Living Without Fear.* However, the document does single out 'the attitudes of boys and young men' for preventative interventions during schooling, pointing to survey evidence suggesting that one in six young men think 'they might force sex on a woman if she were his wife'[3].

## Messerschmidt's Structured Action Theory

The persisting absence of the term 'masculinity' in the aforementioned reports may partly be due to the conceptual inadequacy of the term itself. Writing in the same edition as Heidensohn, James Messerschmidt (1995) explained how the term masculinity had been surpassed by the conceptualisation of a plurality of masculinities and femininities. By 1995 many of those writing inside and outside of criminology were finding the concepts 'masculinity' and 'femininity' too 'static' to explain the plurality of behaviours and attitudes exhibited by men and women, criminal or otherwise. Social-psychological, anthropological, and historical research on men had long pointed to the empirical fact of a diversity of masculinities, within and between cultures and over time (Jefferson, 1997a). Feminism’s challenge to the idea of a clearly defined, unproblematically internalised and normative feminine sex-role had paved the way for many male scholars to critique the presumption of a single, unitary ‘masculinity’.

Messerschmidt’s attention, like many within criminology, turned to the work of Bob Connell for inspiration. Connell (1989, 1995) encouraged social scientists to think of competing ‘masculinities’, negotiated within everyday interactions, including institutional settings, where the power inequalities of class, race, and other social relations inevitably come into play. Connell put forward the notion that gender relations are comprised irreducibly by three structures of labour, power and cathexis; reworked the Gramscian concept of ‘hegemony’ to show how some forms of masculinities (and femininities) are repeatedly subordinated and marginalised in ‘gender orders’ whilst others remain complicit with this order; and theorised gender as a practice, as well as an effect of practice on experience, the body, personality and culture.

> Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioural average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. ‘Masculinity’, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these places in bodily experience, personality and culture. (Connell, 1995: 71)

Messerschmidt blended these insights with theoretical postulations derived from the social theorist Anthony Giddens and ethnomethodologists Candance West and Donald Zimmerman, to offer a criminological theory of,

> what people in specific social settings do to construct gendered social relations and social structures, and how these structures in turn constrain and channel behaviour in specific ways. (Messerschmidt, 1995: 171)

His (1993) book *Masculinities and Crime* theorised how different crimes serve as resources that many men, and less frequently women, deploy to 'situationally accomplish gender'. Of particular relevance to those interested in explaining violence towards women were Messerschmidt's account of how:

- wife-beating and marital rape serve as a situational resource for constructing a 'damaged' patriarchal masculinity, through which a man's right to dominate his wife and sexually possess her are reaffirmed. Men experiencing powerlessness in the labour market sometimes choose marital rape as a suitable resource for asserting themselves as 'real men' (pp.143-150), and;
- how the 'wilding' rape of a woman in Central Park, on April 19th 1989, enabled four young African American males to maintain and reinforce an alliance between themselves: an alliance that strengthened the 'fiction' of a 'masculine power' denied to them, because of their age, racial and class status in a structurally unequal, classist and racist society (pp.114-8).

The strength of Messerschmidt's 'structured action theory' was that it seemed to reconcile both *feminist* insights about the normality of men's violence along with *Mertonian* insights about the way in which structural inequalities produce differential opportunities and motivations to engage in crime, and *socialist/Gramscian* insights about the construction and maintenance of state legitimacy in the context of conflicting interests. The historical and cultural specificity of both social structures and the social definitions of crimes and criminals were crucial to this reconciliation, as Messerschmidt's (1997) account of the history of lynching in the U.S South demonstrated.

Messerschmidt's theory was endorsed by Sandra Walklate (1995), who suggested, with some qualifications, that the theory was commensurable with the feminist journalist Bea Campbell's (1993) account of the urban riots that occurred in the UK during the summer of 1991. In her book *Goliath,* Campbell argued that whilst the destructive behaviours of the male rioters, burglars, joyriders, and fire-bombers exhibited in inner cities were related to the human crises (humiliation, low self-esteem, hopelessness) of poverty and unemployment, they also revealed common, but typically unspoken modes of masculinity. 'Masculinity established its identity by enforcing difference, by the exclusion of women' (p.202) and minorities from participation in social spaces and public debate. Campbell observed that whilst women's responses to the economic hardship centred around constructive forms of support and care for the needy, the various behavioural responses of male youth, the police and politicians exposed a mode of masculinity that placed competition and triumph above compassion and community, conflated manliness with the hyper-heterosexual, and derided 'feeling' as effeminate.

Such observations were broadly compatible with structured action theory's insistence that crimes are resources for accomplishing masculinity, particularly, but not exclusively when men experience powerlessness as a consequence of their marginality in the labour market and/or family. They also fitted with the argument that many men, even if they lack the material resources to accomplish it, are complicit with a 'hegemonic masculinity' 'characterised by whiteness,…work in the paid labor market,…the subordination of girls and women,…and heterosexism' (Messerschmidt,1997: 10). Walklate illustrated this point with the following question and answer:

> what makes the often rude and belligerent *behaviour of* the old boys network in the House of Commons any different from the lads who shout, whistle and jostle hanging about on the street corner? The reply has to be that in behavioural terms, very little. As expressions of masculine behaviour, the reply also has to be very little. What differs, of course, is their public and political *acceptability*. (Walklate, 1995: 178)

Ken Polk (1994) also endorsed Messerschmidt's theory, suggesting that it was commensurable with his thesis about the circumstances that act as precursors for most confrontational homicides in Australia. Polk observed that 'male-on-male killings' typically result from honour contests where reputation is threatened and therefore must be situationally re-accomplished. Many homicides originate in men's responses to trivial altercations - quite typically men defending against insults directed at women they know. The social audience may play an active role in escalating the conflict by constructing the physical defence of honour as an imperative for the offended man. Polk, like Messerschmidt, underlined the importance of overlaying the analysis of masculinity with age, class and race, pointing to the way in which trivial altercations are more likely to escalate into collective violence when groups of lower class, young males have to negotiate the use of public spaces with those of different ethnic origins. For those men who lack the necessary physical and material resources to prove their masculinity through procreation, provision and protection, 'the personal power struggle with other marginalized males becomes a mechanism for exhibiting and confirming masculinity' (Messerschmidt, 1986: 70, quoted in Polk, 1994: 186).

## Critical responses

But Polk (1994, 188) admitted that neither he nor Messerschmidt could account for why most lower class and middle-class males avoid these ‘masculinity challenges’ most of the time. Walklate (1995: 181) had similar reservations. She pointed out that both Messerschmidt’s and Campbell’s analysis have a tautological feel to them because they invoke observations about the ‘maleness of crime’ as simultaneously a cause and characteristic of it[4]. In structured action theory, ‘culture’ is presented as a rather uncontradictory, monolithic force on lower class males that unproblematically assimilates the possessive and protective qualities of masculinity with the fact of some men’s abusive behaviour and/or their physical and emotional abandonment of families (cf. Kersten, 1996).

In part, these shortcomings are attributable to the way in which ‘hegemonic masculinity’ has been reified as a set of aggressive personality traits, a fixed character type. This is in stark contrast to Connell’s definition which stressed how the hegemonic position was ultimately *contestable*, hinging on the *constant* and *strategic* reproduction of relations and hierarchies in gender *relations* in order to retain its legitimacy (Connell, 1995, 1998). This shortcoming is compounded by both Campbell’s and Messerschmidt’s tendency to dodge the vexed issue of the possible ‘psychodynamic roots’ of men’s violence in ‘miserable (and/or misogynistic) family relationships’ (Levi, 1997: 879).

## Jefferson’s ‘Third Stage Thinking’

The most sustained attempts to resolve this shortcoming came from the criminologist Tony Jefferson (1994a, 1996a, 1997a). Characterising the use of masculinity in the singular as ‘first stage thinking’, and the move to masculinities in the plural as a ‘second stage’, Jefferson (1997a) suggested a ‘third stage’ informed by a psychoanalytic break with the orthodoxy that posits split, contradictory subjectivities. This third stage,

> requires taking the psychic dimension of subjectivity seriously, especially its contradictoriness; not seeing the self, as Messerschmidt implicitly does, as simply unitary and rational, reflexively monitoring behaviour in the light of the responses of others…This oversocialized, essentially Meadian version of the self…helps explain the fact that the examples given of ‘doing gender’, despite the theoretical importance of practice (doing), all end up explaining the reproduction, not the subversion, of gender/race/class. This emphasis on constraints rather than action explains the ultimately deterministic feel to the analyses. (Jefferson, 1997a: 543)

Jefferson argued that underpinning men’s differential propensities for violence was the issue of how particular men come to invest/desire/identify with the subject positions offered up by discourses.

In work with Wendy Hollway (into sexual harassment and a student date rape case, and in his own work on the Tyson rape case), Jefferson shows how individuals choose, often unconsciously, to identify with particular discourses, in order to manage their own vulnerabilities (Hollway and Jefferson, 1996a, 1998; Jefferson, 1996b,1997b). Examples of such discourses include: a ‘male sexual drive’ discourse, that defines ‘compulsive fucking’ as both the means and end to men’s naturally driven pursuit of sexual intercourse; a ‘permissive’ discourse that celebrates intercourse as mutually and unproblematically pleasurable; a ‘to have and to hold’ discourse that locates sexual intercourse as only desirable within a mutually loving and lasting relationship; and, a ‘feminist’ discourse that attributes sexual agency to women and positively endorses women’s right to choose whether and how to engage in heterosexual relationships.

Pointing to the limited array of biographical materials about men who have been sexually and physically violent to women and children, Jefferson (1997a: 541-9) highlights the disjunction between how male sex offenders experience themselves (as inadequate and inferior) and feminism's portrayal of sex-offenders as the 'personification of power'. Re-reading contemporary non-academic accounts of the lives of Peter Sutcliffe, Mary Bell and the two boys who killed James Bulger (Robert Thompson and Jon Venables), Jefferson elucidates some of the multiple ambivalences and emotional contradictions that fettered these individuals' lives. Such ambivalences and contradictions only occur because offenders have choices; choices that cannot necessarily be made rationally and logically, not least because they are perceived through a psyche constantly defending against unconscious anxieties and desires.

Jefferson draws on the work of Melanie Klein to explain how these choices are made. Most of the time people choose to invest in certain discourses to defend against their anxieties. So, for example, the 'have and to hold discourse' offers a relatively safe justification for refraining from sexual intercourse if one fears the prospect of being hurt when a date turns out to be a one night stand. Similarly, the male sexual drive discourse offers a relatively safe position for those men who wish to pursue sexual intercourse with women without admitting any desire for emotional intimacy, neediness or vulnerability. At other times, linguistic investments in discourse may be insufficient to contain anxiety, causing defences to be mobilised more behaviourally. Thus, Jefferson draws on Klein's idea that people psychically split off 'bad' parts of themselves, projecting feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness onto others where they can be safely attacked. This may explain why many people pick on those who seem to embody the weaknesses they despise in themselves, as well as why so many heterosexual men often 'saddle their partners' with their own feelings of vulnerability (Jefferson, 1994a: 27-30). Anxiety is thus defended against by investing in relatively safe subject positions, and by psychically and/or physically projecting it onto others.

The possibility that violence is used by some individuals as a resource for trying to accomplish a coherent, gendered identity is not precluded in Jefferson's analysis. The point is that people seek to 'accomplish' gender because gender can be only fluidly formed at the level of subjectivity; the psyche is comprised of indeterminate and unconscious dynamics. This offers up the possibility of a more sophisticated account of the relationship between emotional, physical and sexual abuse, as well an explanation of why violence is not the exclusive preserve of one sex. Psychic dynamics produce similar qualities in both men and women 'by virtue of being human'; dynamics that are, more often than not, more significant than the biological and social differences between them.

Jefferson (1997a) thus departs company with Messerschmidt and Walklate in urging criminologists to overcome their 'cultural hostility' to psychoanalysis in favour of approaches that show how the complex and often contradictory *emotional truths* of men's experiences relate to socio-historical processes. He rather cleverly takes us back to the more radical, Freudian components of Connell's thesis, notably the repression of unconscious anxiety and desire often 'revealed through dreams, jokes and slips of the tongue'; the conflict-ridden nature of sexuality; the extent to which masculinity is formed as an over-reaction to the femininity that men also share – hence, the precariousness of adult masculinity formed as it is by coexisting and contradictory layers of emotion; and the importance of scrupulous attention to detail advocated in the clinical case study method.

## Criminological responses

Within criminology three authors have responded to the idea of theorising men's subjectivities from a psychoanalytic viewpoint: Jim Messerschmidt, Jeff Hearn, and Richard Collier.

Messerschmidt's own responses to Jefferson's critique have, to date, been frankly disappointing. His (1999) article, "Making Bodies Matter" despite greater sensitivity to the emotional lives of two violent young men (named Zack and Hugh) remains locked in a broadly realist framework that presumes that offenders can and will 'tell it like it is'. The failure to theorise the emotional contradictoriness of subjectivity leads Messerschmidt to represent violence against women as masculinity accomplishing. In his account of Zack, Messerschmidt accepts at face value Zack's claim that sexually abusing his younger cousin unproblematically made him 'feel like one of the guys'. Yet it is quite clear when one looks closely at all the life-stories presented that Zack's relationship with this cousin is simply not the same as the relationships most boys want with their girlfriends. Similarly, Messerschmidt fails to interrogate the multiple meanings that could underlie Hugh's argument that 'slapping down a girl [who] talks shit to you...would not be violence'; a statement that could signify genuine rage, the rationalising of violence, or tough talking bravado.

That Messerschmidt (1999) fails to acknowledge his title's debt to Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* is unsurprising. His analysis ultimately eschews an insight central to both Butler's and Connell's work – namely that the materiality of the body is implicated in our persisting sense of sexed subjectivity. Instead, Messerschmidt offers the somewhat obvious conclusion that bodies facilitate and constrain social action, leaving undertheorised the crucial issue of the relationship between bodies, motivation, and activity – a point already raised by Jefferson (1998). Again Messerschmidt implies an overly simplistic conception of human subjectivity which is obviously optimistic in the context of men's accounts of violence to women and children. Feminist research demonstrating that violent men have a lot to hide, rationalise and justify (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Hearn, 1998a; Scully, 1990) should have been better engaged with both theoretically and methodologically.

This feminist criticism is very much the flavour of Jeff Hearn's analysis of the accounts of the fifty men he interviewed for his book, *The Violences of Men*. Drawing 'themes' from these accounts, Hearn highlights the often implicit rationales men typically deploy when explaining their violence towards women. Hearn identifies five broad discursive categories men use to negate their culpability for violence.

1. *Repudiations* involve either the whole or parts of the violence being disowned or, denied typically through the 'removal of the self and of intention'. For example, saying 'It just happened' or 'I didn't mean to hit her'.

2. *Quasi-repudiations* recognise certain types of violence, but mitigate blame and responsibility through 'not knowing', minimisation, and relativization. For example, 'I can't remember hurting her', 'It was just a slap'.

3. *Excuses and justifications* involve the recognition of the violence but the denial of either responsibility (excuses) or blame (justifications) for violence. For example, 'She wound me up', 'It wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for the drink/drugs'.

4. *Confessions* involve the man recognising the violence and accepting both blame and responsibility.

5. *Composite and contradictory accounts* comprise combinations of all of the above.

My problem with this type of analysis is not so much that it is wrong – men certainly do all of these things – but that by deliberately screening out the ambiguities, ambivalence and paradoxes that characterise men's individual accounts (p.220), Hearn loses sight of the biographical specificity of these men's lives. This effectively forecloses the possibility of analysing these men's experiences to account for why they either do not or cannot live up to the pro-feminist principles Hearn sets out for himself (ch.3). In Hearn's analysis, discourses of masculinity are attributed with an impregnable quality, screening out any real possibility of exploiting contradictions to motivate men to make different choices. One cannot help feeling that Hearn has missed the point of the work of feminist psychoanalysts (especially Jessica Benjamin (1990) whom he refers to in his first chapter) who have theorised the paradoxical and intersubjective quality of *desire* in heterosexual *relating*. More worryingly the conventional discriminators of age, race and class are neglected in Hearn's analysis, downplaying the significance of the more obvious sociological insight that the resources for doing gender are not equally available to all men (Box, 1983, Messerschmidt, 1993). The depiction of alcoholism and addiction as mere excuses for violence, are one angle on the truth, but only one (Featherstone & Trinder, 1997). Is the relationship between ill-health, financial hardship, addiction and other destructive behaviours nothing more than self-interested social construction?

Such an unwillingness to reduce 'the corporeal' and 'psychic' to 'the social' is expressed by Richard Collier's (1998) in his book, *Masculinities, Crime and Criminology.* Drawing on both Jefferson's theory and Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, Collier illustrates the way in which men's bodies are variously constructed in criminology as empowered and oppressive, disempowered and victimised, biologically determined and socially constructed, inscribed and performative. Like Butler, Collier argues that rather than deciding which one of these depictions is accurate, we need to recognise 'the materiality of the body and the lived experience of (sexed) subjectivity'.

> [T]he 'lived-in'-ness of a psychical and libidinally mapped body, must itself be central to addressing the sexed specificity of crime (or, indeed, to understanding experiences of 'family' 'work', and so on). This is not a body which is…invariably empowered and oppressive. Nor, importantly, is this the 'de-sexed' 'ungendered' body of social constructionism…It is, rather, a body which embraces a recognition of the complexity and contradictory nature of subjectivity and lived experience itself, the ways in which subjects presently constituted as 'male' may be simultaneously 'oppressive' and 'caring'…transgressive and conforming…capable of resistance to the social order *at the very moment* that they reproduce dominant and oppressive sexual cultures…These are bodies which have an active part in accruing subjectivity rather than being replaced or inscribed by it. (1998: 162)

Collier argues that transformations in patterns of heterosexual relating, already taking place as a consequence of shifts in the organisation of family life, marriage, childhood, motherhood and fatherhood, make it increasingly meaningless to depict men in terms of fixed categories and hierarchical binaries. In fact, these transformations are rendering the relationship between men and children particularly problematic. Sometimes the relationship between men and children is constructed nostalgically, for example in the writing of the men's movement who claim that *families need fathers*. In other contexts the relationship is construed as disenchanted, for example, when we are faced with evidence confirming the persistence of men’s apparently random violence, the incorrigibility of ‘persistent offenders’, and the horrifying cases of ‘children who kill’. This disenchantment has presented a challenge to men’s psychic investments in traditionally masculine notions of the protector, breadwinner and disciplinarian.

Collier, like Walklate, observes that politicians have often espoused a language of ‘toughness’ in their responses to crime, which has some similarities to the language espoused by criminal young men. But unlike Walklate, Collier points out that this ‘toughness’ has tended to denote different things in different contexts. For policymakers in criminal justice it has not meant entering into physical conflict. The Home Office has tended to equate the challenge to engage with masculinity rather narrowly with ‘confronting offending behaviour’, most typically using cognitive-behavioural methods that tackle deficiencies in offenders’ ‘ways of thinking’. Collier insists that there is a dubious voluntarism in this work, that if challenged by a more adequate notion of subjectivity begs the question: what it is we are trying to re-educate men to be? Is it to reproduce ‘normal’ men, ‘normal’ masculinities? Or are we asking these men to become like their ‘educators’ in the criminal justice system? This is not to say that cognitive-behavioural programmes do not have any desirable effects on men. But it is to stress that evaluating interventions on the basis of ‘programme efficiency’ underplays the routine humiliation, violation and violence that constitute the subjectivities, defences and coping practices of many young men, especially those lower class men who are the primary preoccupation of the criminal justice system.

## ‘Masculinities’ Beyond Criminology

Outside of criminology, responses to both Connell’s *Masculinities* and psychoanalytic endeavours to study men’s subjectivities have been more engaging and critical than those within. The social psychologist Margaret Wetherell (1999), for example, whilst broadly endorsing Connell’s thesis, questions the presumption in psychoanalytic writing that ‘inner space’ or ‘mental life’ seeps through the ‘cracks’ in men’s discourse. Rather discourse constructs inner space.

> Psycho-discursive practices are not human minds. Contradictions are supplied by the habitus, by the complex performances which make up any man’s character, they are not emergent sui generis from the psychological per se…Masculine characters develop from contradictory and fragmentary practices, pieces of discourse, accounting strategies and repertoires (1999: 8-9).

For Wetherell, men’s talk is not the discourse that disguises mental activity, it is instead a construction that reflects the organisation of situations and sets of circumstances, in which identity was, and still is, being negotiated. Thus, in work with Nigel Edley, Wetherell shows how most men’s complicity with the gender order is secured through by many men’s tendency to assert their difference from the stereotyped macho, sexist man (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). This psycho-discursive analysis proves its point about the linguistic negotiation, construction and denial of complicity, but whether this necessarily discredits the idea that there are ‘emotional truths’ repressed and excluded from men’s talk I remained unconvinced. Indeed, I would suggest that one need look no further than to compare some of the cases documented by Wetherell and Edley (1999; & Edley & Wetherell, 1999), and Hollway & Jefferson (1996a,1996b, 1998, 1999), to discover exactly how much emotional complexity and contradiction is screened out in the psycho-discursive approach.

To my mind, John MacInnes' (1998) *The End of Masculinity* offers a more persuasive, although essentially political argument for abandoning the study of men's psyches. MacInnes asserts that 'masculinity, along with the complementary concepts of femininity and gender, can only be understood as *ideological mechanisms* that are the product of a very specific set of historical circumstances': circumstances in which we tried to introduce social universalism in the belief that men and women should be fundamentally equal in terms of their rights as citizens, but as inequalities have persisted, we have deployed 'natural differences' as an explanation for male privileges. MacInnes' argument is that in these circumstances masculinity was *imagined* as a set of socio-historical characteristics, not inherently connected to sexual difference, but which could, if necessary, be seen as an expression of sexual difference. Social theory was left 'swinging from penis to phallus' (p78): the former locating the origins of inequality between the sexes in biology (hence 'anatomy is destiny'); the latter assuming that identity is socially constructed and is therefore susceptible to reconstruction (hence 'the personal is political'). The impact of our *sexual genesis* on our psyches – the fact that we are all born the dependent and mortal products of other women and men – was all too readily overlooked in favour of research into *sexual difference*.

> As mortal products of sexual genesis we cannot always alter our feelings of identity…our fear of violation of our psychic security, the emotional charge we invest in the fetish of sexual difference and our images of masculinity and femininity. The challenge…is to recognize that this is a violation we can only attempt to perform upon ourselves…to realize that there is no authenticity, in our sex or elsewhere, to provide such security, and that such potential for psychic security as we develop comes in large part from our earliest attachment experiences, rooted in our sexual genesis. (MacInnes, 1998: 146-7)

For MacInnes, it is precisely because the personal is *not political* that we may hope to induce social change, against the impulses of our stubborn psychic investments in imagined ‘identities’. The business of intimacy unavoidably involves dependency, and therefore conflicts. Getting men to ‘speak their emotions’ will not necessary resolve these conflicts: we cannot simply reconstruct our psyches to transcend the defences that we embody in order to protect us from the threats posed by knowledge of our own mortality. What we can do, as radical feminists have long argued, is pursue material equality between the sexes so that ‘there is not such an imbalance of material power that allows one partner to dominate the other, should they so choose’ (p.150). For MacInnes, this necessitates a significant shift in the distribution of material resources towards families with children, and away from those without.

But, in defence of both Jefferson and Connell, one might argue that both authors have always been sensitive to the elusive, ideological qualities of masculinity, and that both aspire to a project of social justice above and beyond a narrow focus on addressing men’s emotional inarticulateness (Jefferson, 1994a,1994b; Connell, 1989, 1995, 1998). The point, according to Jefferson (1994a) is that without attention to the tensions between the social and the psychic, as they find affect in men’s lives, critiques of masculinity ultimately fall on ‘deaf ears’. The more problematic aspect of Jefferson’s shift to ‘third stage thinking’ concerns whether it is possible to free psychoanalysis from its rather phallocentric foundations and somewhat unshakeable claim to know *the truth* (Maguire, 1996; Parker, 1997a; Robinson, 1996).

One solution to this is offered by the late John-Hood-Williams (2001) who pointed to the contradictions between both Freudian and Kleinian theories of sexual development, particularly as they find expression in Jefferson's work. In his article "Gender, Masculinities and Crime: from structures to psyches" Hood-Williams contrasts Messerschmidt's work with Jefferson's (1996b, 1997b, 1998) articles on Mike Tyson. Hood-Williams endorsed Jefferson's argument (against Messerschmidt) that masculine gender identities cannot be straightforwardly read off from social locations. But in re-working Jefferson's analysis of the life of Mike Tyson, Hood-Williams exposes problems with using Kleinian concepts such as 'ambivalence', 'recognition' and 'anxiety' to *explain* men and women's differential gender/sexual development.

Jefferson (1998), in his account of why the boxer Mike Tyson chose *strength*, exhibited as the readiness to risk the body in performance, to represent masculinity tentatively invoked Nancy Chodorow's (1978) theory of sexual development: a theory which assumes that the process of separation from the mother is harder for boys than for girls. This is because boy's biological difference from their mothers requires that they differentiate themselves more sharply from her than, say, their sisters have to. Jefferson speculates that it might be this sharper differentiation, instantiated at the pre-Oedipal stage, that mobilises the distorting defences of splitting, projection and denial more acutely for men. Many men learn to manage or contain the anxiety this differentiation creates more or less successfully. But for some men, especially those like Tyson, whose parents are either unavailable or unable to provide them with the emotional nourishment needed to help them develop feelings of trust and security during infancy, primitive persecutory anxieties can return, sometimes suddenly, when threatening situations are encountered. Intimacy with women is one such situation in which feelings of ambivalence and insecurity are likely to be perceived as especially threatening for many men.

Hood-Williams questioned whether boys as opposed to girls necessarily have more trouble differentiating. From a Freudian perspective, the break with the mother is more complicated, and hence more anxiety-provoking for girls than for boys. In order to journey to ‘normal’ heterosexual femininity the girl must ‘give up an attachment to the clitoris, her analogue for the phallus…to hand over its importance to the vagina’ and ‘occasioned by the castration complex’ switch her primary attachment to her mother to desire for her father, and then other men. In contrast the boy’s attachment to his penis is never abandoned, and his first attachment to his mother, although, displaced onto other women, remains throughout his life.

Hood-Williams thus suggests that given the absence of Tyson’s father, a more Freudian analysis might locate the difficulties Tyson had in relating, especially his hyper-heterosexual masculine persona, as originating in his failure to resolve the Oedipus complex.

> Freud does remark that the superego of the boy with an absent father and without easily available substitutes does constitute a problem. With no ready source of identification - and particularly with a controlling or tantalising mother - his subsequent relationships with women are *more likely*, and we should put it no more strongly than this, to be marked by fears of incorporation and of being engulfed, making such relationships difficult. Women may always represent a fear of loss of self, of incorporation. There are many cultural reactions to this of which promiscuity and many short term relationships - for which Tyson is legendary - is only one of them.

Hood-Williams found neither his own, nor other Lacanian readings of Freud utterly convincing, pointing to the problem of how the penis or phallus could possibly 'stand for male power' in the eyes of an *unsocialised* child. In the biological version of Freudian theory the infant is presumed to know 'the significance of a bodily organ simply from seeing it'. In the more Lacanian reading the phallus is depicted as the transcendental and anchoring position that defines difference in a shifting symbolic order. But this position is never specified or specifiable. As MacInnes' and Butler also suggest, psychic processes are not necessarily gendered, masculine or feminine. Rather the psyche is 'invested' with ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman. From this perspective masculinity is 'fictive', 'chimerical' and produced out of its own enactment. There is no inner masculine core. Rather 'masculinity' is evoked in the performative work, discursive gestures and corporeal enactments that convince us to believe in it.

## Psychoanalysis and Masculinity

Finally I wish to direct the reader's attention to writing more squarely within psychoanalysis that suggests how we might transgress the powerful fictions of masculinity.

Stephen Frosh (1994, 1995, 1997a,b) explains that in Lacanian theory it does not matter whether actual fathers are present or absent, since in the symbolic order of language the place of the father, i.e. the phallus, is one of an illusive, but omnipresent absent-presence. On the one hand, the phallus signifies the power of sexual desire and agency, on the other it exposes men's insatiable, and ultimately hollow, desire for the other's desire. The net result of this is that men perceive women's 'lack' (of a penis/phallus), as 'an apparent failure to specify a limit and location for sexuality', which in turn presents the 'terror of dissolution, of falling back and in, of losing...precariously attained identity' for men.

> It is not just *domination* that is placed in jeopardy here, but masculine *existence.* This underpins at least some of the male's idealization and terror of femininity, experienced as that which is most desired and most feared, that which at one and the same time gives and takes away. The masculine response to this, within a symbolic order constructed around difference and exclusion, is to make the woman into a goddess and then to do everything possible to keep her in chains. Thus, in the midst of approbation there is misogyny; where there is adoration there is sexual violence. Phallic uncertainty and the power of the mother: in these are the seeds of masculine sexuality sown (1995: 186-7).

Criticising Lacan, Frosh (1994) argues rationality, particularly the rationality of psychoanalysis systematically places women outside of language, beyond the capacity to know; 'excluding women consistently and violently, from the male order'. (p.119) There is transparent fraudulence in Lacan's theory that actually functions to construct and exclude difference at the same time as it claims to deconstruct it.

Frosh thus suggests that in order to get men to change we need to the tap the unconscious elements of men's experience; exploiting the gaps and breaks in men's narratives, where unconscious desire glimpses through. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's concept of the 'semiotic'[5] as the disruptive underside of linguistic/Symbolic experience, Frosh (1997a: 70) points to 'the body' as a site for the eruption of irrational, apparently unwilled responses that dislodge men's investments in masculine rationality. As a therapist, this ultimately requires Frosh to attempt the impossible: to step outside his own gendered investments. Frosh opens up the possibility of transgressing destructive masculine sexuality to his clients by exposing the provisional and unsettled quality of masculine subject positions. But this possibility is just as quickly foreclosed because the anxiety the unsettling creates motivates men to retreat back to the certainty of sexual difference.

Interestingly, Frosh (1997a) refers his reader to the work of Jessica Benjamin (1990, 1995). Benjamin is, in many senses hostile to the Lacanian tradition, not least because of its too tidy, dichotomous and ultimately phallocentric focus on the boy's loss of the mother (see also Hollway, 1996). As Frosh points out, Benjamin's (1995: 114) re-reading of Freud points out that the boy's lack is 'not so much because of his loss of his mother, but because of his failure to find a father who is present in any form other than as a symbolic prohibition – who is really there for the boy, who is in the positive sense 'embodied''.

Benjamin (1990) argues that in Western heterosexual relationships men typically, but by no means uniformly, deny their dependency by positioning themselves as the rational and independent subjects of desire. Women are often complicit with such men. In their own submission to male domination, women offer recognition to men without expecting it in return. Benjamin insists that erotic desire typically depends upon complementary dynamics of sadism and masochism; dynamics that are constantly renegotiated intersubjectively between couples, and can and often do position women as sadists and men as masochists, as well as vice versa. How exactly this is worked out hinges on both parties capacity to manage the tensions between self-assertion and recognition (for the other); a capacity rooted in each individuals' specific history of desire, reaching back to their pre-Oedipal relations with parents. Benjamin goes on to challenge the inevitability of gender polarisation, pointing out that some individuals manage to retain the possibility of cross-sex identifications throughout their adult lives. These cross-sex identifications open up the possibility of managing the tension between self-assertion and recognition, and thus the possibility of achieving 'mutual recognition' in adult intimate relationships.

Benjamin’s explanation as to why some individuals learn to manage this tension hinges on a psychosocial account of parenting. According to Benjamin, the child’s capacity to manage the tension between self-assertion and recognition is learned during infancy through experiencing the loss and recognition, in close proximity, of the primary carer. When mothering is ‘good enough’ the child experiences its mother as a force able to withstand its own destructive fantasies, and comes to realise that whilst she cannot be completely controlled, she will return again and again to help the child survive threats to its own vulnerability. Fathers typically serve the purpose of symbolising a separate subjectivity to the mother, hence offering the child a means to separate from her. For the child to be able to develop an identificatory love the father must be both present and sufficiently reassuring to enable the child to realise that separate subjectivity can be accomplished without completely repudiating ‘object love’ for the mother and the dependency she represents. Benjamin argues that if the child experiences this form of parenting then it is possible for it to keep open the possibility of cross-sex identifications in adult life, and therefore pursue intimate relationships founded on ‘mutual recognition’, as opposed to domination and submission, at least some of the time. However, for many parents this is a difficult balance to achieve. Many mothers (and fathers) are simply unable to offer ‘good-enough parenting’ because their own levels of self-esteem and security are too low to be able to withstand their children’s own destructive projections. Fathers are often too afraid of sadistic impulses, too rivalrous, or too frequently physically and emotionally unavailable to the child to make ideals seem realisable (Benjamin, 1995: 113).

## Summary & Implications for Policy

Theoretical controversies surrounding masculinity’s existence have reflected differences of opinion as to how to focus the study of men in a way that captured the maleness of violence - without attributing inevitability to the association between ‘being male’ and ‘being violent’, either at an individual or social level. Whilst the case for theorising subjectivity in order to explain the differences between men is very persuasive, few within criminology have been willing to move into the ‘third stage thinking’ Jefferson (1997a) proposes. Outside of criminology there is debate as to whether psychoanalysis is necessary to theorise subjectivity, and/or whether theorising subjectivity, at the level of the individual, is an effective strategy of inducing social change. Those who argue that such a project is worthwhile have demonstrated that psychoanalysis, in its many forms offers a rich vocabulary for describing the fantasy of sexual difference. What has proved more difficult is using psychoanalysis to account for actual patterns of differences in men’s and women’s propensities for violence, without implying either an absoluteness or inevitability to these patterns. Richard Collier’s call to overcome criminology’s binaries thus echoes Jessica Benjamin’s critical attempts to surmount the binaries of psychoanalysis.

Such controversies have probably made the concept of masculinity somewhat impenetrable to many of those students and politicians who have not followed the debate closely. Given the confusion that surrounds the term ‘masculinity’ it is unsurprising that it has not found particular expression in policy circles. Indeed, one might argue that policymaking in the field of violence against women cannot wait for criminologists to make up their minds about what needs to be done about men and masculinities. This does not mean that there are not significant elements of the ‘masculinities debate’ that could and should be informing policy-making and/or everyday understandings of violence towards women. Thus, in my concluding comments I wish to argue that insights from the masculinities debate should be used to address certain presumptions, misunderstandings, and uncertainties in popular and policy discussions about men’s violence towards women.

Moreover, the problems associated with policy and practice in this field suggest that there are certain questions that theoreticians need to turn their attention to as well.

One primary example is the fact, much flaunted by structured action theory, that the choices available to some men are more circumscribed than others. To this end, we need to take seriously the findings of the *British Crime Survey* when they indicate that those living in poverty, experiencing poor health, alcoholism and addiction, the young, the unemployed, families with children, and those living on council estates are more likely to be both perpetrators and victims of violence. For sure, none of these factors 'cause' violence in the positivistic sense. Nor do they excuse men's individual violence, or diminish the significance of men's disproportionate part in perpetrating violence. However, they do suggest that material disadvantage has an effect on both individuals' likelihood of encountering situations where there is pressure to resort to violence, and that some individuals have a greater array of resources available to help them resolve interpersonal conflicts without resort to violence than others.

Collier is thus right to ask questions about the differences between those being 're-educated' on cognitive-behavioural programmes and those doing the re-educating. The mode of masculinity exhibited by practitioners may be neither a desirable nor a realisable one for the lower class men who are disproportionately the subject of such interventions. In this respect, we might ask those in the business of writing men's life-histories to refocus their attention on the 'masculinities' exhibited by some of these practitioners. We might also ask those, like Hearn, who claim to be doing masculinity differently to their interviewees how their own psychic trajectories differ, and how the men subject to criminal justice interventions could have been expected to follow the same route.

I suspect many (but not all) of the strains and pressures that violent men routinely experience in their daily lives cannot be educated or counselled away. In this respect, MacInnes is right to remind us of the need to address material inequality and disadvantage if we want to create conditions whereby people are able to leave abusive relationships if they wish to. But we might also remember Benjamin's insight that 'good enough' parenting is much less likely in families where parents are emotionally unavailable because of their own low levels of self-esteem. Given that financial hardship can have an effect on parents' self-esteem, as well as delimit the amount of time parents are able to spend with their children, then a strong case should be made for social redistribution.

Secondly, gender theorists of sociological and psychoanalytic persuasions all emphasise the *relational qualities* of masculinity and violence. Hence, we should not be surprised that some men are battered by female partners, nor that all battered women are not the passive victims of men. To argue that some people are in part complicit in relationships of domination should not mean that we have to go down the road of 'victim-blaming'. We can take a different route if we take seriously issues of domination and submission in the configuring of heterosexual desire. I suspect either emotional and/or material dependency are at stake, as much, if not more so than fear, in many victims' decisions to put up with abusive relationships for so long. In this respect the government's support for both programmes that accept voluntary referrals and for preventative educational work with children is to be applauded. We need to enable violent people to refer themselves for help if we are to address the damage being done by vast majority of offenders who have never had any contact with criminal justice agencies and are still living with their partners. Indeed, cognitive-behavioural principles would suggest interventions are more likely to be effective if they are not perceived as punitive (Worrall, 1998). Learning is best achieved when reinforcers are positive, and much less likely in a climate of negative reinforcement, such as punishment.

The idea that ‘prevention is better than cure’ would probably be endorsed by practitioners, criminologists, and economists of quite different theoretical allegiances. But this should not just be because violent behaviour is expensive - which it certainly is (Women’s Unit, 1999: 8) - but also because violence is a hard habit to break once established, that can be best avoided in the domestic context by raising children’s standards so that they become unwilling to enter violent relationships in the first place. But if prevention really is better than cure, should we give up on psycho-educational or therapeutic work with violent adults? My answer to this is a resounding ‘no’. Given that such men and women are rearing the next generation of children, to deny support to them would prove grossly irresponsible. Again, we need to create the material and emotional conditions that enable children to manage the tension between self-assertion and recognition in adult sexual relationships.

Nevertheless, the focus on ‘subjectivity’, whether theorised in the Kleinian, Lacanian, or Foucauldian terms should lead us to interrogate whether ‘what works?’ is the only question we should be asking when recommending interventions. Whilst the primary objective of criminal justice interventions must be to reduce men’s physical and sexual violence, feminist research has quite correctly highlighted how abusive behaviour can take many forms. If we take seriously the embodied quality of men’s psychic defences, then we should be suspicious of any quick fixes to resolve men’s problems with ‘relating’, ‘managing anger’ or ‘emotional expression’. This does not mean that cognitive-behavioural programmes cannot have a desirable effect, only that we should neither expect them to work the same for everyone, nor expect change to be immediate, progressing unilaterally towards a once and for all accomplishment.

Those theoreticians interested in masculinity and subjectivity have been negligent in terms of their engagement with the issue of what change might mean. The notion of subjectivity implied in structured action theory definitely has a number of shortcomings. However, the notion of subjectivity that policy-makers have deployed, perhaps unwittingly, with regard to both interventions with violent men and the evaluations of these interventions is one based on a narrowly cognitivist, input-output model of social learning (see for example, Children Act Subcommittee, 1999). The critique of the rational unitary subject needs to be applied to this social learning model in a way that is accessible to practitioners and policy-makers.

There is considerable scope for testing out the strengths and limitations of different methodological and theoretical presuppositions in this field. For example, the debate between those who assume that men ‘tell it like it is’, those who treat all talk as ‘justifications and rationalisations’, and those who assume that talk is the ‘cracked shell through which mental life peeps through’, might be reconciled if tested against evaluation research in this field. Such research typically triangulates men’s self-report data, with victimisation data gleaned from partners, and medical and criminal records (see Dobash et al, 1996a), and therefore could be used to expose denials, justifications and rationalisations, along with any pre-emptive evidence of them in men’s stutters, stammers, and changes of emotional tone. Such comparative work might not only test the various theories of subjectivity, but could also reveal how and whether it is necessary to ‘know’ violent men in particular ways in order to change them. If we decide to side with those who assume that violent acts are a product of biographical and situational contingencies then we will also need to ask whether it is *appropriate, effective, and/or just* to expose all men who have been violent towards women to exactly the same forms of intervention.

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[1] Screened January 6th, 1999.

[2] The Government has since formalised its policies in the document *Government Policy Around Domestic Violence*, available at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/cpd/cpsu/domviol198.htm

[3] The Home Secretary's commitment to this work was questioned by the Group *Justice for Women* when the decision was made to let the convicted rapist Mike Tyson into Britain (Bright et al, 2000).

[4] Walklate was also concerned that critiques of masculinity would be used by politicians, at both ends of the spectrum, to attack some of the least powerful men in society.

[5] Frosh (1997: 73-4) explains,

> the semiotic refers to the rhythms and sounds that flesh out the purely linguistic elements of speech and writing…that dimension of experience linked with and underpinning the symbolic order of language and culture, but also constantly threatening to disrupt it…[T]he semiotic is the input of the undirected body, while the Symbolic is the regulated use and organised operations of that body in social production…[W]hile acknowledging the shared marginality of the semiotic with the feminine, Kristeva insists on its pre-gendered nature, making it a possible site of resistance and subversion in all subjective experience - male as well as female…whether in art, in language, in madness or in dreams.

# Chapter 2

# *Methodology*

## Abstract

*This chapter discusses the methodological aspects of this thesis, including my piloting, rationale for using the 'Narrative Interview Method', and the strengths and limitations of that method. I also explain how I gathered my sample and some of the practical and philosophical concerns that impacted on the design of my interview schedule, limiting my ability to put the principles of the narrative interview method into practice.*

## Introduction

Returning to my original PhD research proposal three years after it was written I felt surprised by two things:

- First, how much faith I had put in the capacity of a methodology that I was less than fully conversant with to produce material that would, if equipped with appropriate theoretical insights, answer my central research questions, and;
- Second, how my faith had paid off. The methodology had generated the material I was seeking.

This chapter begins with a description of my original research aims and objectives, documenting the method I chose to adopt. This is followed by brief accounts of my piloting, the development of my interview schedule, and the procedure I used for recruiting interviewees to my sample. A discussion of my actual sample follows, along with a few comments about the extent to which I was able to put the principles of the *Narrative Interview Method*[1] into practice. I then discuss how I analysed my data, before concluding with a few comments about the strengths and limitations of my methodology. I shall not specifically address issues of ethical significance in this chapter, since I wish to address these in my closing chapter entitled, “Men’s Narratives, Psychoanalysis and Morality”.

## The Original Proposal

Introducing my original research proposal I contrasted radical feminist insights about the (singular) ‘maleness’ of most physical and sexual violence towards women, with structured action theory’s positing of a plurality of masculinities and evaluation research findings indicating that some violent men do actually change, i.e. become non-violent. My research aim was to address the ‘theoretical challenges’ presented by the tensions between these different ideas and findings, focussing particularly on the puzzle of why men’s violence remains persistent and prevalent, despite the strong social taboos against it, and the fact that men can and do change. I told my sponsors, the ESRC, I intended to address this challenge by,

> investigating the role violence plays in the lives of two apparently different groups of men through an in-depth study of a project that challenges the gendered roots of men’s violence.

Breaking this down into objectives I said I would:

- compare and contrast the attitudes and experiences of the men who run an anti-violence project with those who are its clients;
- explore the distinctions which men make between ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ forms of coercion and sexual coercion;
- ask how masculine identity is important to understanding men’s violent tendencies;
- understand how ‘change’ is conceptualised at both individual and organisational levels;
- incorporate ‘an evaluative element’ in relation to the anti-violence project from which my sample would be derived[2].

## Negotiating Access & Planning

Whilst this proposal was being submitted to the ESRC for funding, I was negotiating access with a small project – herein called the *Anti-Violence Project* (AVP) – located in a city in the North of England with which my supervisor (Tony Jefferson) had already had some contact. In order to incorporate an ‘evaluative element’ some of the fieldwork was to involve attending meetings and workshops held by AVP, to find out about the work they were undertaking and planning[3]. One of AVP's directors invited me to become a co-director myself, suggesting I undertake a piece of 'action research'. After some thought, I declined this offer on the basis that my research and the work of AVP would be better served if I could retain my independence.

The larger part of my fieldwork was to involve interviewing both workers and clients at AVP about their 'attitudes and experiences' in order to say something about the significance of 'identity' in explaining men's differential 'violent tendencies'. This fieldwork required me to negotiate access at both an *organisational level* and with *specific individuals* who work for AVP. In particular, some of the counsellors at AVP were concerned about the potential effects of my research on their clients' wellbeing. I had to address the concerns of these counsellors before I could approach clients for interviews.

I surmounted these concerns by agreeing to interview counsellors and directors at AVP before approaching any of the client group. It was not just that counsellors and directors were 'gatekeepers' with whom I had to negotiate to get access to 'violent men'. Rather those who were 'gatekeepers' were equally my research subjects. During interviews these directors and counsellors at AVP entrusted me with sensitive information about themselves, in part to help me answer my research questions, but also so as they could assess whether I could be relied upon not to threaten the work of AVP or unnecessarily breach the trust of its workers and clients. As counsellors and directors experienced my interviewing techniques (including the confidentiality agreement) first-hand their concerns about my research subsided.

However, before I could interview anybody I had to *decide on* and *gain experience in* a suitable interviewing method, as well as work out the logistics of how AVP could put me in touch with clients without breaching their commitments to ‘client confidentiality’ and ‘partner safety’. At this time, many academics within the field of ‘masculinities’ were advocating biographical research as the most effective way of exploring the contingencies of men’s lives and identities, especially the issue of ‘subjectivity’[4] (see Connell, 1995; Jackson, 1990; Kimmel & Messner 1995; Messerschmidt, 1997; Thurston & Benyon, 1995). However, few of those advocating ‘biography’ published guidance on exactly *how* one should conduct ‘biographical research’, i.e. what questions does one ask, when, how, and why? My supervisor, Tony Jefferson suggested using the *Narrative Interview Method* he (together with Wendy Hollway) had found an effective means of generating in-depth accounts about “Gender, Anxiety and the Fear of Crime”. Seeing the richness of the material this research project generated (Hollway & Jefferson, 1996b, 1997), I was sufficiently persuaded to experiment with the *Narrative Interview Method* in my pilot work.

## The Narrative Interview Method

The *Narrative Interview Method* was first deployed by Hollway and Jefferson (1997, 2000) in their research into “Gender, Anxiety and the Fear of Crime”. Simplifying, it is a semi-structured method of interviewing that ‘works’ by encouraging interviewees to ‘freely associate’ in response to a short list of ‘big’ questions[5]. Most of the interview ‘structure’ is implicit rather than explicit. The interviewer does have a few ‘short answer’ questions that he or she hopes the interviewee will answer. But these questions are not asked until nearing the end of the interviews. Instead, the interviewer devotes most of the interview to constantly trying to elicit more narrative, encouraging the interviewee to expand upon the events depicted in their opening statements. Those questions that are asked during the mid-stages of the interview are ‘narrative focussed’, dealing explicitly with what the interviewee has already said about their life-story. Hence, most questions take the form of:

> *Can you tell me (some more) about the times/periods/days, when you…?*

Or, if in the middle of a particular story:

> *What happened then?*

In their ‘Gender, Anxiety and the Fear of Crime’ research, Hollway and Jefferson’s opening question was: “Can you tell me how crime has impacted on your life since you’ve been living here?”. The interviewers then kept their interventions to a minimum, seeking to become the almost invisible facilitators of story-telling as opposed to the highly visible askers of questions expected in orthodox structured interviewing[6] (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997). Committed to a psychoanalytic model of human subjectivity, Hollway and Jefferson’s mode of analysing interview data differed from most of the more ‘mechanical’ approaches favoured by other biographers within the social sciences. However, in terms of their actual *interviewing techniques* Hollway and Jefferson’s approach is quite similar to that advocated by those using the *Biographical Interviewing Method* (Breckner, 1998; Rosenthal, 1991; Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992; Wengraf, 2000) as well as the *Life-history Research Interview Method*, depicted by Ken Plummer (1983: 96-7).

In all of these biographical interviews:

- Silence is treated as ‘golden’: interviewers avoid interrupting the interviewee’s pauses, particularly during their opening statements. Hence, at the start of interviews Hollway and Jefferson told interviewees that they would not interrupt them, instead, taking a few notes so as to be able to ask questions later.

- Interviewers interject minimally during the interviewee's subsequent pauses. The interviewee's motivation is stimulated through the discrete expression of interest. In Hollway and Jefferson's case this expression of interest involved nodding, offering encouraging "hmm"s and "go on"s, actively listening, and telling interviewees that their responses were useful or helpful.
- Clarification is sought in such a way as to avoid any undue threat to the interviewee, typically by using the interviewee's 'meaning frame', reflecting back phrases or expressions in the order they were first stated by the interviewee; otherwise using non-judgmental language[7]; and avoiding 'why' questions. 'Why' questions are thought to encourage the interviewee to offer justifications, rationalisations or arguments *without necessarily referring to their own life experiences*. Moreover, both the notion of *Gestalt* preferred by the Biographical Interviewers, (Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992: 125) and the presumption of a *defended subject* preferred by Hollway and Jefferson, anticipates that people cannot always explain why they have done things; the entirety of the psychosocial terrain escapes the interviewee, but may be tentatively re-constructed more fully, by the researcher. Hollway and Jefferson take this a little further, assuming that what 'escapes' interviewees are the unconscious motivations that underpin both behaviour and the account given of it. Hollway and Jefferson presumed that respondents would not be able to communicate all of their experiences in logical, rational, or consistent ways, and therefore felt it meaningless to force interviewees to do so.
- Questioning is tactical. The main aim is to open up an area of the interviewee's life by taking them further and further back, enabling the interviewer to simultaneously

ascertain further narratives, clarification, expansion and/or elaboration of particular events or time-periods. Since there is insufficient time (and likely patience on the interviewee's part) to ask about everything, the interviewer may choose to spend a few moments thinking about 'what to ask' and 'how to ask it' once the interviewee has concluded their opening answer.

- These tactics are part of a strategy geared to working with the interviewer's own limitations. Since interviewers, by virtue of being human, inevitably miss, overlook, and forget vital information during primary interviews neither Biographical nor Narrative Interviewers seek to ascertain all of the information they want in one sitting. Hollway and Jefferson coined the idea of a 'double-interview' (i.e. two interviews per interviewee of length 1-1½ hours each), in order to reconcile the constraints imposed by limited resources and the likelihood that interviewees' would be unwilling to commit indefinitely to being researched, with their own desire to return to interviewees with further questions. During the week intervening between first and second interviews, Hollway and Jefferson listened to tape-recordings of their first interviews, paying particular attention to the absences, avoidances and emotional changes of tone which (from a psychoanalytic perspective) were thought to reveal something of the defended nature of human subjectivity. In their second interviews Hollway and Jefferson endeavoured to work around these defences, or at least gain a clearer picture of where these defences lay, by asking further narrative questions.

## Piloting and Designing Interview Schedules

Based on my reading of other research about men's accounts of violence a number of (contradictory) concerns fettered my early attempts to design a 'loose' narrative interview schedule. In line with the *Narrative Interview Method*, my methodological aspirations were to develop questions that did not unduly foreclose what interviews could say about their lives. However, conversant with what other studies had revealed about men’s accounts of violence I was concerned that:

- Interviewees would tacitly avoid discussing their own physical and sexual violence if not explicitly asked about it, perhaps representing themselves as victims but not aggressors (Owen, 1995; Young, 1995).
- Asking narrative questions about violence and sexual violence might appear insensitive, voyeuristic and/or provocative (Schwartz, 1997). Less evocative terms (such as threaten, harass, pester) might be needed to broach the topics of physical and sexual violence.
- Conversely, sensitivity to terminology might enable some violent men to deny and minimise their violence, in the case of sexual violence obscuring the issue of consent to vilify themselves (Scully, 1990). My choice of terminology might foster collusion with violent men’s attempts to blame others for their violence (Cavanagh & Lewis, 1996; Hearn, 1996). Indeed, asking about particular ‘times’ might encourage interviewees to present violent incidents as ‘one offs’, losing the context which renders some *relationships* ‘abusive’.
- The more educated and articulate interviewees would, in some respects, be better able to avoid answering questions about their personal lives. In particular, I wondered if those who had worked as counsellors would avoid answering questions by ‘reflecting them back’ to the interviewer.

Three men I knew to have some similarities with my potential sample populations volunteered for the pilot work. I worked through variations of the following pilot interview schedule with these men.

## Draft Interview Schedule

### 1. Relationships - Past, Current, Present

a. Can you tell me about your experiences of relationships, in the period *before* you first came here/sought counselling/became a counsellor?

b. Can you tell me about your experiences of relationships, in the period *after* you (as above)?

c. Can you tell me about times in those relationships when you felt anxious (unhappy/uneasy)? Can you tell me about any extended periods of time when you have felt like that?

d. Can you tell me about times in those relationships when you felt happy (comfortable/at ease)? Can you tell me about any extended periods of time when you have felt like that?

e. Can you tell me about times in those relationships when you felt angry? Can you tell me about extended periods of time when you have felt like that?

### 2. Violence

a. Can you tell me how violence impacted upon your life in the times before you first came here/sought counselling/became a counsellor?

b. Can you tell me how violence has impacted upon your life more recently, in the period after you (as above)?

c. Can you tell me about the times in your life when someone was violent towards you? If no, ask again with respect to ‘when someone was threatening towards you’. Can you tell me about any more recent/previous times/extended periods of time when someone was violent/threatening towards you?

d. Can you tell me about the times in your life when you were violent towards someone else? If no, ask again with respect to ‘threatening towards someone else’. Can you tell me about any more recent/previous times/extended periods when you have been violent towards someone else? If no, ask again with respect to ‘being threatening towards someone else’.

**3. Sexual Violence**

a. Can you tell me about how sexual violence impacted upon your life in the times before you first came here/sought counselling/became a counsellor?

b. Can you tell me about how sexual violence has impacted upon your life since (as above)?

c. Can you tell me about times in your life when someone was sexually violent towards you? If no, ask again with respect to ‘when you felt sexually harassed or threatened by someone, even though physical violence may not have been used against you’. Can you tell me about any more recent/previous times/extended periods in your life when someone was sexually violent towards you?

d. Can you tell me about the times in your life when you were sexually violent towards someone else? If no, ask again with respect to ‘when you may have sexually harassed or pestered someone else, but did not use physical violence’.

**4. Responsibility, Blame and Challenge**

a. Can you tell me about times in your life when you have felt responsible for someone else’s problems? If no: Can you tell me about times when people have blamed you for things for which you were not responsible?

b. Can you tell me about a time when you have frightened someone, perhaps unintentionally, without physically harming them?

c. Can you tell me about times when people have challenged you about the way you react towards them?

d. Can you tell me about a time when you have challenged someone about the way they act?

On the positive side, this schedule elicited some sophisticated narrative accounts from my first two pilot interviewees. Both men recounted some highly sensitive stories about their experiences as perpetrators and victims of violence, physical and sexual. The piloting work lent support to the idea that some men equate ‘violence’ with physical assault, and therefore would not talk about ‘sexual violence’ unless explicitly asked to. Softer terms such as ‘threatening’ ‘coercive’ or ‘pressurising’, with or without the prefix ‘sexually’, would be needed in order to frame questions in such a way as to accord with interviewees' hesitancy to label experiences as 'violence'. The piloting work also suggested that my fears about 'collusion' might be exaggerated and/or simplistic. The men I interviewed did not present themselves in especially positive lights - far from it. All of them disclosed some deeply personal, anxiety-provoking, and incriminating experiences. Indeed, after the piloting work had finished, my first two interviewees were both anxious to check that their disclosures had not impacted on my regard for them.

On the negative side, I found the draft interview schedule to be over-long and hence rather burdensome. Having too many questions to ask distracted me from listening and remembering the interviewees' narratives. I had trouble keeping notes on what was said and at times I got the impression that my interviewees felt as if they were trying to fit their experiences into my meaning frames, rather than just telling their stories in their own words. This piloting work demonstrated just how easy it was to unwittingly deviate from the methodological principles of the *Narrative Interview Method*. Indeed, my opening question (about 'relationships…before and after') seemed to invite responses that inhibited a narrative reply by confusing interviewees, as the following two responses demonstrate:

> DG: Can you tell me about your experiences of relationships, in the period before you first came here?
>
> Pilot 1: My experiences regarding relationships with my wife or urm everybody in Britain in particular?

And,

> DG: Can you tell me about your experiences of relationships, in the period before you became a counsellor?

Both responses suggested that my interviewees needed a clearer, more definite frame of reference to start off with or, at least, greater direction from me. Furthermore, the second pilot interviewee had had very many ‘relationships’ with women, and in the aftermath of the interview I wondered what the value of getting him to describe each and every one of these relationships was.

I dealt with the issues of having too many questions and imposing my meaning frame by (hesitantly) pushing many of these draft questions to the back end of my interviews. Henceforth, questions about ‘Responsibility, Blame and Challenge’ were to be left to the end of my second interview with each person. I hoped this would enable interviewees to provide narrative accounts in their own terms, before I imposed my terms. I decided that it would be better to judge whether minimisation had occurred after each first interview, postponing the questions on ‘extended periods of violence’ to my second interviews where necessary. If minimisation was suspected in the first interview I could use the second interview to tease this out (by asking further questions about ‘the first/last/worst/other times when violence occurred’) and by highlighting it in the analysis.

In my third pilot interview I decided to frame my opening question around some of the demographic data I gathered before the interview commenced. Thus, knowing my interviewee to be married and living with his wife, I asked for the story of how he and his wife came together. This proved a less ambiguous way of eliciting a narrative, but at the same time it was also potentially restricting, encouraging the interviewee to hinge most of his life-story around his marriage when he may have chosen to do otherwise had I not prompted him in this way. In addition, I also reduced the number of scheduled questions in this third pilot, moving a few, selected questions to the end of my second interview. This did open up more space to explore the interviewee’s narrative, although in this particular case that narrative was not always particularly forthcoming.

## Fieldwork

### The Final Interview Schedule

I did not manage to come up with a better opening question until a few minutes before the start of my first fieldwork interview. At this point, I decided to return to the question used by the German oral historians in their research with victims and perpetrators of the Nazi holocaust[8], namely: ‘Can you tell me the story of your life?’ (Rosenthal, 1991, Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992). This proved less prescriptive and clumsy than my original question about ‘relationships…before and after’, although at times interviewees still asked where they should begin. Throughout my fieldwork I experimented with variants of this question. Sometimes I encouraged interviewees to start their life-story ‘from the time they first came to Northerntown’, other times I asked them to ‘begin with their earliest memories’, or to ‘begin wherever they liked’. Thus, my final interview schedule comprised four key questions, with some supplementary questions, as illustrated overleaf:

## Final Interview Schedule

1. You know I am doing a piece of research about the life histories of two groups of people: men who have been violent and want to change, and the men and women who work with violent men at AVP. Can you tell me your life history? Start where you like/with when you first came to Northerntown/your earliest memories.

2. Can you tell me the story of how you became involved with AVP?

3. Can you tell me about how violence has impacted upon your life?

(a) If not addressed: Can you tell me about the times in your life when someone was violent towards you?

(b) If no, ask: Can you tell me about a time when someone has frightened you, perhaps unintentionally, without physically harming you?

(c) If not addressed: Can you tell me about the times in your life when you were violent towards someone else?

(d) If no, ask: Can you tell me about a time when you have frightened someone, perhaps unintentionally, without physically harming them?

4. Can you tell me about how sexual violence has impacted upon your life?

(a) Can you tell me about times in your life when someone was sexually violent towards you?

(b) If no: Can you tell me about times when you have felt harassed, pressured or threatened in a way which you thought might be sexual or sexually motivated?

(c) If not addressed: Can you tell me about the times in your life when you were sexually violent towards someone else?

(d) If no, ask: Can you tell me about times when you think someone else may have felt sexually harassed, threatened or pressured by you?

## Sampling

I wrote to potential interviewees informing them that I was doing a piece of research about 'experiences of violence and change'; research in which participants would be encouraged 'to identify the things which are most relevant to their lives'. The letter explained that all interviewees would receive '£10 towards their costs', and that this £10 would be paid at the end of a second interview. I felt a moral obligation to ensure that my interviewees were not left out of pocket as a consequence of their participation (i.e. travel or time out of work). The money was not meant as an incentive to participate, although a few men did see it in this way.

Interviews were estimated to last about one hour each. The letter invited the reader to return a form indicating whether I could call them to discuss their possible involvement in the research, and asking them to leave their telephone number. I sent out fourteen letters to practitioners and received thirteen responses, all positive. Of these thirteen, I interviewed nine practitioners/directors at AVP, two women and seven men, largely although not exclusively on the basis of their immediate availability for interview: there were a few individuals who I decided to include in my sample because I felt them to be integral to AVP. Most of the 'practitioner' interviews were conducted in the interviewees' own homes.

Letters to clients (i.e. men who had been violent and wanted to change) were handed over via another researcher evaluating AVP. Some 21 clients attended AVP counselling during the seeking period I was seeking interviewees. Most, if not all, of these 21 would have received my letter. However, not all of these men would have been suitable for interviewing. 6 of these 21 left counselling after just one counselling session and therefore would not have been available for my research. Indeed, given the practicalities of arranging interviews, it is probable that my sample of AVP clients came entirely from the 8 men who attended 6 or more sessions. Eight clients actually responded to my letter, two negatively and six positively[9]. Of these six positive responses from AVP clients I managed to arrange interviews with five men who had been violent. In addition, a probation officer working in the area introduced me to three men who were attending a court-mandated intervention for violent men. All three of these men agreed to be interviewed by me, bringing my sample up to eight clients and nine workers.

### The Sample

Of the nine practitioners I interviewed, three were aged in their early to mid-thirties, five were in their mid to late-forties, and one was in his early fifties. All of the men were openly heterosexual; one was never married, two were married, four were divorced. All of the practitioners were white and of British nationality. One of the female practitioners described herself as heterosexual and unmarried; the other, who described herself as lesbian/bisexual, was living with a woman-partner. Six of the practitioners had children.

Whether my sample of practitioners was representative of ‘people who work with violent men’ I have no means of judging. My sample was certainly not very representative of the ‘non-violent population’ in the UK - as I once naively assumed it might be. There is probably only a very small section of the general population who have the skills, resources, motivation and time to work with violent men for little or no pay. All of the practitioners I interviewed were university-educated and employed in the ‘caring professions’. Eight out of nine had been through some period of therapy or counselling at some point in their lives[10]. None of the male practitioners had witnessed their fathers physically abusing their mothers, although at least two had seen their fathers assault brothers. One male practitioner's mother was violent towards him as a child. Most of the practitioners had experiences of being smacked by parents and getting into fights at school.

Five out of the seven male practitioners had experienced close and/or intimate relationships with women who had been sexually abused by other men. One of the female practitioners suspected she had been sexually abused by her father. One of the male practitioners claimed he had been falsely accused of sexually abusing his daughter. One female practitioner had experienced physical and sexual violence by men in adulthood. Several of the male practitioners claimed to have been sexually harassed, threatened or pressured by other men as adults. One of the female practitioners had attempted suicide, but none of the men had. The other female practitioner had contemplated self-harming. Both of the female practitioners and one of the men had perpetrated relatively minor physical assaults against their partners; although in all three cases these were relatively isolated incidents. Two male practitioners described being sexually coercive towards women partners when they were younger.

The client sample were all male, but slightly younger than the practitioners: two were in their late twenties, five were in their early to mid-thirties, and one was aged fifty. All of the clients described themselves as British; seven were white, one was of Asian descent. All depicted themselves as heterosexual. Four were married, three were separated or divorced, one was living with his girlfriend. Six had children.

Whilst social scientific knowledge about men who are violent is insufficiently complete to be able to assess whether my client sample were representative in any statistical sense, they were not atypical in terms of their attributes, histories and socio-economic status. Clinical research suggests that men who are violent towards women are more likely than the general population to have poor social skills, histories of psychiatric disorder (such as anxiety and depression), alcohol and/or drug abuse, be disadvantaged in socio-economic terms (i.e. unemployed, living in poor housing or have financial difficulties), and have been exposed to violence as a child (Brown & Howell, 1997: 77). This was true of many of the client group in my sample. Four client interviewees had fathers who were persistently violent to their mothers, and three of these clients were also chronic victims of their father’s violence. However, the remaining four cases claimed there was little violence in their home-life when they were children, although all had been ‘smacked’ and/or had and fights at school. None of the ‘violent men’ were university educated. All but two had left school with few or no qualifications. Only one was in full-time employment at the time of my interview; he was employed as a sale-specialist. Two were hoping to get work in the near future; one as a partner in a small business, the other as a social work support worker. The remaining five described themselves as ‘unemployed’, although some were undertaking part-time unskilled labour. At least two had been living in accommodation for the homeless and had lived rough at some time. One was living in a bail hostel.

Three clients claimed that their partners were just as abusive as they were. All denied ever having been sexually violent or abusive, although in a several cases this denial was undermined by their narratives. Five had attempted suicide at some time, and one other indicated that he had thought about it. Six mentioned problems with alcoholism, (compared to two practitioners), and one was a heroin addict.

Research also suggests that the vast majority of offences of violence against women (some 78-85% according to Stanko et al, 1998) remain unreported to the police, and that few offenders are successfully prosecuted. My sample was not unusual in this regard. Most of my client interviewees had been violent on more than one occasion without the police being informed. Only two of the eight had convictions for physically assaulting women partners. Both had been sentenced to probation. Two clients had had some police contact as a consequence of their violence towards their wives, but had never been charged or prosecuted. Three client interviewees had criminal convictions for offences other than violence towards partners, and had served prison sentences as a consequence. Three men had never had any police contact as a consequence of criminal (including assaultive) behaviour, although one had gained a psychiatric record.

### Interviewing Procedure

Before each interview commenced I explained how it would be conducted, informing interviewees that they were 'free to leave or stop the tape at any time', detailing to them the limits of the confidentiality I could promise[11], and inviting them to ask any questions they had. I would then run through a series of short 'tick-box' questions regarding the interviewee's age, living arrangements, marital status, children, employment, and duration of involvement with AVP, before asking my opening narrative question.

Most of the questions asked in the second interviews were biographically driven, and hence unique to each interviewee. However, at the end of each second interview I would ask a series of short questions that I thought relevant to my central research question. These included:

**Closing Questions for Second Interview**

1. What is the thing that makes you most anxious in your life at the moment?
2. What was/is the thing that makes you most anxious in your relationship with your wife/partner?
3. When was the happiest period in your life?
4. When was the unhappiest period in your life?
5. Do you consider yourself an assertive person?
6. Would you say that you were quite possessive in your relationship with your wife/partner?
7. What about in previous relationships?
8. Would you say that you often feel responsible for other people's problems?
9. Is there anyone in particular whose problems you feel responsible for?

At the end of both first and second interviews I would ask my interviewees whether there was 'anything else they wanted to ask me or tell me'. I would ask this *before* switching the tape off, and *again after* the tape was switched off, in case people wanted to raise issues 'off the record'. After the second interview, my interviewees were offered:

- a tape recording of their first interview;
- the possibility of having a copy of the second interview posted to them (or a specified contact person);
- £10 towards their expenses, and;
- a short self-completion questionnaire about 'how they found the interviews', which I asked if they could return in a postage-paid envelope that I provided.

Three interviewees said they would pass the payment onto the project. Four declined the offer of cassette copies of their interviews. I received nine self-completed questionnaires through the post.

### Putting Principles into Practice

During the fieldwork I gradually became more disciplined at putting the principles of the *Narrative Interview Method* into practice, as well as more confident in my ability to conduct interviews without having the schedule in front of me. As the method generated useful material I found it easier to trust that narratives would prove of greater relevance to my research questions than direct answers to those research questions. Indeed, I now suspect the length of my pilot interview schedule was a product of my own doubts over whether my interviews would produce the material I required if my central research questions were not made more explicit to interviewees.

As the contents of this PhD testifies, the *Narrative Interview Method* delivered what it promised, i.e. some very rich and complicated narrative accounts about experiences of violence as victims, witnesses, perpetrators, and workers in the field. The transcripts and case notes of my interviews constitute over 1000 pages of printed text. In fact, there is much material that has been excluded from this PhD simply because of word and time restraints. Some of the cases have simply not been used.

According to the feedback I received from my interviewees the method offered more than it promised. Clients and workers alike pointed out that although the interviews were not entirely ‘enjoyable’ (because they required them to work over ‘anxiety provoking’ memories - some of which they had chosen to forget) they were nevertheless ‘helpful’, ‘useful’ ‘searching’ ‘challenging’ and/or ‘constructive’ experiences. Whilst one might raise some concerns about the eight interviewees who did not return a response, all of those who did respond claimed they found me ‘easy to talk to’. This included one client who found the interview ‘very upsetting and distressing’. But, the fact the interviewees were generally pleased with the way I conducted interviews does not mean that these interviews were necessarily conducted appropriately, nor in accordance with the principles of the *Narrative Interview Method*. In fact, there were individuals who, perhaps unknowingly, constantly tested both my patience and my capacity to persist with ‘narrative-pointed’ questions. My supervisor (who listened to all but one of my first interviews) and I would occasionally pick this up when re-listening to cassettes of each interview.

My impression is that the *Narrative Interview Method* worked slightly differently for the client group as opposed to the practitioner group. Some of the practitioner group did offer intellectualising responses to questions, sometimes detracting from their actual narratives. At times, I found this frustrating and was reluctant to let interviewees ‘run on’ particularly when time was scarce. Practitioners were generally more up-front when it came to saying they did not want to talk about a particular event, issue or relationship. They were more likely to either decline my invitation to them to tell their story (often because they wished to protect somebody else’s confidentiality) or postpone relaying their answers until after they had thought them through. Practitioners also seemed to be more forthcoming at asking ‘exactly’ what kind of answer I wanted to my questions, sometimes questioning whether they had actually said what I thought they had.

In contrast, some of the client group had trouble reeling off a narrative, in some cases describing their entire life-stories in just a few sentences. Thus, I often faced the reverse problem with the client group, some of whom offered answers such as ‘it’s been all right’ or ‘everything was fine’ as responses to questions that asked them to tell me the story of their ‘marriages’ ‘childhood’ etc. There were two client interviews where I (unwittingly) came very close to asking ‘why’ questions, not least because I had exhausted so many of the narrative questions I could think of.

However, clients often described many more eventful, typically confrontational, turning points (often in what seemed to be a search for a ‘cause’ of their violence or relationship break-ups) than practitioners[12]. In this respect it was often easier to formulate simple narrative questions about the clients’ lives than the practitioners’. Clients challenged my questions far less often and very rarely worried about whom they talked about, probably because I was a stranger to them, and they knew they would never encounter me again.

Other logistical/technical problems hindered the eliciting of narrative on various occasions. Thankfully, nobody failed to turn up for interview, but several clients were late, limiting the amount of time we had together. One man had such a severe hangover during his second interview that he found it very difficult to sustain his train of thought. Another (the man who found the interviews ‘distressing and upsetting’) chose to go to the toilet seven times during an hour interview, breaking off his narrative at what were probably significant moments. Problems with recording equipment also effected some of the early practitioner interviews. One interview did not record at all. The interviewee agreed to help me replicate this interview, but much of the spontaneity and fervour that characterised the original seemed lacking in the replicated version.

## 5. Analysis

### Analysing Case Material

In many respects I have endeavoured to follow a similar procedure to Hollway and Jefferson in analysing my case material. However, I, like them, have found it particularly difficult to describe exactly how I came to interpret my case material. This may in part be an intrinsic feature of case-study analysis. As Robert Stake (1994: 240) expresses it:

> Both the researcher and reader need conceptual structures…an unfolding realization. They do not have to be aware of this need. Thought itself, conversation surely and writing especially draws phrases into paragraphs, appends labels into constructs. Attention focuses. Generalization can be an unconscious process…In private and personal ways, ideas are structured, highlighted subordinated, connected embedded in contexts, embedded *with* illustration, laced with favour and doubt. (Italics in original).

Thus, I can only convey the process I went through, in the hope that those interested in using the *Narrative Interview Method* might recreate this 'unfolding realization' for themselves.

### Hollway & Jefferson's Analyses

In their "Gender, Anxiety and the Fear of Crime" research, Hollway and Jefferson used case studies to apply earlier critiques of 'the rational unitary subject' of mainstream sociology and psychology (see especially Henriques et al, 1984; Hollway, 1989) to criminology, effectively exposing the limitations of conceptualising and researching 'fear of crime' in a narrowly rationalist/realist manner. Rather than dismiss contradictory accounts as unreliable, Hollway and Jefferson invoked the psychoanalytic insights that:

- human subjectivities are fundamentally divided, fragmentary, and contradictory;
- people are irreconcilably anxious, and;
- anxiety constantly mobilises psychic defences and motivates human behaviour.

For these reasons, Hollway and Jefferson (1997, 2000) argue that individuals' accounts of themselves should not be taken at face value: narratives are always defensively constructed. Following Freud, Hollway and Jefferson assumed that incomplete words and sentences, slips of the tongue, stammers and gaps in individual's narratives reveal as much (if not more) about the interviewee's psychic interiority as the concise answers and 'attitudes' that are typically recorded in survey research. Hence, Hollway and Jefferson's case analyses involved theorising the gaps and inconsistencies in their interviewees' narratives, and paying particular attention to patterns in what interviewees left out, as much as what they actually said, in order to expose underlying unconscious dynamics. In order to interpret the meanings in their interviewees' narratives, Hollway and Jefferson became deeply engrossed in their case material. Their mode of interpretation was as much empathic and intuitive as rational and scientific. As analysts, Hollway and Jefferson drew on their own experiences, as well as other case analyses, to imagine and evoke the life experiences of their interviewees.

In particular, Hollway and Jefferson found the Kleinian concepts of splitting, projection, introjection, and identification especially useful in making sense of the patterns of absences and presences in individuals' accounts. To illustrate their points Hollway and Jefferson (1999; 2000) present rich case descriptions and sensitive case analyses which the reader might find applicable or insightful in other contexts. As Steiner Kvale (1999) explains that this is how 'precedent' works in both legal and clinical fields. In these fields it is *the reader or receiver of information,* not the analyst/researcher who determines the applicability of the analysis to other cases. The researcher's job is to ensure that there is sufficient evidence for the reader to make analytic comparisons. The researcher's job is not to make large-scale generalisations about entire populations.

## My Analysis

As I explained earlier, the Narrative Interview Method does not allow one to postpone all of the analysis until after the fieldwork is complete. ‘First interviews’ have to be analysed before the second interview can take place. After each interview I would write up my immediate thoughts, feelings and recollections as ‘Case Notes’. I would also use these notes to describe the appearance of the interviewee, any particular body language used by the interviewee (especially when violence was signalled), as well as conversations with the interviewee, before and after the interview. These notes varied in quality and length, not least because I would sometimes feel the need to get the case wrapped up, if only to stop thinking about it and get some sleep.

In the time between the two interviews I always fully transcribed the first interviews. This proved very laborious, but ultimately a very effective means of familiarising myself with what interviewees had said. I would usually have listened to interview cassettes three times before the second interview: once immediately after the interview had ceased (usually on my journey back to Keele); again during the first transcription, and; a third time while I checked the transcription over, often adding in stutters, incomplete words, and ‘urms’ that had been missed or overlooked. Sometimes I would also draw up a chronology of my interviewee’s life so as to clarify the order in which key life-events happened and to expose any gaps in the narrative account. This proved to be a good way of highlighting absences and contradictions in what were very often quite complicated life-stories.

In the meantime, my supervisor would also listen to a cassette copy of the interview. During our consultations we would discuss both the interviewee’s narrative and my use of the *Narrative Interview Method*. I would usually present a draft list of questions for the second interview, along with any problems or reservations I had with regard to particular questions. Between us we would usually try to work out some solutions.

That said, the bulk of the analysis took place after the fieldwork had come to an end. To get myself started I would usually:

- First, set out the individual’s chronology in as much detail as possible, highlighting those parts that remained most unclear after re-reading the transcripts.
- Second, I would try to extract those parts of the transcript relevant to the various themes I hoped to address. For example, extracting what the interviewee said about ‘being victimised’, ‘fighting’, ‘change’ or ‘growing-up’. This extracted material, together with the chronology, would be used to generate a ‘pen-portrait’ of each interviewee.
- Third, I would try to apply various theoretical frameworks to the case material (for example, reading it through the lenses of ‘radical feminism’, ‘structured action theory’, Freudian psychoanalysis, social learning theory, etc). Often, this would involve returning to the case material with new criteria to see whether there was any more evidence to support or negate particular theories. If there was further evidence I would revise and amend my ‘pen-portrait’ accordingly. Cases varied in the amount of work they required. Sometimes my analyses just did not feel ‘right’. I have spent many a restless evening returning once again to cassettes, transcripts and theory trying to produce ‘better’ portraits and more ‘fitting’ analyses.
- The pen-portrait would then be written up in relation to the theories, constituting a ‘working paper’.

- Once I had edited my ‘working papers’ to the best of my ability they would be seen by my supervisor and/or other interested parties, who would then raise further questions for me to return to both the theories and the case material with. Only once these further questions were adequately addressed could each working paper be said to constitute a ‘chapter’. Some of the chapters have been presented as conference papers. Others have been sent out for anonymous review in journals, hence incurring further critical scrutiny.

## Evaluating the Research

To summarise, I have endeavoured to conform to the principles of the *Narrative Interview Method* throughout my research. The degree to which I have managed to do this has varied from time to time. Some interviews were more challenging than others. Some case material was harder to make sense of than other case material. In one key respect I have preferred a technique more closely associated with the *Biographical Interviewing Method,* namely the choice of opening question. In my own research, I have found that by telling interviewees what my research is loosely about and then inviting them to tell the story of their life, narratives of relevance to my research could be elicited without imposing too much of my own ‘meaning frame’.

I make no apology if my samples of ‘practitioners’ and ‘violent men’ are not statistically representative of certain broader populations. Indeed, I doubt whether one can talk meaningfully of representativeness with regard to these populations. My intention in this thesis is not to make broad generalisations that fit all ‘violent men’, ‘all practitioners’ or ‘all men’. Indeed, I would argue that the reason the terms ‘masculinity’ and ‘masculinities’ allude conceptual clarity is because those using them often assume that general principles applying to all men can be derived from case material. Conversely, my aim is to seek out multiple points of similarity and divergence between individual men/cases. Against the orthodoxy, I invite the reader to make up their own mind as to whether elements of the cases I present here seem relevant to their lives or others they have encountered; to think carefully about which points of similarity they generalise to other cases.

However, I do concede two particular weaknesses with my methodology. The first of these fetters much biographical research in the social sciences, and is perhaps best referred to as the ‘irreducibly linguistic character’ of narrative. Using case material I have been able to demonstrate how the complexities and contradictions in individuals’ lives expose the inadequacy of certain theoretical explanations for violence whilst demonstrating that other readings of the data are possible and/or more persuasive. But ultimately all I have are my interviewees’ and my own linguistics constructs (see also Plummer, 1983: 105). The problem of finding meaning in these constructs is not entirely resolved by positing a psychosocial subject.

For evidence of this one might ask: given the contents of this PhD and the characteristics of my sample, which questions and issues I have not (yet) delved into? I have set certain cases aside because I doubted my competence to negotiate adequately between different interpretations of the data. I have chosen not to present analyses of the lives of the two women I interviewed, doubting whether I possessed a sufficiently broad range of cultural experiences to be able to offer a persuasive interpretation of their lives. This analytic work may be better postponed until such a time when I am able to draw more on the experiences of other analysts, perhaps working with others on the case material I have. With regard to the topic of false allegations of ‘child sexual abuse’ levied at a practitioner I have been reluctant to theorise, on the evidence I have, whether my interviewee was ‘telling it like it really was’, or offering a sophisticated denial of abuse. In fact, this is a problem that fetters all of the case analyses. Although many of my interviewees presented themselves in quite negative terms, this is not to say that some were not denying the true intensity of their violence, depicting themselves as having some inner emotional turmoil that simply did not exist, or concealing earlier experience of trauma or abuse.

One way of addressing the linguistic character of the research might have been to seek additional accounts either from official records, the men’s counsellors, or maybe even family members or their partners. But aside from the exceptionally complex ethical dilemmas that this would have posed (not least the potential danger of putting women and partners at risk of further intimidation and abuse) it may not have necessarily resolved the issue. The victims of physical and sexual abuse do not necessarily offer more accurate accounts of themselves than perpetrators. Some victims have reason to exaggerate their own experience of victimisation, perhaps to vindicate themselves for other actions or champion a political cause. Perhaps more frequently, others attempt to conceal, deny, or forget their experiences, through shame, fear of not being believed, or in order to ‘put the past behind them’ (Hoyle, 1998). Official records are themselves constructed out of fragments of these individuals’ accounts of themselves, albeit for different purposes.

Another weakness concerns the issue of reflexivity. Reflexivity, as Tim May (1998) observes, is both endogenous - referring to the impact of the researcher on the analysis - and ‘referential’ - referring to what the research tells us about those under study. Most of this PhD is devoted to the latter form of reflexivity, discussing the people under study and people like them. I suspect most readers will be satisfied that I have been reflexive enough on the ‘referential front’, even if they disagree with my final analysis. But others will argue, quite rightly, that what I have said about those under study is intertwined with narratives of my own - narratives that need to be better explicated before the validity of my analysis can be gauged. These ‘others’ will want to know how my presence impacted on the interviews, as well as where my choice of research questions was ‘coming from’ in the first place. Rather unsatisfactorily, I have yet to discover a means of analysing my own ‘transference’ in the research process. Indeed, one might retort - as I have done on occasion - that as another ‘defended subject’ this is something I will not be able to accomplish on my own. Perhaps in confirmation of this, I urge the reader to come to their own conclusions as to why this chapter begins so assuredly and concludes so tentatively; to interrogate the contradictions and changes of tone throughout this thesis, and to get back to me about how I might endeavour to address those absences and avoidances that shape my choice and use of case material.

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[1] Now called the “Free Association Narrative Interview Method” to mark out the centrality it accords to the psychoanalytic notion of free association (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

[2] For confidentiality reasons this ‘evaluative element’ has taken the form of unpublished reports, discussions, and advise not included in this thesis.

[3] Since this element of the research was not my primary focus, I shall postpone a discussion of it until chapter 8, where I address the problems of ‘working with violent men for change’.

[4] See especially Bob Connell’s (1995: 89) argument that:

> Life histories give rich documentation of personal experience, ideology and subjectivity...But life histories also, paradoxically document social structures, social movements and institutions. That is to say, they give rich evidence about impersonal and collective processes as well as subjectivity.

[5] Hollway and Jefferson (1997) had seven ‘big’ questions.

[6] See O’Connell & Layder, (1994: 117-20) for a concise account of the ‘orthodox structured approach’.

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[7] Note how Hollway and Jefferson's choice of the word 'impacted' avoids making the assumption that either short-lived or lasting effects resulted, and/or that consequences were desirable or undesirable.

[8] A methodology, amongst several, that inspired the formulation of the *Narrative Interview Method.*

[9] Although of these six positives, at least three were prompted by their counsellors.

[10] This figure may be high for a plurality of reasons, not least: greater awareness of counselling services amongst those working in the caring professions; fewer misconceptions about counselling amongst such professions; and/or the fact that in order to undertake counselling work one must first have been counselled.

[11] Before each interview commenced I would relay the following confidentiality statement:

## Confidentiality Statement

I need to explain to you the steps that I am taking to protect you from the implications of your disclosures: to ensure your anonymity and the confidentiality of what you say. In research of this kind there will always be a very slight possibility that someone will be able to identify you from what you have said, but I shall do everything I can to make sure this does not happen. If you feel that there are some special reasons why your anonymity might be undermined then do not hesitate to tell me. You need to know that:

- I am an independent researcher funded by an independent research council - the ESRC. I am not employed by AVP or any criminal justice agency. I am not a counsellor.
- The tapes of your interviews will be kept in a secure place and no-one other than myself and my academic supervisor will have access to them.
- When I write up the interviews your name and some specific places and dates you mention may be changed so that your account is made anonymous and thus difficult to trace back to you. Only extracts of your transcripts will find themselves in my final report.
- You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.
- The only time when I would expect to have to breach confidentiality would be if a respondent indicated that they represent a serious and immediate danger to someone else or their self. For example, if someone said they were going to cause someone else criminal harm or if they told me they intended to commit suicide, then I might consider notifying their counsellor or supervisor or the emergency services. Obviously this would depend upon the circumstances. Do you understand?
- Finally, I'm very grateful that you have agreed to speak to me. I couldn't do this research without your cooperation. It is important to me that you feel comfortable with the interview. So I want you to remember that you are free to stop the interview or take a break at any time. Is there anything you would like to ask me or tell me before we start?

[12] This raises the questions Jo Goodey (2000) formulates in her re-working of Denzin's typology of 'epiphanies' into the 'hegemonic masculine biography', namely: whether these narrative differences reflect (1) socio-economic differences in men's actual lived

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experiences (2) whether differential socio-economic status leads different men to experience the *same* life-events in different ways; and/or (3) whether some men are able to speak more authoritatively about certain life-events as a consequence of their socio-economic status. But as Tony Jefferson (personal correspondence) reminds me it also raises issues of how the impact of trauma shapes one's capacity to remember and tell stories coherently. Gitta Sereny (1999) makes this point in her account of how she struggled to uncover the emotional truths underpinning Mary Bell's murderous behaviour. See also Antze & Lambek, (1996).

# Chapter 3

# *Masculinities, Violence and Defended Psychosocial Subjects*

## Abstract

*Against 'structured action theory' and the 'discourses of violence' approach this chapter argues for a psychoanalytic interpretive approach to reading violent men's accounts of their lives. Using material from a single case study, the author challenges the idea that violence towards women is necessarily 'masculinity accomplishing' and suggests how an approach which theorises both the social and psychic can be deployed to address the issue of 'change'. The strengths and limitations of positing a defended psychosocial subject in the research process are also discussed.*

## Introduction

Two perspectives have become particularly influential in recent discussions of men's violence towards women. One of these perspectives, James Messerschmidt's 'structured action theory' (1993, 1994, 1997, 1999) conceptualises violence as one of many 'situational resources' for accomplishing masculinity. In Messerschmidt's account men choose violence against women as a means of achieving a positive masculine identity, albeit in circumstances limited by the structures of labour, power and cathexis. As other commentators have illustrated elsewhere (notably, Jefferson, 1994, 1996, 1997a; Hood-Williams, 2001), Messerschmidt deploys a rational, unitary but self-interested subject operating in a structurally unequal society. In contrast, the 'discourses of violence' approach favoured by Jeff Hearn[1] (1996b, 1997, 1998a) conceptualises men's violence to women as a largely instrumental strategy of control. Hearn fears that the concept of 'masculinity' might confuse the issue of how men behave and what they say about their behaviour, not least because he has observed that men's talk about violence, whether to friends, researchers or practitioners is laden with effective techniques of neutralisation (Groombridge, 1999) that work to deny, excuse, rationalise or justify the use of threats and force. Whereas Messerschmidt (especially, Messerschmidt, 1999) believes that interviewees can and will 'tell it like it is' given sufficient trust and rapport, Hearn presumes a male subject inscribed by self-interested discourses of violence and masculinity.

In what follows I suggest a more emotionally tentative approach to men's subjectivities that challenges the synonymy that both Hearn and Messerschmidt attribute to 'masculinity/maleness' and 'violence against women'. Practitioners have been adept at pointing out that in order to engage men in a process of change it is first necessary to recognise the social and psychic complexity of men's lives[2]. Once this complexity is recognised abusive behaviour is more readily condemned and the possibility of non-abusive alternatives can be pursued (Daniels, 1996; Wyre & Tate, 1995; Tudor, 1999; Wolf-Light, 1999a,b). My argument is that a psychoanalytic interpretive reading of men's lives not only serves to highlight what many men have in common, but also opens up the possibility of change to theoretical engagement without denying the multitude of socio-structural and psychological factors that militate against it. In order to make my argument I present the case of a man I have called 'Gary'. Having presented Gary's biography, interspersed with my own analysis, I conclude with some critical reflections on what his case might tell us about masculinity, psychosocial analyses and the prospect of changing violent men.

## The Narrative Interview Method

The account deployed below was elicited using the *Narrative Interview Method* described in chapter 2. As I explained, the founders of this method take the goal of 'complete and unfettered access to respondents' personal lives as a largely unascertainable ideal. The method deploys the psychoanalytic presumption of a defended, fragmented subject, anxiously managing (repressing, splitting and projecting) thoughts, feelings, and memories that threaten the integrity of the self, during the interviewing *and* throughout the analysis. Presuming a defended subject at the analysis stage inhibits the reduction of individuals' subject positions to single, unitary attitudes or 'types'. The analyst assumes that the reality of the interviewee's biography is greater than the sum of the extracted parts; and that those parts elicited during the interview are an incomplete set. Memory loss, embarrassment, shame and the sheer inexpressibility of so much human experience will have delimited the interviewee's capacity (by some unknown quantity) to either 'tell it like it is' and/or completely conceal their own emotional truths.

Such a position is not an uncontroversial one. As with much analytic work there is the danger of reading things between the lines that simply are not there (Parker, 1997a). What is presented as truth may reflect the analyst's own projection onto their respondents (Frosh, 1994). One might retort that there is no point in doing research if we merely enable respondents (especially abusive ones) to speak for themselves, and that all research (Plummer, 1995), whether explicitly psychoanalytic or not, is potentially effected by the researchers own projections; a pitfall that is best avoided by being critical, rigorous and accurate (Gelsthorpe, 1992: 215).

Moreover, uncritical psychoanalytic work can sometimes justify the status quo (Elliot, 1994). In this particular instance there is the danger that in acknowledging a link between masculinity and violence we might free men of the responsibility for actually seeking to change (Frosh, 1994: 2), especially if we insist that part of the psychic composition of masculinity is consciously inaccessible to many men. By theorising masculine subjectivity one might serve either wittingly or unwittingly to grant academic legitimacy to men's justifications for their violence at the victim's expense. Indeed, there are still the unresolved issues of whether women's subjectivities can be conceived in the same way as men's (on which see Daly, 1997; Hood-Williams, 2001), and whether the psychic realm adds a necessary explanatory dimension (Jefferson, 1997a: 553). The argument of this chapter is that adding a psychic dimension is necessary. By articulating the many emotional truths of men's 'experience' we expose the disparity between what violent men feel, say and do, the interface of men's *psychic investment* in *social discourses* and *practices*. Hence, this interface seems a likely site from which to instigate an effective politics of change.

## Case Study

### Introducing Gary

Gary was a 26 year old white male, of slim build, introduced to me by his counsellor. Gary and I spoke for about seventy minutes on two separate occasions. He was an amenable (almost obedient) interviewee, (unusually) eager to please, and probably a little nervous. Gary delivered his account in a soft, thoughtful, and non-confrontational manner. Gary never challenged any of my questions and at the end of both interviews he asked me whether I felt his account would be of any help to me; to which I said, “I’m sure it will be”.

At the time of the interviews Gary lived alone. He had no children, but sometimes had to care for his ‘girlfriend’s little boy’. He was unemployed, but ‘starting a course soon’. Gary had been attending voluntary counselling for about three months. Prior to that he had been refusing offers of medical and therapeutic help for his violence because he was ‘frightened’ and was ‘convinced’ that he could ‘sort it all out’ alone. Gary began his account with a number of his earliest memories, all of which seemed highly symbolic of, if not significant in shaping, the major events of his life.

### Gary’s Earliest Memories

> DG Perhaps you could basically start by telling me the story of your life. Start as far back as you can remember.

GX Well as far back as I can remember. Err. I can remember when we were being little, being a little kid. I am not sure how old. Err. (Pause) No, I've got no idea how old. Well. I might have been about (Pause) four or something like that. Or maybe nearly four. I'm not sure. Err. I can remember vaguely living at me erm. Oh hang on, no. Maybe it's just because I've been told about it that I think I can remember. Erm. I can remember living at me dad's mum and dad's…I can remember going to me other grandparents. Me mum's mum and dad's house…[and]sitting on her knee and her singing me a song that I think was about Robin Hood, but I'm not sure. Err. I can also remember being told that I wasn't allowed to call me mum, 'me mum' anymore. I had to call her 'Auntie Emily'. Which really confused me at times, coz I didn't understand why. Erm.

DG You were told that you weren't allowed to call your biological mum...

GX Yeah, I weren't allowed to call me mum. I knew she were me mum. I'm not sure when this was. I'm not sure if this was when my dad had met, already met…me step-mum… I've no idea about that... And I can remember…going there [to my maternal grandparent's house] and calling her 'Auntie Emily'...I can actually remember calling her this. And err Uncle Billy, who were her boyfriend at the time. And err, and like not really understanding why. Doing it because I'd been told, coz I was only a little kid and that. I'd been told to do, and so I was doing it. But not really understanding why.

DG Did you ask why?

GX I don't think I did. I don't think so. I can't remember if I did or not…And erm, as far as I remember when we went there…I was always found…spending most of the time on me own. I don't think I had many friends…I don't know if that's because I just didn't want to be around a lot of other people or not…I remember there were one boy who I was best friends with who err moved away to somewhere else. I can't remember where. And I can remember like, when that happened, like feeling really like lonely at times. Like not really bothering to try and make friends with anybody else. Erm. I can also remember just something like, running out of school early because the

> bell had gone. I thought it was time to go home. I ran out. Coz I could see me erm me mam waiting for me. I thought it were time. That’s about all I can remember about being at infant school.
>
> Oh no, hang on. (Pause) I can remember getting into trouble for hiccuping, which were really funny. When I was sat in err, when we were sat in assembly. The head teacher were at the front of assembly. And erm. I got hiccups. I did this like really loud hiccup. And you could hear ever[ywhere]. Like really, really loud hiccup. Erm. Headmistress said, “Who made that noise?”. And I like was looking round like in puzzlement, wondering what she was talking about coz I’d just hiccups and I didn’t know she was talking about me. And then somebody said, “It were him, Miss”. So I can remember being like told to go and stand outside her classroom. And being stood there crying like explaining what had happened (laughs).
>
> DG Mmm.
>
> GX And then she said, “Oh right then. Go back to your class” …I can remember telling me dad that night. And he come into school to complain about it to the head. [For] which [there] were, probably no…need to, because like I had not actually got into trouble for it. Like once I had explained what had happened I’d just gone back to me class…

There are a number of things that should strike the reader about this account. Firstly, I have not attempted to convert what was actually said into smooth flowing text. The fractured and incomplete quality of some of Gary’s statements are evidence of the uncertainty, ambiguity, and contradictoriness which underpin his (and all of our) subjectivities. This is a man trying to remember, as he speaks, what he thinks had happened. He is sifting what he can actually remember from what he thinks he can remember because he has been told. That Gary’s account is uncertain should not be seen as evidence of its invalidity, but its authenticity. In fact, Gary's account is typical of adult's recollections of their childhood's (White, 1998) in that:

- As with so much memory reconstruction, particularly around distressing childhood events, he has remembered the feelings of uncomfortableness, anxiety and pain better than the sequence of events;

- Gary's early recollections are more isolated (as opposed to a chain of events). His early memories are associated with the impact of significant others on his own feelings, as opposed to recognising those significant others in their own right.

Second, Gary illustrates for us how typically dependent children are on significant adults to help them make sense of their confusion and puzzlement. The account of him running out of school to meet his mother suggests strong desire and longing in those early years: a desire which overturned his ordinarily conscious self-restraint in waiting for the bell. We might question whether his mother was really there or whether this was just the wish fulfilment of a confused little boy who's mother suddenly left without comprehensible explanation[3]. The theoretically important point is not so much whether she was there or not, but that whilst this real or imagined memory has impacted on Gary's sense of his self, it is also inseparably a structuring frame of reference in the account he was reconstituting for me.

Significant adults' unwillingness to explain to Gary what was going on truthfully and coherently had a bewildering and disenchanting effect on the way he perceived (and still does perceive) the world. At around four years old his family was breaking up and reconstituting. People were telling him ‘all kinds of things’. Gary didn’t ask ‘why?’. His self-confessed loneliness suggests that he had few people, if anyone, with whom he shared this confusion. No-one realised how much emotional damage it might cause Gary (or any child) to be told that his mother was now his ‘Auntie’, even though he still knew her to be his mum. Gary’s (humorous) hiccuping story conveyed just how frightening his confusion could be, especially when he suddenly found himself under threat and interrogation for something he had not realised was wrong. Indeed, Gary later recounted the ‘terrible trouble’ he got into when learning to read. He would suddenly be reprimanded for copying what someone read out, but he could not (and still cannot) understand why: ‘as far as I can tell that’s one of the ways you learn to like recognise words and stuff’.

Finally, there are a number of references in Gary’s account that are unexplained, but should not be dismissed as irrelevant. Note the warm and fond reference to his maternal grandmother who sang songs about Robin Hood; and the absence of similar references to his paternal grandparents. Note also Gary’s more embittered reference to his father going down to the school even though he’d been told there were ‘no need’ to; the conspicuous absence of adjectives depicting his stepmother, and the dismissive ‘Uncle Billy- who were her boyfriend at the time’; all of which could have multiple foundations in the real and fantasy world of this small boy[4]. In short, this brief opening statement was overlain with significance extending beyond Gary’s actually spoken words. Gary’s frames of reference were simultaneously ambiguous and meaningful products of the vagaries of memory in reconstruction.

### Gary's Violence to Rebecca

Moving on, I asked Gary, "Can you tell me the story of you becoming involved with [this counselling project]?". He replied:

> GX Well erm (pause) the reason I erm got involved was because I were being violent, towards erm me [sic] girlfriend. It's not. I didn't actually get involved while it was happening. I've got involved since…I'm just err (Pause) all the time getting really err (Pause), really like (Pause) really, really like wound up, like beyond like any like necessary degree of like anger, like. Just like getting really tense and frustrated and basically, not all the time, but a lot of the time…I just didn't know what, how to handle like certain situations.
>
> DG Situations such as?
>
> GX …When it first started…she'd think I were like picking on her or having a go at her. And like…one day every week...her mum would come and pick- she's got a little boy…pick him up and take him to this like nursery...
>
> DG Mmm.
>
> GX And err. Every week she would get in a right panic. Really panicking and running about like mad. Saying, "I'm not gonna get everything done. I'm not gonna be ready in time". So I was trying to help her…She [was]…just panicking, and panicking. I said, "Look. Just calm down. I can't like. We're not going to get anything sorted out if you don't calm down". ...And she'd think I was having a go at her. And this would go on week after week. And eventually, I'd just…be like shouting... "Don't! Just calm down. Please calm down"…And she'd say, "Well you are just picking on me. Just having a go at me". I said, "No I'm not. Calm down"…I'd just need her to calm down so that we can get everything sorted out…And no matter how much I'd say, "No I'm not. I'm not. Sorry. I'm not. I'm not picking on you"... a lot times well she thought I was criticising…And no matter how much I'd say, "I'm not doing" she wouldn't seem to believe me.

And I'd just get so frustrated and angry because when I were younger a lot of the time I seemed not to be, just not believed by parents…Say I'd done something wrong. And if I'd not done they wouldn't believe me. Or if I had done it…it wasn't half as bad as they seemed to think. They'd just not believe me. So I'd get really frustrated. The same thing. I'd get really frustrated by the fact that somebody wouldn't believe me. I'd just get so unbelievably angry about it. And I'd just like start screaming and shouting and throwing things around. Just like basically having a tantrum. Err. It just got worse, and worse and worse until it didn't need any kind of like. It didn't a lot of the time, didn't need…anything to trigger it off…for no reason at all, I'd just get really like wound up…Just like completely lose it, and go completely over the top. Like breaking things and chucking things and punching holes in stuff and hurting Rebecca…Like verbally abusing her a lot. A lot more than actually physically hurting her ...But I did physically abuse her. Coz like I've hit her a few times and I've. There's been a couple of times when I had me hands round, round her throat. Erm.

DG You hit her. What? How?

GX …I can't remember…I could ask her actually. And maybe if she wanted to…she could probably remember a lot better than me. I find it difficult to remember exactly what happened sometimes…I'm so like out of control that I just can't. When I think back I can't remember exactly how things happened...

DG Okay. You also said there was a time when you.

GX Yeah, there was like twice I did that to her. But I weren't actually trying to… strangle her…I think I got her like that (signals hands round throat). And it were like holding her…up against wall…I think she had bruises there afterwards.

DG On her throat?

GX Yeah, I think she did. But I wasn't actually trying to strangle her. I was just like. I don't know. Holding her up against the wall and like probably screaming and shouting at her as well. Erm.

> DG Can you remember what sort of things you would’ve been saying?
>
> GX I’m not certain…I’d of probably been swearing a lot or maybe even…telling her…that it were her fault that I was in very bad mood. Stuff like that. Even though afterwards when I’d calmed down I would tell her that I didn’t actually mean that. But it couldn’t, it don’t change anything about how I’ve been…It weren’t happening all the time but like there were some periods that were worse than others. There were sometimes…like maybe a couple of weeks, maybe longer, I was like completely fine...I find it really hard to separate the actual times that it happened…It all just seems to be all like mixed, like mixed up together in me memory. It’s…all just like one big blur like of shouting and screaming and being abusive...I always knew what I were doing were wrong [but] I didn’t seem to be able to control it. Stop it. But since [I’ve come to counselling] I’ve like found it easier to keep calm and like I’m not being so irrational…Oh yeah. The week that I did [strangle her], I can’t actually remember doing it, but I did believe her...She, she’s got absolutely no reason to lie to me about it, to like exaggerate. So I do believe her, even though I can’t remember it.

Clearly, Gary is a man who has been very violent, probably to a much worse degree than he remembers or is willing to tell. His story fits with much of what feminist researchers have heard from victims of domestic violence (Stanko, 1990; Mullender, 1996, Lees, 1997). Gary says he wasn’t ‘actually trying to strangle’ Rebecca, but it is not unreasonable to presume that Rebecca would have perceived this violence as potentially life-threatening. Gary’s violence had been persistent; at best there would be a ‘couple of weeks’ when he’d ‘be fine’. The violence was unpredictable. Gary would ‘get so unbelievably angry…It just got worse, and worse and worse, until…a lot of the time, [it] didn’t need…anything to trigger it off”. Gary was so wound up and out of control that he couldn’t (or wouldn’t) remember what he had done.

Indeed, given that Gary's violence 'fits' with what feminist research has uncovered from victims of domestic violence we might ask four questions of his account. Firstly, is Gary's account truthful? One might have expected Gary's adulthood recollections to feel more unequivocal than his childhood recollections; not only because they are more recent, but also because it is conventional for adults to 'appear to know' themselves more authoritatively than children. Was Gary's proclaimed inability to remember a way of deliberately concealing things from me? Possibly, but Gary's story read much more like a clumsy confession than a carefully constructed lie[5]. His memories were all mixed up and understandably perplexing to him, making his speech chaotic and his stories disjointed. Gary seemed to be telling me as much as he could remember and find out - something that he was under no obligation to do- even though it did not paint him in a very flattering light[6]. Maybe Gary had unconsciously learnt to deal with his violence by forgetting - a strategy he could have picked up during the unresolved interpersonal conflicts of his childhood (see Hodges et al, 1994).

What Gary elicited for me was a highly contingent account; contingent upon the rapport between him and I; my methodology; his experience of counselling; and his current feelings about the biographical twists and turns of his life. We might speculate that if Rebecca had had him arrested we might have heard a much more embittered account. It is this very contingency that sheds light upon my second, third, and fourth set of questions, namely: (2) What did Gary's violence mean to him? (3) In what circumstances is he violent to his partner? (4) Why was Gary violent when some other men in similar circumstances would not be? In short, to what extent is Gary a 'normal' man and what does his behaviour, thoughts and feelings tell us about his and/or other men's 'masculinity?

## The Meaning of Gary’s Violence

In contrast to the much-made claim that men use drink to disown their violence (Mullender, 1996; Hearn, 1997, 1998a), Gary claimed that he only drank after being violent.

> I used to drink a lot as a result of me losing me temper and getting violent. It were never like the other way round. I never like really lost me temper as a result of me drinking. It was always…drinking as a result of [being violent].

That Gary had used drink and drugs to suppress his own self-loathing became evident when he told me of his two suicide attempts. Two years earlier Gary had taken a near lethal cocktail of anti-depressants, painkillers, and alcohol.

> I obviously weren’t thinking rationally…I were upsetting so many people I was thinking maybe if like I weren’t here then I’d not upset anybody. Like I know they might be upset that I were dead or whatever, but I’d not be upsetting anybody. It wouldn’t be going on for years. It just didn’t seem…I just did not know what to do…I had no idea what I could [do]…I hated myself, the way I were being. The way I were treating Rebecca. And I didn’t know how to stop it.…I was just like despairing that much that I thought that [suicide] were the only solution.

It was Rebecca who found Gary the next day and got him to hospital.

Gary had felt bad about his violence for a long time. He stated that he knew he was ‘being a complete git towards Rebecca... that I always knew what I were doing were wrong’. Gary was not oblivious to the injustice and unreasonableness of his violence. He was despairing because he ‘just did not know what to do’ to control his rage. Gary was not proud of his violence (to men or women) as the following story about an altercation with the father of

Rebecca’s son illustrates. The child had witnessed Gary upsetting his mother and relayed this back to his father. The child’s father sought Gary out in a night-club and set about him. Although he managed to overpower the child’s father (who Gary described as ‘enormous’ and ‘frightening’) Gary was unwilling to accept the bravado others attributed to him for doing so.

> I had a few like people that I know come up to me and do the usual stupid, like erm, “We hear that you knocked boots off him or whatever”. And I just said, “Well I’m not talking about it”… I weren’t like actually proud of the fact that I had knocked somebody a lot bigger than me over... I had people coming up to me and going as though like I should be. But they obviously didn’t know all the rest of what were going off anyway.

‘What were going off anyway’ was that Gary was being brutally violent to Rebecca. Despite Gary’s parents’ insistence that Rebecca should call the police, she had not. In fact, Rebecca had chosen to call a doctor, which had effectively set in motion a whole chain of social and psychiatric support systems that eventually saved Gary from getting into worse trouble. At this point in the story, the tone of Gary’s voice dropped, and he reflected:

> Actually Rebecca’s been really good about it all. Despite what I’ve done. Despite how much I’ve upset her... Despite how much I’ve hurt her she’s always been like. She, she’s not just said like, “I don’t want anything to do with you”. She’s… always trying to help me. And I’m really like grateful for that.

Thus, if we are going to attempt to explain Gary’s violence, we also need to account for his own repulsion at his actions, his own self-hate and self-pity, his own conscious awareness that his violence was wrong, his emerging remorse and gratitude, and his current anxieties over his ‘uncontrollable’ temper (Hodges et al, 1994). We need to accept that what Gary has done has had an impact on the way his account is remembered and told, and that he cannot explain everything for himself. Gary's subjectivity is not reducible to some monolithic masculine or patriarchal quality: it consists of an evolving set of difficult to express, and hence seemingly irreconcilably, anxious emotions (Pattiman et al, 1997).

## The Social and Psychic Dynamics of Gary's Violence

Gary explained how during a row about Rebecca's son's visit to her family, he (Gary) would get so 'wound up, beyond like any like necessary degree' because Rebecca thought he 'were picking on her'. Gary feared not being able 'to get anything sorted' if Rebecca didn't 'calm down'. We might interpret this as Gary blaming Rebecca for his 'tantrums'. But it is an unconvincing way of passing the blame. Gary admits he did 'pick on' Rebecca in a very physical way. Moreover, it was obviously Rebecca who was doing the 'sorting', not Gary.

An alternative way of interpreting this scenario would be to argue that Gary attempted to invest in a discourse, often available to men, in which he positioned himself as the rational, caring organiser, perhaps in order to conceal his own insecurities over Rebecca's independence, and the concomitant threat that her son and family might pose to him. Nevertheless, Rebecca, according to Gary thought he 'was having a go at her'. Gary's investment in this discourse of the 'rational organiser' did not work. Gary refuted Rebecca's accusation, but was worried, even paranoid, that she still thought he was criticising. Gary pleaded and apologised (despite his initial denial), 'Sorry... I'm not picking on you'. Gary felt misunderstood and undermined as Rebecca appeared to misconstrue his call for calm as evidence of his dissatisfaction with (as opposed to desire for) her.

Denied the largely fulfilled expectation amongst white, middle-class, able-bodied heterosexual men to be listened to[7], (an expectation that might have seemed all the more rudimentary given Gary's unemployed status and his intense feelings of loneliness) Gary's feelings of being misrepresented did become increasingly persecutory. Gary experienced flashbacks to times in his childhood when he was not believed. Eventually he would 'lose it' and be shouting, swearing and begging: "Don't! Just calm down. Please calm down". He'd "just *need* her to calm down". Gary's feelings of persecution would tilt towards humiliation. Gary had made the situation worse because Rebecca experienced his caring but controlling interventions as undermining and belittling. Feeling 'so unbelievably angry' because all his efforts were in vain, Gary started throwing things around. Morally defeated, Gary asserted his dominance physically. He then told Rebecca that his bad mood was her fault.

Thus, in the words of Jack Katz (1988: 22), Gary struggled to contain his increasing humiliation until he attempted to 'transcend it in rage'. Gary's tantrums might be interpreted as his last ditch attempt at taking charge of the situation physically whilst expressing his sense of misrecognition. In the aftermath of his violence, Gary was hesitant to blame Rebecca, not only because he had violated the trust of his most valued confidante, but because in asserting his dominance physically Gary unwittingly unveiled that he had not got the mental resolve to deal with Rebecca's criticism. Gary could not contain his own emotional disarray in the face of someone else's confusion. Gary did not embody competence; he slipped easily and crazily from trying to help into a tyrannical rage. The (unspoken) paradox in this is that it was actually Gary who could not cope with the 'apparent chaos and emotionally driven disorder' (Frosh, 1997a: 73) which Rebecca's panic seemed to signify. In enacting his violence Gary was forced to give up the pretence that he *was calm and she was not.* In Kleinian terms, Gary was splitting off and projecting his persecutory anxieties onto Rebecca. Although Gary claimed that Rebecca felt criticised, it was he who was afraid that she might think he was doing her down[8]. The moment Gary lost his temper he conceded inability to contain his own (already acute) anxious confusion[9]. After he had been violent, Gary could no longer safely attack the weaknesses he had projected onto Rebecca. Gary would retract his accusation that it was all Rebecca's fault.

## Unexplained Issues

Neither, 'structured action theory' nor the 'discourses of violence' approach can account for both the *specifics of Gary's violence* and *his feelings about it.* If Gary's violence was a 'situational resource for accomplishing masculinity', as structured action theory would have it, it was a resource that proved consistently problematic to him in the aftermath. Similarly, if Gary was presenting his story within discourses of 'violence' or 'masculinity' then these discourses were failing to either repudiate his responsibility or alleviate his feelings of shame. Gary's violence was a highly emotionally charged and an intensely shame-inducing response to the breakdown of a social order in which he attempted to position himself as rational and caring. To the extent that Gary's violence originated in misogynistic or macho attitudes (cf. O' Sullivan, 1998; & Websdale & Chesney-Lind, 1998), these attitudes conceal Gary's desire to be heard and recognised along with his persecutory fears of misrepresentation and chaos.

Although we cannot prove this with any certainty, we might speculate that Gary's socio-economic status and his sense of social isolation made the threats to his vulnerability seem all the more insurmountable when his authority failed. However, this leaves us with a similar quandary to structured action theory. Many men of similar socio-economic status to Gary routinely encounter similar situations, but they do not all assault their partners. Given that many men experience the emotions and sensations that Gary does, why do most men *not* experience them so strongly, so compellingly, so absolutely or so frequently? Or if they do, why do they *not* act on them? Was there some biographical basis to Gary's decision to use violence and/or his feelings of persecution and despair? Gary gave me four intimations at possible 'answers' in his first interview:

1. His flashbacks of being blamed in his childhood.
2. His (inferred) history of self-harming and suicidal impulses.
3. The absence of any account of his teenage years.
4. The (possible) content and rationale of the different stories he was told about his family.

## Gary's Second Interview

Gary's history of self-harming began in his early teens when he can remember:

> doing things like holding onto the radiator…wanting it to burn me. Like in the end I'd just end up letting go because it were getting too hot. But just wanting it to burn me. Erm. Not really understanding why or anything like that. I were just like being really upset and miserable and just wanting it to burn me.

In his late teens and early twenties Gary had put himself through bouts of severe alcoholism. He attempted to cut his wrists when he was about nineteen. This was around the time of his break-up with his first girlfriend. It was also the day of a family gathering in which his paternal grandfather had been invited into his father's home. The origins of Gary's depression, the conflicting stories he had been told about his family, and his disdain for his paternal grandparents were intricately related.

> GX My sister had been sexually abused when she were younger by me granddad, me dad's dad…My dad's parents used to come round one night…every week…And I'd know because I'd be able to see the light shining…I'd hear him come out of the toilet and go into me sister's room. And this were happening like every week. And he'd be in there for a while.
>
> And it…were the same time, we just first started learning about…sex education, and learning about the differences between girls and boys…And erm I remember the teacher saying something along the lines of "If an adult ever touches you in these places and tells you it's your special secret then it is wrong for them to do that and you should tell someone".
>
> I just remember being, laying in bed when I were younger, hearing him going into my sister's room and like being there for ages, erm, thinking like, "What if he's doing something like this? Like what if"…But then eventually he got caught doing it…He were found out. The next day my dad told me what had been happening. I found out that he had actually been doing what I thought he'd been doing.
>
> …as I got older I started like thinking "Why hadn't I said anything? If I'd said something about it, if I'd said what I thought err it might not have happened, or it might or it wouldn't have gone on as long"…I think, I were just too frightened to say anything.
>
> DG Too frightened?

> GX Just frightened that I'd get into trouble that, or maybe my sister would get into trouble. I don't know…I remember my dad telling me that his mum had…tried to stop him phoning the police. Tried to like persuade him not to phone the police about what had been going off…I suppose it's some kind of err like, "Oh no. We can't have [the] shame or whatever".

Gary's feelings of guilt were compounded by the fact that his family had used him to reintroduce this grandfather back into the household (despite having received a suspended sentence with the expressed condition that he stay away from his grandchildren).

> GX …I must have been about thirteen…I still didn't fully understand like what had happened. How bad it were. I knew… it were like a terrible thing…one of the worse things that could happen to someone. But I just didn't understand fully at the time. And I remember we had a massive argument with me mum and dad. And this was one of the times when they were coming out with all kinds of rubbish about, "…If you had ended up living with me proper…mum, things would be loads worse. You'd get hit loads more". And stuff like that. And I was like really confused. And really like upset.
>
> …I can remember them mentioning my granddad for some reason. And I just remember like, erm, saying something like, "…How come we don't see him anymore?". And despite what had happened…they asked me if I wanted to see him again. And I just said, 'Yeah'. And then they went and asked Sarah, my sister, to say what [whether] she wanted to see him again…I found out later, when she found out that I knew what had happened to her, that she were absolutely terrified to say…that she didn't want to see him again. She just said, 'Yeah'…It were my fault that she'd ended up having to see him again and…that were one of the…the reasons I just started (pause) erm, just like hating myself so much, at the time.

Gary's parents responded to this guilt-ridden and shame inducing sexually abusive relationship by (unwittingly?) taking action that made Gary feel responsible for the prolonged trauma his sister faced. During and after the period of exacerbated familial tensions (when the sexual abuse was exposed), Gary's parents became increasingly physically violent towards him and his sister. Gary's parents would excuse their violence by suggesting that his biological mother would have hit him 'loads more'. Gary did not and could not 'know who to believe'. Gary's stepmother's and father's violence were also connected to his persecutory sense of not being believed. Gary's stepmother would hit him around the head whilst his dad was at work. Gary recounted the following incident which exposes the abusive effects of the hierarchy of loyalty and (mis)trust which developed in this family:

> "[My stepmother] were going to hit me with a slipper. I remember putting my hand up to try and defend myself. And her thinking that I'd erm put me fist up to try and hit her, when I hadn't…And no matter how many times I had said, "I was just trying to stop you hitting me. I was just trying to stop getting hurt", she wouldn't believe me. So when me dad come home from work he got told that I'd tried to hit her. So I'd get hit again. I get into more trouble for that".

Gary's stepmother would hit him and then Gary's father would punish Gary for trying to defend himself. Gary's explanation of events was negated in preference to his stepmother's. It would seem logical to presume that this was the most important example of Gary's flashback that when he was younger his parent's 'wouldn't believe me. Or if I had done it…it wasn't half as bad as they seemed to think'.[10]

By Gary's late teens his father's drunken violence towards both children was becoming brutal and dangerous. Gary's father had head-butted Gary and threatened Sarah with a knife[11]. Gary left home (twice). After his father and stepmother told him to leave home the second time Gary sought alternative accommodation for him and Sarah[12]. Gary's parents confirmed to social services that “they didn’t want me [Gary] to go back, but they wanted my sister to”.

## Case Summary

There is much more that I could say about Gary’s life, but given the limits of space I want to attempt to offer a summary and some tentative conclusions as to the strength and limitations of the analysis I have offered.

Gary’s family had a number of badly kept secrets, some of which were connected to his paternal grandfather’s sexual abuse. Gary was brought up in an environment in which adults rarely took responsibility for their own mistakes and the emotional pain they caused, preferring to either project blame onto the children, or excuse themselves with the threat that ‘things would be worse’ for the children if they lived elsewhere. Adult authority generally offered little to alleviate, and much to aggravate, the anxieties, lonesome vulnerabilities, and bewildering injustice Gary experienced throughout his youth. Gary was often held responsible for the violence inflicted on him. Gary also felt a terrible burden of guilt for both his failure to prevent the sexual abuse visited on his sister and for prolonging her suffering. Gary’s (partially guilt-driven?) desire to protect Sarah also prolonged the emotional and physical abuse his parents inflicted on him. Gary’s persisting feelings of guilt and persecution were coupled with his various experiences of rejection and betrayal.

It is difficult to explain the intensity of Gary’s rage and the harm he has inflicted on his own and other’s bodies without reference to the confused little boy he once was (and to some extent still is), and his (learned) tendency to split and project, onto his closest intimate, the uncomfortable emotions he cannot quite repress. This is not to say that this fear and confusion *cause* Gary's violence, nor that that there are not frightened little boys and girls who do not turn into batterers (Maguire, 1996). But it is to suggest that the humiliation and disenchantment Gary experienced during his youth had some form of impact on the formation of his adult masculinity: an adult masculinity that suddenly required him to 'contain' the troublesome feelings he internalised during his childhood (Collier, 1998). Gary's violence served as a temporary, contingent resource for fending off his persecutory feelings. This same violence subsequently came to signify the very emasculating lack of mental resolve that he was trying to conceal.

The fact that Gary's was not the 'body controlled' or 'disciplined body' illustrated (humiliatingly and tragically for him) that he did not have the mental resolve that is the essential complement to physical musculature in the realms of the world's most acclaimed hard/masculine men (Jefferson, 1998). Gary's violence to himself and others, his conviction that his grandfather's sexual abuse of his sister 'was one of the worst things that could happen to a person', his protectiveness towards his sister, his sense of injustice at being beaten by his father and step-mother, and his unwillingness to seek help for his violence are all evidence of his (and I contend most men's) ambiguous relation to violence against women. Gary's desire for accurate recognition, his remorse, gratitude and self-hate are constantly re-constructed in his account, shifting his subjectivity away from self-righteous indignation and/or fatalism and towards a more balanced recognition of the damage he has done and the possibility that he can make a difference.

## Masculinities, Violence and Change

Theorising men's violence in this way suggests a more precarious, subtle, and layered notion of masculine subjectivity than is implied in much of the sociological literature. It suggests that if masculinity is what men are trying to accomplish through violence then it is not necessarily achieved in a way that men desire it to be. Moreover, those very observable traits and behaviours that we so often take to be indicative of masculinity are, in fact, the observable manifestation of men's sometimes (but not always) unconscious attempts to fend off psychic threats to their sense of vulnerability. In presenting Gary's case I have suggested one way of explaining why violence towards women is condemned by so many men even though some of these men are undoubtedly violent themselves. My means of making this point are controversial because, on the one hand, my analysis evokes psychic experiences that I hope many men will be able to relate to, but on the other, I do so with the suspicion that neither Gary nor his partner would fully endorse my interpretation of their lives.

Is this psychic dimension a necessary part of the explanation? One might argue that if men's and women's psyches are not fundamentally sexed, different or opposing, then the reason behind men's greater participation in violence would still appear to lie with the way in which certain social discourses and institutional arrangements make violence a seemingly more 'masculine' resource for doing gender (Hood-Williams, 2001). This is a view that I would endorse, yet I think it makes the case for an adequate psychic explanation all the more compelling precisely because it locates the more radical agenda for change within the remit of the social (MacInnes, 1998).

Thus in Gary's case neither his structural position of relative disadvantage, nor the situations he routinely found himself in seemed likely to alter much. But theorising Gary's account as a series of partial recollections, littered with partly unfathomable, inexpressible, an uncodable sentiment, enables one to envisage a shifting subjectivity; and thus the possibility of change; albeit 'change' intractably rooted in Gary's past and obstructed by some stubborn psychic investments. What was changing was Gary's growing sense of responsibility for his violence to his partner, his increasing recognition of his own bodily mortality, and his diminishing ownership of the blame projected onto him (emotionally and physically) during his childhood. An exclusively psychic focus would lead one to ask whether these are necessary and sufficient conditions for Gary to somehow 'contain' or dispel the violent rage that appears so sporadically and intensely inside him. Indeed, this might be the most realistic agenda for Gary to pursue in the immediate term.

However, if we are seeking a substantial reduction in the general incidence of men's violence towards women then simply helping those who have already been violent will reap only small returns. The 'bigger' question for us as 'masculinity theorists', criminologists, and practitioners is whether, given Gary's embodiment of such strong and highly charged psychic defences, there are other desirable, and presumably socially masculine, subject positions that he could take up (Segal, 1990; Bowker, 1998; Collier, 1998). Conceptualising violence towards women as indicative of 'emasculating weakness' must represent a fundamental starting point in our endeavours to elucidate alternative subject positions.

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[1] Although they use different terminology Eisikovits & Buchbinder (1997), Godenzi, (1994) Scully (1990) make similar analyses.

[2] See also Jefferson's argument (1994a: 29 & quoted on p5 this volume) about the importance of theorising masculinity in a way that men will recognise.

[3] Gary's mother told him twelve years later that she used to follow him but 'stay out the way because she knew it would cause trouble'.

[4] Billy had told Gary that his father was threatening suicide when his mother left; someone (possibly Billy) had physically threatened Gary's father. Gary explained that his maternal

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grandparents were the “only two adults…that seemed to treat us with respect instead of like ‘Well, they’re just kids. They don’t know owt like’”.

[5] Sometimes it seemed as though Gary could not stop himself from recounting all the intense and messy feelings that surrounded the confusing events of his life. At other times it felt as if Gary just could not find the words to explain himself. Unlike a confession Gary never asked me to pass any judgement on him or the legitimacy of his violence.

[6] Gary found out that at his worst he had dragged Rebecca out of bed by her throat, causing severe bruising. The argument, which had occurred several days prior to his violence, had been over something especially trivial (some damaged furniture given to them for free). The bruising Gary caused Rebecca was noted by various members of his family at a party that same evening. However, Gary did not disclose until directly prompted that he had been violent in both of his two previous relationships with women.

[7] See also Sandra Walklate’s (1995: 178) statement on the similarities between politicians and ‘the lads who shout, whistle and jostle’, quoted in Chapter 1 (p19) this volume.

[8] Rebecca told Gary that she thinks this obsesses him.

[9] One might speculate that in the two years that Gary had been refusing psychiatric help, he was trying desperately to deny this emotional truth by reasserting (boldly) that he can sort it all out himself.

[10] The latter part of this statement ‘it weren’t half as bad’ suggests that Gary did start to hit back at his stepmother, but that he still cannot admit this to himself. It may imply that he did not feel justified in hitting his stepmother even though she hit him first.

[11] Gary stated: “And at that time I just wanted to like leap at him and just hit him and hit him and hit him... But I didn’t because he’d got this (laughs) carving knife”

[12] Gary was reluctant to leave home because he thought Sarah would “get all of the like crap, even worse than the she were getting already”.

# Chapter 4

# *Continuums, Difference, Hegemonies & Embodiment*

## Abstract

*This chapter discusses the relative merits of both psychoanalytic and psycho-discursive engagements with the work of Bob Connell, focussing especially on those engagements that deal with the relationship between men's many differential relations to violence as well as their accounts of themselves. Four men's case histories are presented and analysed. The author concludes that a 'poststructuralist psychoanalytic approach' is more able to account for the masculine embodiment of fears and desires, along with the significance of this embodiment to men's violent and non-violent practices, than a purely psycho-discursive approach.*

## Introduction

If radical feminism dominated the debates around gender and violence in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it had to compete for academic supporters during the 1990s when the work of Bob Connell (1989, 1995) became increasingly influential (Newburn & Stanko, 1994). Given men's material advantage over women, as well as the place of men's (sexual) violence in sustaining male domination, the challenge feminism left Connell was to produce an explanation that accounted for differential interests and identities amongst men.

Connell's (1989, 1995) response was to revamp a Gramscian concept, coining the term 'hegemonic masculinity'. This hegemonic masculinity referred not to 'fixed character types' (1995: 71), but a set of practices, strategies, and relationships that loosely instil a 'gender order' structured by labour, power, and cathexis: structures that persistently facilitate and legitimate white, middle class, heterosexual men's participation in rationally-calculative, competitive activities. Connell observed that in the institutional and interactional struggles of everyday life, (patterned also by class, race and other social relations) men negotiate between hegemonic masculinity and other competing alternatives: alternative *masculinities* that are subordinated to, marginalised by, or complicit with the 'hegemonic pattern' (Connell, 1995: 79). Connell argued that violence follows from this, not just because men use war, murder, rape, and domestic assault to maintain their dominance, but also because violence serves as a means of 'drawing boundaries and making exclusions'. In short, men use violence to assert their difference from and dominance over others when their authority is challenged or exhibits 'crisis tendencies' (Connell, 1995: 84-6). The fact of men's violence proves the injustice of the gender order because a 'thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate' (Connell, 1995: 84).

Connell (1998) notes that others sometimes conflate his work with the ‘continuum of violence thesis’, reifying the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as a fixed character type that causes men to perpetrate a range of nasty behaviours. This has effectively detracted debate away from the institutionalised power *relations* that all men and women are engaged in, however unequally, and has rendered the ‘masculinities’ concept unrecognisable to many men. It is not difficult to see why this has happened. The radical feminist Liz Kelly (1988) also drew on the work of Gramsci to conclude that ‘the myriad forms of sexism women encounter to the all too frequent murder of women and girls by men’ (p.97) could be explained in terms of ‘power being in jeopardy….[E]xplicit force/violence is in fact a response to the failure of, or resistance to, other forms of control’ (pp.22-3). The challenge this presents, theoretically and politically, is to explain individual men’s varying degrees of participation in a ‘continuum of violence’ in a way that resonates with men’s own accounts of their behaviour (Walklate, 1995: 93).

Social-psychologists Margaret Wetherell’s and Nigel Edley’s (1999) response to this challenge has been to take up Connell’s point that many men pursue the ‘aspirational goals’ of hegemonic masculinity without actually instantiating it as a ‘personal style’. The men Wetherell and Edley interviewed positioned themselves in ‘imaginary discursive positions’ - the ‘ordinary bloke’, the ‘heroic self’, and the ‘rebellious, non-conformist’. Wetherell and Edley suggest that whilst their ‘heroic’ position is a near instantiation of hegemonic masculinity, those men who invest in the rebellious position adopt the most effective and thus hegemonic *strategy* of negotiating masculinity. In representing themselves as extraordinarily independent and free-thinking, these ‘rebellious’ men assert their difference from both women and stereotypically macho men. Rebellious men remain *complicit* with the gender order, criticising it whilst implicitly making concessions to it[1].

But what of the repressed Other in men's discourses of masculinity, the unspoken contradictions that men 'negotiate' performatively and psychically? Poststructuralist psychoanalysis would have it that men and women imagine gender by psychically splitting off and projecting unwanted parts of themselves onto others. From this perspective 'cultural fictions' of 'emotionality in women' and 'rationality in men' are the fantasised products of men's and women's respective repressed desires and fears (Walkerdine, 1994: 67). Lynne Segal (1990, 1992, 1998) in her writing on 'changing men' and the anti-pornography debate has hypothesised what men's unspeakable desires and fears are about. Segal (1990) argues that 'the promise of phallic power' causes many men to doubt their own sexual sufficiency, and therefore intercourse confirms a sense of 'powerlessness', 'emptiness and failure' for many men.

> [I]t is precisely through sex that they experience their greatest uncertainties, dependence and deference in relation to women…And certainly for many men it is precisely through experiencing themselves as powerless and submissive that they experience the greatest sexual pleasure. (Segal, 1990: 212)

For Segal men's eroticising of women does not create women's subordination. Women, along with other relatively powerless groups, are eroticised because of their consistently disadvantaged position in power relations. Hence, Segal is critical of those who have reduced pornography and violence to a 'continuum' founded on the 'urge to power' (1998: 48). Aligning herself with the work of the poststructuralist feminist Judith Butler (1997), Segal (1998: 50) points out that that 'the hominoid penis is anything but permanently erect [and] ready for sex'. Pornography actually exposes men's,

> fetishistic need for visual proof of phallic potency, alongside their craving for visual evidence of female desire…[T]hrough pornography real women can be avoided, male anxiety soothed, delusions of phallic prowess indulged (1998: 58).

The embodied quality of gendered desires, aspirations, and fears should make us cautious about attributing agency entirely to speech utterances: a point I, amongst others, have often overlooked in Connell's thesis.

Connell (1995: Ch.2) criticises the idea that bodies are completely disciplined by social discourses or imprinted with social symbolism, and points to the simultaneous resilience of men's bodies - the way in which bodies repeatedly delimit social possibilities - and their 'shared social agency' in shaping practice and structures. For Connell, men's experiences of pain, sexual impotence, ageing, intoxication occupational health hazards, violent injury, and loss of sporting prowess cannot be deconstructed away. 'The sweat cannot be excluded…Bodily experience is often central to our memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are' (1995: 51-3). But it is perhaps because Connell offers no theory as to how bodies become invested with gendered meanings and emotional significance (Hollway, 1994: 248) that his work has often been read in a socially reductionist way.

This issue has been a focus of Tony Jefferson's theoretical engagements with Connell, via the life-history of Mike Tyson. Presuming a non-unitary, contradictory subject investing, sometimes unconsciously, in empowering social discourses, Jefferson (1996b, 1998) explains Tyson's transformation from a muscularly undeveloped, lisping 'fairy boy' to 'Iron Mike' - the world heavyweight champion, in terms of Tyson's capacity to muster the mental resolve needed to risk his body in the life-threatening performance of boxing. Jefferson demonstrates how Tyson's capacity to muster this mental resolve, to *'live' hardness,* hinged upon Tyson willingness to psychologically disown the weaknesses he found increasingly intolerable in himself by splitting them off and violently projecting them onto others. Explaining the rape of Desiree Washington that Tyson was convicted for in February 1992, Jefferson (1997b) implicates Tyson's investment in a racialised discourse that attributes 'bestial' 'supersexuality' to all black men, as well as his deeply embodied tendency to deal with emotional weaknesses through the physical diminishment of others, and the sexualised fear of rejection in Tyson's sadistic but fantastical rendering of Washington's non-consent as a positive 'come on'.

To summarise, if we wish to theorise a 'continuum of violence' in a way that men will recognise then we need to capture both men's felt sense of 'doing difference' from other men, along with the way in which men's discursive constructions of masculinity hide or conceal their psychic feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability; feelings that can be both embodied and projected through language and practices.

Four men's accounts are documented below. The first two accounts come from men who worked for an anti-violence/anti-sexist project explicitly concerned with the relationship between 'masculinity' and 'violence towards women and children'. My choice of cases here was deliberate. I hypothesised that if there was a group of men likely to be able to avoid using violence against female intimates it would be those who had thought through the issues sufficiently in order to work with violent men for 'change'. These cases contrast with my third case - a man voluntarily attending counselling because he wanted help to ‘change’; and my fourth case - a man court-ordered to attend a probation programme for batterers.

## Four Cases

### Ken

Ken was from a prosperous background, privately educated during his school years. He had a lengthy history of working in the field of men’s health and with groups interested in alleviating social exclusion within and of the Third World. Ken had moved into the areas of anti-sexist men’s politics since the birth of his son; partly because of a heightened awareness of issues around fatherhood, and partly because his responsibilities as a father inhibited his ability to pursue political work further away from home.

Ken had neither witnessed, experienced nor participated in very much violence of a purely physical kind. He had ‘never been close to sexual violence in terms of issues to do with abuse or rape’, although as the interview proceeded it became clear that this was an issue of definition. Ken gave three examples of when he had been ‘close’ to sexual violence. The first he readily identified:

> I suppose as close as it gets to is earlier days in my relationship with Karen [wife]...knowing what the grey area or line is that you cross that the woman or the partner may define as not necessarily violent, but overly, you know, pushing it too much and causing hurt… Issues to do with starting out on a sexual career and urm not so much the violence, as the not knowing what the hell you are meant to do. The inept groping. And wondering whether or not what you are doing is pleasing or displeasing, and therefore perhaps uncomfortable or inappropriate. I remember, obviously making a few mistakes in that area…

> When we were having sexual intercourse she obviously wasn't finding it that comfortable. And instead of me easing off and doing something different, or just not doing anymore, I pushed it and urm carried on until I had my orgasm and then withdrew...I can remember her saying that it hurt. [DG So did she ask you to stop at that point?] Yeah. I'm sure she did. I'm sure I was under the influence of alcohol at the time. I mean I can remember her, probably something like hands on my on shoulders trying to sort of trying to push [me] away, I suppose…
>
> I don't think it would have ended that pleasantly…I tend to close down. After a bit of time has elapsed I sort of come round to realising what the implications of the event were, and my part in it, and then making up for it so. I'm sure I would have apologised…
>
> It's one of many experiences I have come across in terms of not wanting to have a traditional man-woman relationship, either from the sexual point of view or in the whole relationship point of view, with regard to issues of power and dominance…Over the years we have tried to work out an equal relationship as far as we can. I mean when the sexual aspect of our relationship was more, as I see it, important we used to talk about this kind of thing quite a lot in terms of checking out what we both liked. That happens less now because the urge to have love, to make love is relatively infrequent in terms of our lives. For me there is just too many demands going on.

There are a number of ways in which we might read this statement. Firstly, we might observe that today (if not then) this event could be legally categorised as 'rape'. Not only did Karen ask Ken to stop, withdrawing her consent, but she made her withdrawal of consent physically explicit by pushing him away. The sexual intercourse was hurting Karen. Ken was aware of this, but carried on. The act was certainly selfish and harmful, resented by her, and (later) regretted by him. Not untypically, (Painter & Farrington, 1999) neither of them identified the experience as 'rape'. No legal proceedings were pursued. Ken and Karen were still together some 13 years after the event.

Secondly, we might observe how another story of sexual immaturity and its rectification was being told around the non-consensual sexual intercourse. The non-consensual sex Ken described occurred back in the ‘early days’ when intercourse was more important, at least to him[2]. His ‘inept groping’ bespeaks of sexual inexperience and the mistakes that one ‘obviously’ makes in such circumstances. Ken is ‘sure’ that he was ‘under the influence of alcohol’, defining a more enlightened, responsible present in contrast to a period of youthful thoughtlessness and badly managed intoxication. He attributes his seemingly uncaring tendency to ‘close down’ after the event to an immature obliviousness to the implications of his behaviour.

Ken then explains how Karen and he tried to ‘work out an equal relationship’, constructing his ‘sexual immaturity’ as a passing phase, diminished by ‘sought after equality’ in their whole relationship, as well as sex. Note how ‘things weren’t going too smoothly’ when they were ‘having sexual intercourse’, suggesting a more ‘mechanical’ lapse, whereas in subsequent years Ken’s discourse of ‘love-making’ invests sex with a more caring and desiring dimension[3]. In short, whilst Ken’s *behaviour* was (once) aggressively heterosexual, Ken did not want *identify himself as* an aggressive heterosexual. Indeed, during his youth Ken had at least one ‘homosexual experience’ which he described, contradictorily, as both as ‘borderline abusive’ and ‘very natural sexual activity’. Ken explained,

> I don’t have a problem in feeling sexually attracted to other men. Or them feeling sexually attracted to me. But I think it’s because I have done a fair amount of work on those kinds of feelings.

This contradiction may not be totally irreconcilable. If Ken does ‘not have a problem in feeling attracted to other men’ now this may be *because* he did a lot of work on ‘those kind of feelings’ that render bisexuality *a problem* for men. The ‘shaving’ incident described below, suggests that in his youth Ken, like many young men (Comstock, 1991; Harry, 1992; Mac an Ghail, 1994) associated homosexuality, with bodily under-development and effeminacy, and that he used to fear all three.

> This guy epitomised what I didn’t want to be. So I didn’t want to be as immature as I perceived him to be in terms of a developing adolescent boy. Because he looked more effeminate than a lot of other boys. He had this very round face and ears that really stuck out. And wasn’t as physically developed from the muscular point of view and didn’t have as many hairs on his body…He was like the anathema to what the rest of us in this group was trying to be - real boys, really tough and really fit.
>
> We ended up pinning him down on the floor getting a razor out and shaving some of his pubic hairs off. I think I was the person who actually did that. I feel ashamed that I did that, allowed myself to do it. Not completely coerced, but allowed myself to be influenced by the bigger group. I must have been wanting to prove myself to the group. I’m sure I felt that I had achieved something in terms of earning the respect of the majority group. But I would also hope that I had some kind of feelings of discomfort about it.

Ken’s violence was thus motivated by his dread of being perceived as ‘like this boy’ - effeminate’, ‘immature’ and underdeveloped: *the epitome of what he did not want to be* and the target of his peers’ homophobic violence. The shaving act probably evoked a fear of the homosexual amongst Ken’s peers whilst enabling the collective projection of these fears (safely for the perpetrators) onto the body of a weaker and statistically outnumbered other. Ken, a late developer, who was also at times excluded by his peers, abandoned his morals in order to prove himself to the group.

What does Ken’s story tell us about the links between ‘masculinity’, ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘violence’? Firstly, men’s discursive investments in heterosexuality shift as desire and anxiety are managed in changing social contexts. Thus, Ken’s reflections position him as a sexually naïve youth who, after a period of youthful ineptness, becomes a non-traditional, anti-sexist man. This posited naivety, although not conventionally esteeming in traditionally macho terms, serves to disassociate Ken from the other masculine stereotypes such as the ‘bullying aggressor’ and/or ‘sexually selfish lover’ that one might attribute to him because of his behaviour. Secondly, although some of those men who fit quite closely with Connell’s ‘hegemonic pattern’ continue to discriminate against homosexuals in order to repudiate their own bisexuality[4], other ‘straight’ men, like Ken manage to occupy masculine subjects positions from which they can admit to bisexual feelings. In Ken’s case, his established marriage, his child, his association with those politically committed to challenging social exclusion, and his material and intellectual advantage probably facilitated his movement towards such a position in adulthood.

## Scott

Scott was of more humble origins than Ken. Money was tight during Scott’s childhood, and the ongoing presence of newly born babies throughout his youth made for a large, but restless household. Academically more advanced than his brothers, Scott attended grammar school and later university. His training as a social worker and interest in matters ‘intellectual’ during this period laid foundations for his entrance into gender politics, most significantly after the break-up of two relationships and the loss of custody of his only child.

In response to my question about 'how sexual violence had impacted' on his life, Scott explained:

> I have never raped or sexually assaulted anybody…I've never really felt threatened sexually by somebody else, except in a general way of feeling sort of very, very anxious about sex. But they're in consensual situations where I am actually choosing. Nobody has forced me to take my clothes off and go to bed with somebody.

As became apparent from Scott's account, this 'anxiety' about 'sex' was implicated in the one occasion when he had been 'physically violent' to his ex-partner, Stephanie.

> Stephanie and I had this like very volatile relationship. Passionately in love with each other… Anyway, the circumstances in terms of my violence, angry feelings towards her was that the relationship was one which became a very sexual relationship, but was one where Stephanie was, I think, ambivalent about being in a relationship at all really. We'd had times when she wasn't interested in sex. And I'd be very, very turned on by her. There was one particular occasion. She'd been away for the weekend. And before she'd gone away I was really, really aroused. And there was a couple of times she had just not been interested. And the kids were still away. And she was feeling really randy. And (laughs). I said, 'I've arranged to go out anyway. So I'll see you later'. And we went to bed together that night and she wanted to have sex. And I just felt really, really angry. I was actually penetrating her with my finger. And urr I just wanted her. I felt very, very sexually violent towards her, really. And I just, I just shoved her out of bed. Just pushed her out the bed. Bang. It wasn't a very high bed. But she was shocked, she was shocked. No doubt about that. And it was a very angry feeling I had about it…

Without question this event is about 'control' and 'power', and 'masculine heterosexuality'. All are implicated in Scott's strong desire for sex and his proclaimed 'anger' that Stephanie twice rejected his advances. Scott's somewhat antagonistic retort, 'I've arranged to go out anyway' reads like a rather defensive attempt to recoup some control over their sexual relationship in the face of her earlier rejection. However, Scott's shoving of Stephanie does not seem like a purely instrumental response. The sexual intercourse he desired may well have ensued had he not shoved Stephanie; had he concealed his 'very sexually violent' feelings.

There are two other contradictions in Scott's story. On the one hand, Scott and Stephanie's relationship was 'very sexual', but on the other, Scott's proclaimed anger was about *not* getting sex. They 'were passionately in love with each other', but Stephanie was 'ambivalent about being in a relationship at all, really'. These contradictions might be because Scott was anxious, either at the time of the event or when recounting to me. Neither possibility is mutually exclusive. Scott's stammered repetitions 'She was shocked, she was shocked. No doubt about that', along with his grammatically unnecessary clauses 'really' at the end of his sentences, suggest that he needed to reassure himself of the emotional dynamics of his relationship. If Scott was uncertain over what Stephanie's seemingly erratic sexual desire (from his point of view) signified about her feelings for him then this would probably have made him anxious, both at the time and when recounting the story. The following statement would seem to support this hypothesis.

> Somehow it had got to that stage without me sort of being able to talk to her about it. Why it was I was feeling that…One of the very good things about that relationship for me was that we worked through this. I mean the other relationships which I had up to that point which could have become sexual and didn't. I mean I never got through to working through the impotence stuff. Stephanie was the first person where I acknowledged it was a problem. I got very, very upset about it. And we shared that distress. And, she was committed to the relationship, so we got through it. And eventually we were able to have a good sexual relationship. So I mean that sort of broke the cycle in a sense that I knew after that that if I was with somebody who I loved, and she loved me, and it was what we wanted then eventually it would be okay.

What this second statement reveals is Scott's history of sexual impotence. Unsurprisingly, Scott had chosen not to initiate sexual relationships with several women whom he was close to for fear that his impotence would recur. As studies of men's heterosexuality now substantiate, intercourse remains the definitive act for many heterosexual couples[5] (Gavey et al, 1999): an act in which 'real men' are presumed to take charge of the sexual encounter and women do not (Hillier, et al. 1999: 72). Penetrative sex is not only about the highly masculine business of performance (Bordo, 1998; Grindstaff & McCaughey, 1998), but it typically smuggles in, for men (at least), emotional reassurance that the relationship is 'normal', intimate and close, without forcing them to verbalise their desires, self-doubts and fears of rejection (Hillier et al, 1999). Men who fail to live up to the myth of heterosexual potency typically experience intense feelings of humiliation, incompetence, and insufficiency (Webb & Daniluk, 1999). Unable to smuggle in these emotional benefits through intercourse, sexually impotent men must choose whether to deny their emotional dependency or renegotiate intimacy with sexual partners in another way.

Scott constructed his sexual impotence through a discourse that defines his previous relationships in terms of the lack of mutual love and recognition: a lack that he imagined to be rectified by Stephanie's commitment to him. His discovered sexual potency with Stephanie was attributed to a 'passionate' love that 'broke the cycle… I knew after that that if I was with somebody who I loved, and she loved me, and it was what we wanted then eventually it would be okay'. Thus, Scott invested in a have/hold discourse that defines 'good sex' as that which happens in a mutually loving, safe environment (Hollway, 1989). This investment presented Scott with the optimistic possibility of sexually fulfilling relationships with women by rendering his impotence socially contingent, not biologically immutable. It also rendered Scott psychically dependent on Stephanie's desire; his 'cycle' of impotence might reoccur if they fell out of love.

Even though Scott was an articulate man, whose social work training and participation in men's politics would have rendered him better equipped than most to confront his sexual impotence, 'it had got to that stage' where he wasn't 'able to talk to her about it'. When Stephanie's ambivalence about 'being in a relationship at all' emerged, this probably seemed especially rejecting and isolating for Scott. What Scott wasn't able to talk about could have been a fear that his impotence might reoccur - something he could only test out in penetrative sex with Stephanie. From a psychoanalytic perspective Scott's shoving probably signified his violent denial of the very unspeakable emotions that Stephanie's erratic desire (from his perspective) evoked in him (see also Frosh, 1997a). If Scott feared that Stephanie no longer wanted him, then instigating sexual intercourse might have seemed an irrepressibly desirable, but potentially dangerous and humiliating means of pursuing his own sexual desire.

To summarise, Scott like many men displaced some of his intimacy needs onto penetrative sex. The discourse of to 'have/hold' in which he invested, whilst on the surface seemingly 'mutual', served to saddle his partner with some of his vulnerabilities. Scott's splitting of his partner as good and bad, volatile/passionate, saving/damning is not an uncommon feature of men's accounts of sexually intimate relationships. This splitting reveals the flip-side of the masculine power often associated with 'domestic violence'; men's sense of powerlessness at their emotional and sexual dependence on women (Segal, 1990; Frosh, 1994). That Scott's investments in discourse did not fend off his insecurities absolutely gives us a clue as to why the relationship between sexual aggression, heterosexuality and masculinity is so often resistant to social reconstruction, even when men have the political will and social skills necessary to facilitate it. As the furore over Viagra indicates, there are few safe subject positions for sexually impotent men to speak honestly and confidently about their sexuality, even though impotency amongst men is far more common than is routinely acknowledged (Bordo, 1998).

## Matt

Matt was an ex-retail manager seeking counselling for his violence. Matt's violence had taken different forms at different points in his life. During his youth, Matt had attacked peers who 'tried it on with him' and threatened his father with a knife. Matt had been violent to all three of the women with whom he had sustained intimate relationships - although he was initially reluctant to acknowledge the violence in all but his most recent relationship. Matt had a history of suicide attempts linked to both the bullying he experienced at school and the break-up of these relationships. What had spurred Matt to seek help for his violence was the fact that his wife had now left him and was refusing him access to his son.

Matt claimed to have a number of current sexual partners, 'none of them going to be permanent'. He readily described himself as 'manipulative', 'a charmer' 'a co-dependent', and 'a relationship-addict'.

> Everyone needs to be needed, but I will actually use guile. I use cunningness. I've used subterfuge. I use intimidation. I use anything to get into a relationship. And once I'm in a relationship I don't really give a shit about who I'm with. It might as well be a cardboard cut-out.

Matt presented himself as someone with a manically split personality. On the one hand he said he would:

> go out of my way to make someone feel happy…If they need something I will go out of the way to get it. I will basically get rid of all my feelings and put their feelings first and foremost…constantly, for months, even years.

On the other, he was someone who would try to 'find out people's insecurities and to build them up'.

> You sit, you listen. You show that you're thinking. Show them that you're attentive. You show that you care. You give them good enough eye contact. You agree with their plight. You show them just enough sympathy, but not too much...I'll work on their insecurities. If someone feels that they're not nice, I basically work on comforting them. But not overly much. Because too much comfort just sounds false. I feel so much power. I mean I can twist most of these woman around my little finger.

What Matt referred to as 'twisting' women around his finger sometimes amounted to 'mental cruelty'. He described how he would intimidate his wife by telling people that their relationship was 'just based on sex' and by threatening to leave.

> I'd really intimidated her on a number of occasions, ringing my father. He'd say, 'How's Monica? And how's your relationship?'. I'd say, 'Oh it's just based on sex'. And she'd just be sitting next to me…I played my power games by saying, 'Okay. I'm leaving. I'm going. I'm running away'. And yet the minute I turned around and came back I gave her all the power to play the power games. 'Oh I don't know if I should have you back'. And then I automatically start panicking. 'Christ what have you done, Matt? You've fucked up. Get on your hands and knees, flowers, chocolates whatever'.

Matt claimed that his wife had maliciously alleged to the police that he had thrown her on the floor and knelt on her head whilst pregnant. Matt claimed that their arguments were physical 'on both sides', 'nothing extreme', more 'childish, reactionary'. Either possibility could be true. Matt may have been in 'denial', not wanting to admit to me the extent of his violence through shame or fear of incriminating himself. On the other hand, he was willing to admit that he played some cruel 'power games': power games that seemed highly provocative and likely to incite violence.

Matt's explanation for his violence, 'insecurities', 'paranoia' and 'co-dependency' was wrapped in heavily intellectualised misogyny. He blamed his adopted mother for his sense of dependence on women, pointing to the pattern of 'suffocation, abandonment, suffocation, abandonment' that characterised her relationship with him. Matt explained that his mother gained 'total control over him' by 'switching off' for days, not letting him in, 'refusing to talk'.

> My parents treated me in such an over-loving way that it became a catalyst for some of my major insecurities, like why my real mother and father didn't love me or want me. The strength of my adopted mother's love gave me the impression that she was the only one who could actually love me in the world, but nobody else in the world could love me. And therefore nobody else in the world wanted to love me. So I mean that built, built, and built.

Whilst I do not endorse Matt's explanation for the origin of his insecurities, his explanation does lend credence to one theory about the emotional dynamics of his experience, namely his feeling that women held incredible power over him. Rather than women being *twisted round his finger* by his *guile* and *cunning*, Matt feared being twisted round theirs, hence his tendency to 'start panicking …[down on] hands and knees, flowers, chocolates whatever', when feeling unwanted. Moreover, he considered this power almost completely in terms of sex.

> I have not enjoyed sex in a long time. I have the staying power for up to six hours, but yet I get no pleasure out of it. I can't ejaculate anymore. That's why I have such long staying power…And by the end of the time…they've love hearts in their eyes because I've just basically preyed upon their own insecurities. Shown them that they're not frigid. Shown them that they can enjoy themselves once more where previous partners would in anger moments told them they couldn't…
>
> [DG: Perhaps you could tell me about the last time when you did enjoy sex?] No. I don't think, hand on heart that there is an occasion where I can look back and say, 'Yes. I enjoyed sex in general', solely because I have always strived to give pleasure first. Having sex with my wife was my only way of showing love. I didn't realise that me just smiling at my wife [or]…listening to my wife was a way of showing love. So I gave my all in sex, literally. And I would curl up and I would die at the end of it...I always perceived that women had the power to give me sex or not. And therefore I sometimes perceived sex as a weapon that could be used against me by denial or even whilst doing by forked tongues.

This cryptic closing statement infers that Matt felt his lovers deceived him ('doing by forked tongues'- perhaps sex without true love) - a rather hypocritical allegation from a self-confessed 'charmer'. Nevertheless, there is a familiar element to Matt's statement: his imagined difference from the women's 'previous partners' who implied that they were 'frigid'. Matt asserts this difference with recourse to a discourse almost antithetical to the 'male sexual drive discourse' (Hollway, 1989). The discourse Matt's used measures men's virility in terms of their capacity to give sexual pleasure to (as opposed to receive from) women. As Victor Seidler (1997: 187) explains:

> [O]ften heterosexual men's sexuality becomes focused upon giving women an orgasm, as if their virility is to be measured by whether a woman has come or not. But men have been slower to recognize a need to share their *own* sexual needs more openly and to gain more contact with their own bodies…Often we have little contact with our bodies as men, having learnt to treat them as machines at our disposal. This makes it hard to identify what kind of touch brings us nourishment and to appreciate sexuality as a form of communication. Often if we have little contact with our hearts then orgasm…becomes a matter of ejaculation…[I]t is hard to acknowledge where we are emotionally as men; it is far easier to pretend that we are already where we want to be.

Matt was undoubtedly violent, manipulative and misogynistic, but he still managed to distance himself from an idea of the uncaring, selfish male. Matt accomplished this by constructing his part in sexual intercourse as giving pleasure through his 'long staying power'. He claimed to have convinced himself that women had the 'power to give' him sex, that women would use sex as a 'weapon' against him. Hence, he gave his 'all' in sex and would then 'curl up and…die', treating his body as a machine, as Seidler would have it. In spite of his striving to 'give pleasure first', for Matt sex was very much about performance as opposed to communication. By preying on women's insecurities he positioned himself as someone who is *already where he wants to be,* strong and secure. If Segal is correct that many men 'experience the greatest sexual pleasure' in 'being powerless and submissive' then it is unsurprising that Matt, with his many strategies for denying his own emotional dependency, had 'not enjoyed sex in a long time'. His 'power games' were defences against admitting to his partners where he was 'emotionally'.

## Ahmed

Ahmed was born in Pakistan but raised in England after his family emigrated during his infancy. During his late teens Ahmed served a prison sentence for the kidnapping and attempted murder of one of his college peers. After his release from prison, and with the financial backing of his family, Ahmed became a successful entrepreneur, owning a chain of shops. Ahmed then went along with his parents plans to marry him to a Pakistani woman to whom he was ‘promised’. When Ahmed’s wife emigrated to the UK, a year later, Ahmed grew to resent her attempts to delimit the social life he felt he was entitled to. Ahmed claimed that his wife had tricked him into staying with her by piercing his condoms. However, his evidence for this was somewhat self-incriminating[6].

> She couldn’t speak a lot of English. She still can’t now...Which I think is perhaps slightly ignorant…She was too concerned with her own little argy-bargies with her own friends...I used to work, and then obviously I used to go out as well with some friends at the weekend. She wasn’t really too keen on it, but she never said much…Every time something went wrong I used to blame her for it. I never blamed myself. For some reason I kept all the blame away from me. I used to blame her and I blamed my mum. As soon as all the house was finished off then she, she called it ‘to straighten me out’. Stop me from drinking…smoking. And stop me from going out. The more she tried to stop me the more I wanted to go out. I thought, ‘ I work for it. It’s nothing to do with you’…
>
> I don’t know whether I was a good husband to her or not. I never really asked her that. I suppose you could call me ‘a good provider’, but I don’t know if I was a good husband. Because I do used to have affairs [sic]. I used to have affairs all the time really, without really having a conscience about it really. It’s something that I’ve never really admitted to anybody really. This is the first time I’m talking about it.

Ahmed claimed that it was his wife’s attempts to ‘straighten him out’ that provoked his violence.

> She was on of my case properly. All the time there was arguments. Nag, nag, nag. And I think that is where the violence with me and her started…It was nearly every time she found out that I’d been out. And if I had been unfaithful to her...It started from a slap. A couple of months later it

> escalated...She was winding and winding me up…I slapped her this one time on the side of the face. And it hit the kitchen units. But it was only a little bit of bruise. It wasn't really hard. I did it gently. Well I don't know if it was or not coz she hasn't stop crying…
>
> I'm sort of a private type of guy. I like to keep things indoors. I don't really like to wash my dirty laundry in public. And I think she wanted to cause me embarrassment, and cause me grief, you know, in front of my parents. So she attended to wash it in public. Virtually everybody knew...And I'd kept it quiet for a couple of years really. You know. Because nobody knew…I think it took roughly about eight or nine months for it to climax.

When it did 'climax', Ahmed had headbutted his wife on the nose, causing her to collapse, her face cut and bleeding. Both his parents, who were present at the time, condemned Ahmed's violence, although his mother also stated his wife 'was out of line' for what she had said. In a subsequent violent incident, Ahmed punched his wife in the face and smashed up the house after she had damaged his silk shirts by (according to him) washing them incorrectly. Ahmed's father told a friend of his wife's to 'call the police on the bastard'. Ahmed was arrested several days later. Fortunately for Ahmed his wife saved him from a second custodial sentence by telling the magistrate that she wanted her husband to 'come home and look after his boys'.

Ahmed did not seem to recognise either the unequal basis of his marriage or the abusive quality of his behaviour. The power inequalities in Ahmed's relationship with his wife probably left her with little option but to stay and endure his abuse. A non-English speaking newcomer to the UK, Ahmed's wife probably lacked both the social support and material resources needed to leave her husband or stop his violence. Whilst she looked after his children Ahmed worked and socialised, retaining both financial and physical control over his own live and hers'. Ahmed's wife undoubtedly endured a continuum of abuse, including his infidelities, his blaming, his unwillingness to take responsibility for his children, slapping, punching and headbutting. Ahmed's account is littered with misogynistic double standards. Ahmed felt that his wife's inability to speak English was 'ignorant', although there is little evidence of him trying to help her learn. Ahmed felt he was entitled to the social life he had worked for, irrespective of whether he was a good husband or not, but he rebuked his wife for being too concerned with her friends. Ahmed claimed his wife nagged, but also stated 'she never said much'. Whilst Ahmed claimed never to have admitted to having affairs before, he already had a stock justification for them:

> It's not an easy thing for me to be faithful to one woman, to be honest with you. I don't how people do it. It's not easy at all…I'm just a red-blooded male. Can't help it (laughs).

Nevertheless, Ahmed distanced his 'red-bloodedness' from 'sexual violence'.

> It's something that I have never ever indulged in, is sexual violence. I mean a girl, she doesn't even have to say, 'no', really. If I get the cold shoulder, that's it. I don't even bother… I'm not really a pushy type of guy.

As Jeff Hearn (1998a: ch.8) has observed, very few men identify their behaviour as sexually violent. In men's accounts of violence, sex is usually only implicated in terms of righteous jealousy when female partners are alleged to have been unfaithful. In fact, Ahmed's assertion that he is not really 'a pushy kind of guy', mitigates against the negative connotations that are increasingly associated with being 'a red-blooded male', notably, desperation, sexual coerciveness, obsessiveness and/or perversion.

Ahmed’s misogynous double standards are certainly attempts to rationalise and justify his violence (Hearn, 1998a). But, whether his violence is irreducibly instrumental is less clear. Although Ahmed’s wife was trying ‘to straighten him out’ there was little possibility of her leaving or forcing him to concede the patriarchal privileges his businesses and status within his family secured for him. Indeed, one consequence of Ahmed’s violence was the loss of his father’s support. In this respect Ahmed’s violence undermined, rather than consolidated, his hegemony within his family. If there was a purpose to Ahmed’s violence it was that he either wished to silence his wife’s protests about his infidelities or that he wanted to terminate their relationship (see also Hamner, 1998). The former hypothesis is supported by his inference that she was washing his dirty laundry in public; the latter is perhaps negated by the fact that Ahmed was considering moving back home at the time of my second interview with him.

Indeed, irrespective of the misogyny Ahmed used to justify inequalities in his relationship with his wife, I doubt whether any of his friends and family would have accepted his argument that he was ‘not a violent person’ and that his wife had ‘made him like that’. Ahmed had trained as a boxer and served a prison sentence for two violent crimes *before* he met his wife. Perhaps it was because Ahmed knew that his wife’s behaviour did not justify his violence that he did not usually admit to being violent.

> It’s not something that I actually tell everybody about that I’ve done. It’s quite a shameful experience really. I mean it’s taken about two years to get to terms with it.

To what extent were Ahmed’s misogynistic statements evidence of the way he understood the world, as opposed to discursive rationalisations that *defend against* his underlying anxiety and shame? Ahmed never actually said what he blamed his mother *and* wife for.

However, he did tell me that after his wife had exposed his infidelities his mother informed his girlfriend (of seven years) that he was married with children. In conflict with Ahmed's investment in the male sexual drive discourse was his confession:

> I think I cared for the girl a lot really. It affected me a fair bit, really. I was looking for people to blame. Me and my wife were going to split up anyway. And then I split up with my, this girl instead. She found out I was married. She got the courage together to come round to my mum's house and knock on the door and talk to my mum. My mum basically told her everything. And it sort of broke the girl's heart really…I had denied it for years and years. Never admitted. And when she found out she says, 'That's it. I'm on my way now'. And we split up…. She started seeing another bloke.

None of this excuses Ahmed's brutal treatment of his wife. However, what this story does tell us is that Ahmed fantasised that he could sustain a relationship with another woman he was dating before his marriage. When his fantasy was shattered he projected his hurt as anger and blame onto his wife and mother; anger and blame no doubt exacerbated by feelings of jealousy when his girlfriend 'started seeing another bloke'. How much Ahmed actually cared for this girlfriend was concealed in the misogynistic tales he told about his 'red-bloodedness' and his wife's failings, but exposed by his violent rages and the absences and avoidances in his story.

## Conclusions

To summarise, all four of the men whose stories are documented above took up discursive positions that represent them as different from violent, dangerous men. In some cases these men's behaviours may have been experienced by female partners as part of a continuum of violence, but it seems unlikely that any of the men would be able to recognise themselves as contributors to this continuum. Moreover, whilst sexuality, especially heterosexuality, is implicated in all four men’s accounts of violence, none of these men identified their violence as ‘sexual violence’.

In some instances violence can reaffirm a hegemonic order. Ken’s violence towards the boy in his school gained him the support of the majority. Matt’s ‘preying’ on women’s insecurities probably made some women dependent on him, at least temporarily. But this is not to say that men’s violence always has a clear, expressible, instrumental logic. Ken’s sexual aggression towards his wife was in part about his sexual naïvety and poor communication, as well as his selfish desire for sexual gratification. The motives behind both Scott’s and Ahmed’s violence sometimes defied rational explanation. Thus, I have theorised their violence as an expression of that which disrupts the discourse; as evidence of emotionality peeking through the ‘cracks’ of language, as that which reveals men’s felt incapacity to live up to certain masculine, heterosexual ideals; the emptiness, powerlessness and inner loneliness that Lynne Segal captures so well. Masculine embodiment is variously implicated in these accounts, not only because bodies are the physical technologies that perpetrate harm, but also because men’s bodies are sources of insecurity and feelings of inadequacy, symbolic purveyors of competence and incompetence, sites through which intimacy is experienced or thwarted, and instruments through which difficult emotions are communicated, concealed and contained.

As Wetherell (1999) has argued this is not an incontrovertible position, since it sits at the heart of the debate over whether the mind is first social, then psychic, or vice versa; whether the mind is constituted by discourse, or whether discourse is just the outer shell protecting an inner world. In my opinion, this latter position is currently the only one that engages with how individual men take up different discursive positions in language and in practice. The only perspective that adequately accounts for the way in which brutal violence can emerge from trivial disagreements; and accounts for why so many men find their partner's emotionality so intolerable, but are unable to face up to the emotionally charged nature of their own aggression. In short, a psychoanalytic poststructuralist perspective enables one to better conceptualise the similarities and differences between the masculinities of those men who 'threaten to leave' and those who are unfaithful, those men who saddle partners with their vulnerabilities and those who beat them up, and those who are sexually aggressive and those who are 'just red-blooded'. This perspective also suggests why some men, as both practitioners and clients on anti-violence programmes, learn to 'talk the talk' without 'walking the walk', i.e. speak the language of gender equality whilst continuing to engage in abusive practices. If gender is embodied and thus not purely discursive, it is likely to be resistant to change, even if the necessary material resources and political will are in place. The possibility of change is at once opened up by giving linguistic symbolisation to the often messy and muddled elements of men's experience, but also constrained, undermined, and foreclosed by the psychic investments that render the language of gender difference so indomitable.

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[1] See also Godenzi (1999) who comes to a similar conclusion from a more cognitivist perspective.

[2] See Hillier et al. (1999) & Holland et al. (1996) on the relationship between youthful masculinity and the imperative of sexual intercourse.

[3] Ken's despondent 'that kind of communication about love-making doesn't really happen now', along with his slip 'have love' as opposed to 'make love', hint that some passion may have been lost en-route to this more 'equal relationship'.

[4] In 1999 members of the gay rights organisation 'Outrage' alleged that the Conservative Minister Michael Portillo had supported discrimination against gay and lesbian people in order to conceal his own homosexuality (Watt & White, 1999).

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[5] A social norm exploited by Bill Clinton in his endeavours to convince the world that the fellatio performed on him by his employee, Monica Lewinsky, did not constitute ‘a sexual relation’ (Murray, 1999a; Shrarage, 1999).

[6] Ahmed did not always use condoms. Ahmed proclaimed expertise in the withdrawal method because he had ‘never got anybody pregnant’!

# Chapter 5

# *The cycle of violence: are violent men 'just like' their violent fathers?*

## Abstract

*This chapter addresses a puzzle, namely: why do some men seemingly reproduce the domestic violence they witnessed their fathers perpetrating? Are these men consciously trying to be 'just like their fathers', or are more complex psychic dynamics at work? Testing out the relative merits of social learning theory, radical feminist theory, and Freudian, Lacanian and Kleinian psychoanalysis against one man's case history, this chapter argues that the use of the term 'cycle of violence' obscures the complex, contradictory and dynamic quality of men's identifications with fathers and mothers. My case material suggests that a psychoanalytic interpretive approach to subjectivity is more adequate than that offered by social learning theory. However, it also shows that the various strands of psychoanalysis problematise more than they resolve with regard to the connections between heterosexual men's childhood patterns of identification with parents and their subsequent behaviour towards female partners in adult relationships.*

## Introduction

Violence research became increasingly politicised in the 1980s and 1990s when right wing commentators attributed rising crime and unemployment to the demise of paternal disciplinarians and lone motherhood (Campbell, 1993; Collier, 1998; Murray 1999b). Whilst men's rights advocates rallied against policy constructions of fatherhood as a purely economic responsibility (Balcom, 1999; Mackay, 1999; Messner, 1997; Tuddenham, 1999; Williams, 1998), feminists pointed to the damaging abuses that many 'normal' men perpetrate against women and children in their 'care' (Hester et al, 1995), as well as the persistence of unequal divisions of labour within domestic life (Oakley & Rigby, 1998). Social workers, probation officers and family court welfare officers found themselves having to assess to what extent the material and emotional benefits men bring to families outweigh the damaging effects of 'domestic violence' and child abuse (Children Act Subcommittee, 1999; Dixon, 1998; Jones, 1998; Mullender, 1996).

An underlying controversy in these political debates was the timeless question of whether boys inevitably turn out to be 'just like their fathers', i.e. 'troublesome'. The idea that boys do turn out to be like troublesome fathers has found some support in family violence research. For example, McCord (1977, quoted in Farrington, 1996: 15) in a 30 year follow-up of the Cambridge-Somerville longitudinal study (in Boston) found that convicted sons did tend to have convicted fathers. Moreover, 29% of fathers convicted for violence also had sons convicted of violence, in comparison with just 12% of other fathers. Similarly, self-report studies show that men from violent homes are up to ten times more likely to become batterers themselves than men from non-violent homes (Gelles, 1999). However, these findings are probabilistic rather than predictive. Research has found that the vast majority of men from violent homes (approximately 80%) are not now violent (Mullender, 1996). For some men ‘not being violent’ may be a conscious choice informed by the experience of having once been a perpetrator (Daniels, 1999), whereas others never will have been violent to their partners. On a common sense level this is unsurprising. As Farrington (1996: 15) reminds us, criminal parents do not usually encourage their children to become like them. In Farrington’s research, 89% of convicted men at age 32 disagreed with the statement that ‘I would not mind if my son/daughter committed a criminal offence’. Of course, one might retort than many adults still do not recognise domestic violence as a criminal offence. But irrespective of the individual’s knowledge of the law there are (perhaps increasingly) strong social taboos against male violence towards women and children. Indeed, this is why men’s violence often remains a well-kept ‘domestic secret’ (Dobash & Dobash, 1998).

## Explanations

Within the broad church of criminology the most sustained attempts to explain the connection between violent fathers and violent sons came from psychologists researching the ‘cycle of violence’, or the ‘transgenerational transmission of violence’ as it is sometimes called. Inspired by Bandura’s (1977) research into the effects of video violence, cycle of violence researchers typically assumed that exposure to violence, whether direct or witnessed, teaches children new patterns of behaviour upon which they can *model* their actions. This was not just because violence was *socially learned,* but also because exposure to violence weakens children’s inhibitions, desensitises children to the effects of violence, and often presents children with the opportunity to learn techniques of rationalising violent behaviour (Avakame, 1998; Foshee et al 1999).

‘Cycle of violence’ research demonstrated that those who either *experience* or *witness* abuse as children are more likely than those who do not to become abusers themselves (Foshee, et al 1999; Moffitt & Caspi, 1998; Strauss, et al 1980; Weeks & Spatz Widom, 1998). One way or another, people ‘learn’ violence. But as critics have pointed out, this same research consistently fails (in its own terms) to identify any predictive variables that can account for why some people reproduce the ‘cycle’ when others do not (Browne & Herbert, 1997; Bennett & Williams, 1997). The research does not expose *how* ‘learning’ takes place, nor *why* some people (especially boys) learn more violence than other people (especially girls). Hence, cycle of violence researchers have become increasingly sceptical about the linearity presumed in social learning theory (Kolbo et al, 1996), especially because of its neglect of individuals’ ‘views of self, others, and self other-relationships’ (Zuravin et al, 1996: 332).

Radical feminists writing about men’s violence towards women and children have also tended to find social learning theory too deterministic, not to mention too convenient an excuse for men who are violent. As Audrey Mullender (1996) points out, social learning theory fails to account for why it is men who perpetrate the majority of violence, and why it is primarily sons as opposed to daughters who reproduce the violence they experience. Endorsing the legacy of radical feminist criminology, Mullender’s own explanation is that under patriarchy - literally the ‘rule of fathers’ - men’s violence is an instrumental strategy for controlling women that by and large works, accruing advantages even for men who are not perpetrators themselves. Similarly, Hester, Kelly, and Radford (1995) argue that under heteropatriarchy ‘a continuum of violence’ is reproduced against women because this continuum enables men to control all women, even if this control is no longer consistently effective.

Clinicians, particular those working with sex-offenders, tend to draw on both social-learning and feminist theory, in arguing that sexual violence gives certain men a sense of power over their victims. But because clinical work focuses on individual cases as opposed to men's behaviour as a sex, clinicians have concentrated more on what motivates *particular* men to reproduce a cycle of abuse. One explanation often favoured in clinical work is that the transition from victim to offender helps the individual resolve certain emotional conflicts or 'incongruences', i.e. strong, recurring but unmet emotional needs or desires. Those who experience recurring feelings of powerlessness, for example, may 'identify with the aggressor' to fend off the sense of vulnerability these feelings create. The consequence of this for some sex-offenders is that they believe that when they were children they actually abused their own fathers, rather than *vice versa* (Etherington, 1996); a coping strategy that safeguards against confronting the painful fact of their own helplessness. Araji & Finkelhor, (1986: 95) put this succinctly,

> they master the trauma by reversing roles in the victimization they suffered, and through "identification with the aggressor" they combat their own powerlessness by becoming the powerful victimizer.

Of course, this still leaves open the question what causes 'emotional incongruence' in the first place. It also leaves open the issue of what happens to individuals' identifications with those who are not 'aggressors'. Do these identifications just dissolve, lose all significance, or are they always potentially accessible even if not apparent? Psychoanalysis has provided at least three sets of answers to these questions: one Freudian, one Lacanian, and one Kleinian.

Freud’s Oedipal theory predicted both common and idiosyncratic patterns of development for boys. Oedipal theory dictates that the little boy comes to identify with his father (whether actually abusive or not) because of the boy’s fear of castration by him. Imagined by the little boy to be a rival for his mother’s affections, the father is fantasised as an aggressor who is likely to retaliate against him; castrating the boy, as his mother already appears to have been. Freud suggested that the boy typically resolves this ‘castration anxiety’ by renouncing his incestuous claim to the mother and identifying with his father. For most men this investment in ‘masculinity’ is a rather unstable one since desires for the mother, along with rivalrous feelings of hatred towards fathers, have a habit of returning from their repressed place in the unconscious, thus recreating anxiety to be defended against.

Classic Freudian theory anticipates that particular boys will have more trouble resolving the Oedipus complex than other boys. Boys who experience their fathers as physically or emotionally unavailable, perhaps because they are also violent and abusive, are more likely to develop superego problems. Such boys will have more difficulty fantasising a suitable father figure with whom to identify, making the process of separating from their mothers more cumbersome (Minsky, 1998). The lower the level of emotional reciprocity between father and son, the more precarious, and potentially punitive the son’s super-ego is likely to become (see Hood-Williams, 2001; Frosh, 1997b). This reading of Freud predicts that boys whose fathers are emotionally unavailable are more likely to experience relationships with women as engulfing and threatening. One would expect such boys to be less equipped emotionally to contain or divert their own aggressive impulses in later life. Suffering persisting feelings of castration anxiety, such boys are likely to sway between feelings of extreme guilt, anxiety and worthlessness (manifested as depression and self-destructive behaviours) and unmanageable rage (manifested as sudden outbursts of intimidating behaviour towards others in order to externalise aggression).

Conversely, those psychoanalysts who have drawn on Jacques Lacan’s more literary reading of Freud have tended to favour a more ‘social’ theory of men’s violence towards women. Lacanian psychoanalysis suggests that masculinity is a ‘fiction’ produced out of men’s fragile investment in a system of meaning that hinges on ‘desire for the desire’ of a renounced mother/Other (see especially, Frosh, 1994). From this perspective actual fathers are less significant than the symbolism that attributes *the Law of the father, the phallus,* with an omnipresent ‘absent-presence’ in our understanding of the world (Bhaba, 1996). It is the ‘place of the father’ in language that is said to construct a terrifying and ‘painful consciousness of the impossibility of being the phallus – of being truly rational and masterful…[through the] repression of emotion, desire and intimate connection with others’ (Frosh, 1994: 114). Because the symbolic order is constructed around difference and exclusion, men respond to this ‘painful consciousness’ by both idealising and denigrating women. Hence, where there is ‘approbation there is misogyny; where there is adoration there is sexual violence’ (Frosh, 1995: 186-7). The ‘seeds of masculine sexuality’ are sown amongst ‘phallic uncertainty and the power of the mother’.

Melanie Klein’s point of departure with Freud offers up a third explanation. Klein argued that anxiety constantly encroaches on our conscious thought. The effect of this is that individuals fluctuate defensively between different psychic *positions* (as certain unconscious structures regain significance at various points in that individual’s life), as opposed to being *driven* from one phase to the next as Freud claimed. Rather than being determined by some omnipotent signifier, as in the Lacanian explanation, Klein was interested in the biographical specifics that enable and constrain individuals' capacity to manage anxiety. Klein described two psychic positions in which anxiety is differentially managed: the *paranoid-schizoid* and the *depressive* positions[1].

The paranoid-schizoid position is associated with persecutory anxieties and the constant splitting of significant love objects, irreconcilably idealising and demonising them. This position is encountered most frequently in the first year of an infant's life. Klein argued that from the moment of birth children experience deep ambivalence towards their mothers, whose breast provides both a source of satisfaction and frustration to them. Psychic splitting is deployed because the breast is an object which is initially experienced as good (because it satisfies the infant's primary desires, i.e. for food, warmth and nourishment), and bad because it is not always available, presenting the infant with feelings of dependency and the threat of annihilation. Although the child may experience some jealousy towards rivals for its mother's affections, the child's most powerful emotion is that of envy for the mother's breast. The breast is perceived by infants as a source of richness that exposes their helplessness.

Healthy development occurs when the infant moves to the *depressive position* more and more frequently. In order to do this the infant must learn to manage the anxiety caused by the temporary unavailability of its mother by re-creating her in fantasy. It is this capacity to fantasise that develops the child's ego, i.e. the capacity to deal with external reality and manage bodily drives, desires and feelings. The experience of a mother who is both satisfying and frustrating enables the child to develop a capacity to experience both love and hate simultaneously as the child develops the capacity to recreate its mother in fantasy or find a 'substitute' for her in the external world. If the child succeeds in doing this then guilt over previous destructive fantasies towards the mother can be gradually acknowledged, enabling reparation to take place. The psychologically healthy child develops the capacity to feel gratitude and generosity, without these feelings being engulfed by hate and envy.

Klein's observations about how babies develop led her to believe that individuals make cross, and therefore contradictory, identifications with parents from the *pre-Oedipal* stage of development (not the Oedipal as Freud thought). Thereafter psychic reality is constructed through the identificatory mechanisms of introjection and projection. Although there are controversies over what exactly Klein meant by these terms (Spillius, 1988; Hinshelwood, 1991: 319-20), for the purposes of this chapter I shall refer to *introjective identification* as the process by which we take in external objects and make them part of our inner world - hence making for an enduring self-image, the felt sense of continuity we experience through of becoming like a particular object – and *projective identification* as the process by which people pass feelings onto others, as if they were attributes of those others, and then re-introject the identification there. For projective identification to occur, a fantasised object (like the mother's breast) has to first be psychically split into good and bad, before parts of the self can be projected onto it. When projective identification is not reciprocal this can result in us striving to emulate others who we admire; we try to live up to the projection of the good parts of ourselves we have attributed, perhaps exclusively, to someone else. Further, when projective identification is used defensively (which it often is) by both partners in an intimate relationship it can cause a stifling sense of dependency that renders it impossible for either partner to envisage their own existence without the other (Minsky, 1998: 138-9).

For Kleinians identifications with significant others (of both sexes) are never altogether lost however much we may try to foreclose, deny or conceal them. Instead, patterns of object relating are often transferred from primary object relations into other intimate relationships. For example, some men unconsciously find themselves expecting the same degree of care and attention from their wives as their mothers, and/or experience male therapists as omnipresent and undermining like their fathers. In reality though, each new set of relationships brings a biographically unique set of contradictions to be renegotiated inter-subjectively. The combination of each individual's intra-psychic defence mechanisms creates new tensions. This, together with the fact that people fluctuate between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions with regard to different anxieties, complicates the notion of 'identification with the aggressor' in Kleinian theory. To 'identify with the aggressor' in the Kleinian sense, good feelings must be projected onto those whom we feel 'threatened by', but 'dependent on' (i.e. abusive fathers) because to be dependent on a bad figure would be unbearable (Hollway, personal correspondence). Once introjected, bad feelings may be constantly denied, or split again and projected out elsewhere (perhaps onto a mother, who is labelled weak or ineffective).

Klein's work has proved persuasive to some contemporary feminist psychoanalysts, who have seen it as presenting the opportunity to return to the question of what constitutes 'good enough mothering' – a question that is often foreclosed by Freudian's rather phallocentric focus on fathers and sons. The term 'good enough mothering' was originally coined by D.W. Winnicot to refer to the conditions sufficient to enable the child to develop a sense of self sufficiently distinct from significant others. Winnicott explained that the 'good enough' mother is constantly able to help co-ordinate and contain the baby's chaotic emotions, even when the baby's defences are turned destructively against her. The good enough mother exercises her capacity to provide her breast just when the infant wants it, whilst gradually failing to meet the infants needs as they arise. This gently coerces the infant into accepting its mother's separateness.

Developing these ideas in her (1990) book *The Bonds of Love* Jessica Benjamin elaborates how good enough mothering hinges upon the mother being sufficiently integrated and containing to recognise the infant's needs. Benjamin explains that in a structurally unequal and male-dominated society many mothers are simply unable to offer good-enough mothering because their own levels of self-esteem and security are too low to be able to withstand and contain their baby's destructive projections. Moreover, Benjamin (1995) points out that it is important for both boys and girls to experience fathers (or other masculine representations) as sources of identification as well as mothers. Ideally, fathers come to represent separation, agency and desire, an object to be like, enabling the child to experience 'identificatory love' as well as 'object love' for the mother. This relationship is more crucial to the boy whose experience of identificatory love not only confirms separation, but also the achievement of a cohesive 'masculinity'. For boys it is important that their identification with the father is 'reciprocal', and not overly forbidding or rivalrous. Otherwise the boy is likely to feel a sense of failure, perhaps motivating him to foreclose identifications with his mother and delimiting his capacity to manage the tensions between asserting himself and accepting difference in others in subsequent adult relationships (see also Diamond, 1998).

## A Pen Portrait of Mark

### Introducing Mark

Mark, aged 33, was a white man of stocky, muscular build, a keen rugby player who worked as a sales executive in the private health sector. Mark was a self-confessed batterer who was seeking counselling on a voluntary basis to help him ‘change’. Mark’s violence had spanned most of his ten-year relationship with his wife, Maria, predating their marriage of four years. Mark claimed he had only ever had one other ‘serious’ relationship with a woman before Maria. When he was aged fifteen, Mark dated a woman five years his senior. Mark claimed that this girlfriend was violent towards him, but that he ‘never had a go at her, because she used to frighten the shit out of’ him. Mark was hesitant to admit to me that he had a child by this girlfriend. At the time of the child’s birth it had taken blood-tests and a paternity suit to persuade Mark that the child was his. Mark has not seen his son since.

### Parental Absence and Abuse

Mark’s childhood was spent relocating, along with his mother and two brothers, with his father’s army postings. Mark and his brothers were ‘put in boarding school’ and hence they did not see their parents very often - even during the school holidays Mark and his brothers were often sent to stay with friends. Mark elaborated, ‘We had no idea why we were at the boarding school. Because we literally lived five miles…down the road’. Mark claimed the explanation for this was now ‘obvious’: ‘it was because of the violence that was going on and the abuse my mother was under…She was trying to hide us from it. Protect us from it’.

However, it was not until his late teens that Mark began to comprehend just how abusive his father was.

> It was only when I was about eighteen years old that I really got the full story of what happened with my mum and dad about the amount of violence. Like obviously I saw it in my holidays but I never knew, one, to what degree it went and two, how long it went on for…My mum and dad were married nineteen years. And it went on for the whole nineteen years…When I did see him being violent it was after mum had nagged him or tried to get him to stop in. So I always thought, 'Well she asked for it. She caused it'…It wasn't until that night with my mum's friend and listening to what he'd done in the past that I suddenly thought well, 'Is this her fault?'

When Mark's mother decided to divorce Mark's father (when Mark was aged 13) she could no longer afford her sons' boarding fees. 'Dad wasn't paying any maintenance', and mum was trying to hold down two part-time jobs, along with a full-time job as a nurse, just to support her sons. Hence, Mark left the boarding school and went to his local grammar school instead.

It was then that Mark got into trouble, truanting with a 'lad' whom he said was like him - also from a 'broken home' - and shoplifting for the 'girlfriend' he later got pregnant. Mark implicated his father's absence in this, claiming that:

> He was very, very strict. You know we had quite a good disciplined upbringing…I'm sure if my dad or somebody had been around it would've been a question of somebody just pulling me into line. And when I actually got convicted of that, it was quite a shock to everybody. [There was] a lot of anger from my mum that I'd let her down and all the rest of it.

Somewhat paradoxically, Mark claimed to have no positive memories of his father.

> As kids he always smacked us. We always got a smack, if we were naughty or whatever… My mum has always said, even to this day, that 'Your dad was a good father'. And like I say to her, "Well

> what do you call a good father?". And she said, "Well he used to do things with you and all that". And I said, "Yeah, but I don't remember any of that". I have no recollection of anything before I was about seven, eight years old of what we actually did with my father. Err very, very vague. I've no memories of my childhood. Just can't remember things.

This was not strictly true. Mark did have some positive memories of his father:

> He used to take us to football…Dad was a referee and into all that sort of thing. So we always went with him. So that, they were good times.

But these positive memories were overlain with negative ones.

> One thing that does comes to mind was dad was never there at night, coz he was always out. Every single night of the week he would always go to the pub. Leave our house about eight o' clock.

Mark alleged that his father was at his most abusive when he was drunk. One of Mark's earliest memories (aged eight years old) was of the night when his father returned home from the pub, and then:

> virtually threw my mum through a glass door. And I can still remember the door just shattering. Because we were on the other side of the door...Coz we had like a glass door so we could see everything that was going on. And when he actually got her round the neck, that's when me and my eldest brother went in. But he just sort of pushed us out of the way.

Mark claimed that his father's physical abusiveness continued in his second marriage. As Mark's father got older his physical abuse became less frequent, but the relationship between his alcoholism and absence persisted until the day he died.

> [Dad] was on morphine. He said, 'Come on we'll go down the pub'. And we said, 'Well we don't want to go down the bloody pub'. You know, this bloke was dying [of cancer]…And he went. And that was just so typical…I never saw him again after that…He had everything and he just blew it…He's probably missed out on the golden years of seeing what his three sons have achieved.

Mark's feelings of bitterness towards his father seemed to make it difficult for him to either feel grief, or at least admit to having felt grief, in the event of his father's death.

> He was going downhill. And, and. I don't know. It was weird. Not. I didn't feel. I felt sorry for him. I felt a lot of pity for him.

**Brothers and Fighting**

Mark's earliest memories of his own violence centred on his life at boarding school. He described how at school he and his two brothers had a 'collective' reputation as 'rugby boys' and 'army kids'- 'a bit like a type of Mafia'. They 'stuck together' and 'looked out' for each other, and this, Mark claimed, protected him from the bullying and the sexual assaults that were commonplace in their school dormitories. This violent brotherly protection continued into adulthood. There was one time when the brothers were out separately in their local town. The two older brothers went off to protect their younger sibling when he got 'in trouble':

> Not coz we were bloody…violent people, but it was just, you know, 'Look after your brothers'.

There was also conflict between the brothers. After Mark's dad left his mother for another woman[2], Mark's older brother became increasingly violent towards Mark.

> Up until I was about twenty my brother used to always knock seven bails out of me. But there got to a point once...Well look at the size of me now. He's smaller than me. So there was a time when all of a sudden he would physically have a go and he wouldn't get anywhere…A lot of it was over silly things. Our family used to be 'first out, best dressed'...And there were times when if I wore a shirt, he would physically drag it off my back and then give me a smack for it. That was the norm…Maybe he felt that he was the boss and that was how it had to be done.

Mark claimed that as a consequence his older brother missed out on the more close loving relationship he and his younger brother share. However, this relationship was apparently not close enough to enable either Mark or his brother to break the 'taboo' of actually discussing the violence they witnessed as children. None of the brothers had ever discussed it.

### Marriage & Marital Violence

Mark did not describe his extensive violence to his wife with the same bravado that filtered into his accounts of the fights he and his brothers got into. Initially Mark's abuse towards Maria had been exclusively verbal, but it soon became physical. He explained how when he 'first started becoming quite verbally aggressive and nasty…it didn't really need a reason for anything to set it off'. Mark claimed these incidents tended to reoccur about every six months, on the one hand invoking Maria's recurring tendency to get upset as provoking his violence, but then, somewhat more hesitantly exposing how it his 'inability to cope with her upset' typically underpinned his more durable feelings of 'aggression'.

> Things always got worse, obviously when we'd had a beer or two. That's when Maria seemed to get. It was whenever she sort of got upset and either my tolerance or inability to cope with that upset. Her being upset seemed to be the catalyst for things. That's when I first started becoming quite verbally aggressive and nasty.

Mark depicted Maria as ‘a delicate little thing’ who ‘needs looking after’, rendering his violence all the more unintelligible to him. Mark said he had an inability to argue with Maria ‘without getting angry’. With his customers at work Mark was ‘able to sort of rationalise and have quite a debate about anything’, but with Maria he ‘always felt as though’ he ‘was being backed into a corner’ and had to fight his way out.

Mark and Maria had everything going for them: ‘great jobs…a lot of money…the old little cottage in the country…Everything is perfect except here I was being so bloody aggressive’.

> I suppose deep down I’ve always, I always feel an anger inside me…Just as though something is not right in my life. (Pause) There’s been no, no reason for the anger. You know, I’ve got everything going for me in my life.

Mark’s unsettling feelings of anger had become progressively more severe and noticeable in their enactment and effects.

> I could of quite easily killed her with the rage I felt and the damage I wanted to do. And I always felt like it was a release to grab her round the neck…It was like I could be in control of my hands whereas I knew if I punched her, with the size I am and the size she is, I could cause her[3]. I knew that. And deep down I always wanted to when I was in that rage.

Mark explained that his violence was often connected to arguments that he and Maria had regarding each other’s respective families.

> It always seemed to be when we were slagging off one or another's family…It was becoming to the point where Maria knew that if we brought up certain subjects then…physically I was going to do something.

In particular the 'one thing' that used to always get Mark's 'back up' was,

> Maria used to always turn and say, 'You're like your father'…Because the one person I didn't like to be was like him, coz of what he did and what I saw. So that was just like somebody punching me in the face.

Mark insisted, repeatedly, that unlike his father he had always been faithful to his wife, despite being a bit of 'a boy about town' before he met her, and there being opportunities when he could have 'been off'. Although Mark throttled his wife he claimed never to have punched her; whereas he had witnessed his father 'absolutely knocking seven bails' out of his mum. The materially perfect life Mark and Maria had accomplished contrasted starkly with the material impoverishment his father left his mother in. Mark positioned himself as someone who valued his family much more than his father ever did.

Not untypically, Mark sought counselling because he feared that Maria would leave him (Burton, et al 1998). When Women's Aid challenged Maria's belief that she was to blame for Mark's violence Mark became worried.

> I was worried that she was feeling even more resentment towards me, because she'd put up with it for so long.

That Maria had been thinking of leaving Mark 'frightened the life' out of Mark in spite of his claim that he had 'always been frightened of that commitment', i.e. marriage. Mark said he was surprised that Maria had never left him, but explained that Maria had blamed herself for his violence. ‘She sort of had all these views that maybe it was her that was going a bit mad here…That maybe her behaviour was being inappropriate’. Maria chose to conceal her bruising from friends and family. ‘She would go well out of her way to make sure nobody could see…coz she obviously felt ashamed of what was going on’. Consequently only Mark’s counsellor, his wife, and a chaplain he once met knew of his violence. But Mark claimed he had wanted to be found out, not least because he feared he was making Maria so unhappy.

> …then I would have to go and get counselling. It’s weird to say, but I was hoping that somebody would say something or find out. But obviously nobody ever did…I’ve never actually done any, physically anything, self harm, to me. But there are times when I have thought, ‘Is it worth carrying on like this? Am I going to get better? Or is this going to be the pattern for all my life? But more importantly is this going to be the pattern for Maria’s life as long as she is with me?’ I wasn’t too worried about me…I didn’t think I had a tremendous childhood so I’ll probably be down…but I was never fussed about that. But there again, I was having a major effect on somebody else’s life. And that bothered me because, especially as somebody you are supposed to love.

There was some evidence to suggest that Mark had also been sexually coercive towards Maria. Mark explained how in the aftermath of his violence he often ‘felt it necessary to make love…as a way of being closer’. But when I followed this up in my second interview, Mark replied:

> She’d never like resist, like push me away. She never ever did that. But, it would be like holding her and just feeling, “Yeah, she’s there”. But she doesn’t want to be. I’d know that. But it was just like a comfort to me. A few times she would put her arms round me, but nine times out of ten it would be me that would be lying there with my arms round her.

## Career Aspirations and Pregnancy

Mark explained his career aspirations in terms of his relationship with his parents and his relationship with Maria. Although Mark described his father as ‘probably the worst soldier the army ever had’, at age 16, Mark had set his heart on joining the army like his dad. When he was denied entrance on the basis of his school reports, it ‘was a big wrench’ for Mark. Subsequent to his conviction for shoplifting Mark left his mother’s house to live with his friend’s family and went to work in a factory. Two years on Mark and his mother were ‘back on terms’. It was around then that Mark overheard his mother’s friend describing his father’s violence. It was also around this time that Mark decided to become a nurse, like his mother.

Once his nurse training was complete, Mark decided go travelling around Australia. He met Maria just before he left and persuaded her to join him. Although Maria was ‘unhappy the whole time’ they were away, after their return Mark managed to persuade her that the best career breaks would come if they both emigrated permanently. Mark’s career breaks were justified as best for him and Maria, an idea that perhaps resonates as much with the specific combination of ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘family values’ that demarcated the social and political climate of the late 1980s, as much as Mark’s tendency to insist on ‘being the boss’. When Maria expressed hesitancy with regard to emigrating[4], Mark set her an ‘ultimatum’. Mark told Maria, ‘You’ve got to live your life. You’ve still got to go and do what you want to do’. As Mark explained:

> [I]t’s always probably been me that’s controlled the relationship…I’ve always called the shots…Maybe because I’ve always felt that what I’ve suggested has always got to be the better thing.

Maria struggled to find work whilst they were in Australia. Mark's violence got worse, to the extent that it was being enacted in public and in private, and Maria became increasingly lonely. They returned to the UK a year later, shortly after hearing the news about Mark's father's terminal illness.

At the end of my second interview with Mark he explained that Maria had just found out that she was pregnant. Mark described them both as 'very made up…over the moon', but then he referred to 'Maria's negativeness'.

> She's always, not pessimistic, but always negative. Everything is going to happen to her like.

Maria was worried about the possibility that her baby might have Down's Syndrome, as well as the danger that Mark's violence might pose to the child. Mark claimed that the positive side of Maria's 'negativeness' was that it enabled him to be 'positive and reinforcing'. Mark was starting to plan for a future with Maria; a future that had seemed very uncertain several months earlier when she had sought support from Women's Aid.

## Analysis

Mark was certainly one of those 20% of men from violent homes who later went onto to be violent to his partner (Mullender, 1996: 42). In support of social learning theory we should not only note that both men were violent, but also the qualitative similarity between the 'throttling' Mark perpetrated against Maria, and the 'hands round the neck' Mark witnessed his father doing to his mother[5]. Like his father, Mark was also worse when drunk. Like his father, Mark had also expected his wife to move with his career. We might also add that Mark’s violence was not only reproduced trangenerationally from father to son; his older brother and his schoolmates also modelled violent behaviour for Mark to learn.

However, Mark’s account also calls into question the adequacy of social learning theory. Social learning theory fails to explain three key contradictions in Mark’s account:

1. Although Mark persistently rationalised his violence to Maria, causing her to think that ‘she was going a bit mad’, this rationalising ultimately convinced neither of them. Indeed, it was because Mark felt unable to justify and rationalise in arguments with his wife in the same way as he did with customers at work that he would become so enraged.
2. It was not so much that Mark had become desensitised to the effects of violence. He had some nasty memories of his father’s violence and he knew, even feared, the kind of ‘damage’ he could do given the size differential between him and his wife.
3. Even though Mark’s boarding school was a particularly brutalising place, his attendance there prevented him from witnessing much of the violence that his father perpetrated against his mother.

Is Mark’s account more consistent with a radical feminist interpretation? From this perspective, Mark used violence, as opposed to other means of control that he had learnt simply because it was effective. Mark admitted that he had ‘always controlled the relationship’, and showed how he used ‘ultimatums’ to do so. He administered a ‘continuum of violence’ ranging from abusive language, emotional bullying, physical assault and sexual coercion in order to control Maria. Indeed, Mark’s violence was instrumental in two senses: the first, because it made Maria hesitant to challenge his authority; the second, because it forced Maria to accept that his way ‘was the best’ irrespective of the rational arguments for the alternatives. Mark’s capacity to rationalise and justify at work, along with the confessional nature of the story he recounted to me, might be interpreted as fitting with feminist observations about violent men’s capacities to charm in order to appear blameless (Cavanagh and Lewis, 1996; Hearn, 1998a). That the biggest challenge to Mark’s abusiveness seemed to come at the time when *Women’s Aid* encouraged Maria to leave also supports the radical feminist argument about the significance of gendered power differentials in sustaining men’s violence. When Maria was sufficiently empowered to leave, Mark’s violence no longer worked, forcing him to question its appropriateness.

But does this not demonstrate that patriarchy is far less monolithic than some radical feminists would have us believe? If Mark’s violent behaviour ultimately undermined his authority, prompting Maria to seek support elsewhere, does this not suggest that domestic violence is not a universally accepted, leave alone effective strategy for controlling women in heterosexual relationships? Indeed, this should not have proved particularly revelatory to Mark: his violent father ‘blew everything’ and his bullying brother missed out on a close, loving relationship with him. At least in Mark’s case, violence cannot be reduced completely to a rational-instrumental strategy of control.

The clinical notion of ‘identification with the aggressor’ fares better in this respect[6] since it accounts for why Mark’s conscious knowledge of such contradictions might get repressed or denied; by overlooking another’s experience of injustice, fear or pain the perpetrator resolves, albeit temporarily, a degree of emotional congruence. To paraphrase Araji & Finkelhor (1986) we might conclude that by victimising his wife Mark sought to master the trauma he experienced as a child, overcoming his feelings of powerlessness as a witness to his father's violence by identifying with him. In support of this perspective, we might note that Mark never explicitly defined himself as a 'victim'. Mark's only mention of the effects of his father's violence on him was of the time when he and his brother (unsuccessfully) tried to pull his father off of his mother[7]. There is evidence in Mark's account suggesting he sympathised with his father's plight; perceiving his father as a victim of his mother's 'nagging', effectively blaming his mother for her own physical victimisation. Mark thought his mother had 'caused all this': his father's alcoholism, violence, absence and eventual abandonment of his family. Even Mark's argument that he would not have got caught truanting and shoplifting had his father 'been around to pull him into line' implicitly blames his mother.

But what of Mark's strong desire to be unlike his dad, manifested in both his endeavours to become an industrious 'provider', a nurse like his mother, and his experiencing of Maria's insistence that he was like his dad as a violently offensive punch in the face? Both clinicians and academic psychoanalysts alike would probably want to relate such contradictions to the barely conscious, repressed, or unspeakable aspects of Mark's experience, to which his numerous clumsily expressed, incomplete sentences allude. The first and most obvious evidence of repression in Mark's account took the form of an unwillingness to admit anything other than feelings of pity for his father: 'It was weird. Not. I didn't feel. I felt sorry for him. I felt a lot of pity for him'. Then there was Mark's rather ambiguous slip regarding his 'tolerance or inability to cope' with Maria's upset – a pivotal link in the chain that turned his deep-down, restless anger into action that 'could of quite easily killed her'. This desire to kill was too unbearable for Mark to consciously entertain, as his incomplete statement - 'with the size I am and the size she is, I could cause her. I knew that. And deep down I always wanted to when I was in that rage' - exposes. A similar tendency to repress threatening feelings emerged again in Mark's substitution for what may have been 'suicidal thoughts' with the words 'done any, physically anything, self harm' – a statement that alerts us to the possibility that Maria feared more than the threat to herself when she knew that Mark was going to 'physically do something'. Finally, the reader might note how Mark attempted to foreclose further discussion of his own depression with the self-denying remark, 'I wasn't too worried about me… I'll probably be down…I was never fussed about that', despite his repititive insistence that he had 'everything' going for him.

All of this evidence suggests that both the rational instrumentalist model of male subjectivity assumed by radical feminists and the readily inscribed 'blank psychic slate' assumed in social learning theory are unduly simplistic. But does the presumption of non-unitary, contradictory subject, as conceptualised by any of the various psychoanalytic perspectives offer a more convincing account of why Mark became an abuser against his own conscious knowledge that such behaviour was very wrong?

Freudians would certainly predict Mark's strong identification with his father during his teenage years; this identification enables boy's to separate from their mothers by becoming masculine. Freudians would also expect this identification to be unstable, always open to unconscious disruption. Freud observed that the boy's identifications with his mother actually persist into adult life, only displaced as the (more culturally acceptable) heterosexual desire for other adult women. Similarly, the boy's rivalry with his father persists at an unconscious level even though he invests in a cultural masculinity that his father, at least in part, symbolised, offering up one explanation for Mark's somewhat self-indignant discussion of his father's death.

Freudians would also anticipate that Mark's father's absence and abusiveness might give rise to especial separation problems for Mark. The absence of a father figure can cause 'super-ego' problems for the boy. Evidence of such super-ego problems might be found in the contradiction between Mark's feelings of futility and worthlessness (signalled by his belief that he will inevitably be 'down' as a consequence of his childhood) and his conviction that what he suggests 'has always got to be the better thing'. The Oedipal explanation for this lies with Mark's failure to resolve his castration anxiety as adequately as other men: a failure that Benjamin (1990, 1995) argues is made more likely by the absence of a father figure capable of providing sufficient emotional reciprocity to enable the boy to separate from his mother without foreclosing his identifications with her[8].

From this perspective it is not that social modelling *causes* violence. As Frosh (1997a) expresses it, it is more the case that Mark's fantasy of his father did not accord with any real, embodied male person. Internalising a crippled (and crippling) superego as a consequence, Mark constantly experienced a failure to live up to external masculine ideals, an emasculating sense of lack and inadequacy (see also Jefferson, 1994a). From this perspective, Mark's violence was a retaliatory response against the thinking of others whom he imagined to be attacking his somewhat fragile sense of self.

It is the discursive construction of these Others which typically constitutes the focus of Lacanian attention. A more Lacanian reading (in this respect, like a radical feminist reading), might argue that Mark's 'destructive heterosexuality' was no different to most ‘normal’ men’s. Where Lacanians would part company with radical feminists is on the issue of how conscious and instrumental men’s motivations for violence are. Lacanians would, as I have done, draw attention to the absences and avoidances in Mark’s account in order to highlight the repression of his feelings of dependency, the resurfacing of his fear of inadequacy, and above all the terrifying irrationality that constantly undermines his investment in an ideal of masterful masculine rationality. Hence, Mark’s denigration of Maria for her ‘negativeness’ and his idealisation of her as a ‘delicate little thing’ resonate with Frosh’s (1994, 1995) insistence that approbation and misogyny go hand in hand. In men’s accounts of themselves the symbolic Other is the ‘feminine’ other; the repressed fear of the weaknesses men dread and despise in themselves, signified in this case by Maria’s intolerable upset. Mark’s failure to disclose any times when he was dependent (emotionally or financially) on his mother or his wife (until the very moment when the latter was ready to leave him) supports the Lacanian notion that men’s desire for the mother/Other is repressed. Otherwise, Mark’s dependency is consistently conspicuous by its absence; an absence constantly filled by his father’s inescapable symbolic presence. For Lacanians it would be no coincidence that Mark depicted his mother and his wife as undermining his own and his father’s respective authority, since these depictions shore up an image of masculine autonomy and rationality.

However, what neither the Freudian nor Lacanian readings are able to do is account for the shifts in Mark’s subjectivity over the course of his adult development; the albeit cumbersome way in which Mark has consciously problematised the similarities between himself and his father, and the way in which Mark’s psychic investments have been challenged inter-subjectively through his relationship with Maria. The determinism inherent in both the Freudian and Lacanian positions is exposed most clearly when one notices their failure to account for how the boy learns that his father's penis is understood as embodying the all powerful phallus (Hood-Williams, 2001). If most boys manage to negotiate the processes of Oedipal identification and differentiation without resort to such extreme violence then we need to think about what motivated Mark's particular trajectory.

Kleinian theory is better equipped to answer this puzzle since it assumes the renegotiation of anxieties inter-subjectively and therefore integrates social contingencies into its account. Given that Mark grew-up with a father who was abusing his mother, and that Mark boarded at a school where sexual abuse was commonplace, Kleinians might speculate that Mark's childhood feelings of terror often went uncontained during his infancy and childhood. If so, Mark would be expected to struggle to make the movement from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position. He would thus deal with his persecutory anxieties by projectively identifying with a powerful, but threatening aggressor, and by constantly projecting his introjected feelings of inadequacy back onto seemingly weak and vulnerable others.

If take Mark's vehement criticism of his father as indicative of a defensive reaction to his seemingly socially unacceptable projective identifications with him, then the more Kleinian notion of 'identification with the aggressor' makes more sense in this case. For example, Mark's tendency to blame his physically dominated mother by thinking 'she asked for it' given his own failure to stop his father's violence might signify (the infant) Mark's projection of good feelings onto a 'threatening' but 'powerful' father and the projection of his own introjected feelings of helplessness back out onto a seemingly weak mother; a mother, who was perceived by her sons as failing to protect them from their father’s temper and responsible for their subjection to a persistently unnerving, harsh boarding school culture.

This might help explain Mark’s teenage admiration for his father and his persistent attempts to emulate his father’s protector/provider status by stealing things for his first girlfriend. Taken together with the projection of blame for the family break-up onto his ‘nagging’ mother, we can see the paranoid-schizoid tendency to split objects excessively operating in Mark’s accounts of his parents. We might interpret this splitting as a defensive reaction to the stigmatisation Mark attributed to being from a ‘broken home’ and/or the shattering of a fantasy of familial reconciliation, long fostered by his father’s absence and his mother’s endeavours to protect her sons by sending them to stay at boarding school and friends’ houses.

This all changed when Mark became a husband/potential father himself. Finding himself subject to the socially stigmatising label of woman-beater, Mark was motivated to project the blame for his violence onto others, like his wife and his father. The discourse Mark ‘chooses’, however consciously or unconsciously, is one of the ‘never satisfied woman’; a discourse that suggests the problem would go away if only Maria wasn’t so negative. Mark’s idealisation of Maria as the solution to that unspecifiable ‘something’ ‘that is not quite right’ in his life signifies the persistence of excessive splitting in his adult relationships. Somewhat inevitably this idealisation kept collapsing, not least when Mark failed to secure Maria’s happiness. Hence, it was when Maria ‘sort of got upset’, combined with Mark’s ‘inability to cope with that upset’ that ‘seemed to be the catalyst for things’. Occupying the paranoid-schizoid position, Mark convinced himself that everything would be all right if it wasn’t for Maria’s negativeness, her pessimism, her belief that ‘everything is going to happen to her’. Maria was then experienced as totally ‘bad’ by Mark, as his parallel idealisation of himself (in this case as the provider/protector looking after a ‘delicate, little thing’) also collapsed. Once again Mark felt inadequate as the loathed emotional weaknesses he had projected onto Maria returned to haunt him. Mark’s claim not to be ‘fussed’ reads as yet another defensive attempt to suppress the feelings of futility and despair that seemed to follow his own six monthly cycle of abusiveness.

Interestingly Maria was (unconsciously) complicit with Mark’s victimisation of her for a long time, introjecting the blame for his unhappiness, and thinking ‘it was her that was going a bit mad’. Mark would become ‘reinforcing’ as Maria became ‘pessimistic’. These dynamics, coupled with Mark’s incapacity to manage the tension between self-assertion and dependency, probably account for Mark’s ambivalent description of Maria as ‘somebody you are supposed to love’. As Jessica Benjamin (1984, 1990) and Wendy Hollway (1996) explain, it is impossible to feel mutually desired and recognised in relationships where one person completely dominates the other *because* this other then becomes insufficiently autonomous to know their own desire. In short, people do not experience as valuable the desire of those they completely control. Mark’s coercively instigated, but typically insufficient, attempts to re-establish emotional and sexual intimacy after he had been violent seemed to be motivated by his anxiety over whether Maria was someone who could and would still love him in spite of his abusiveness (see also Jefferson, 1997b: 297).

## Conclusion

To summarise, social learning theory alerts us to the fact that childhood experiences of trauma and violence make boys generally more susceptible to violent outbursts in their adult life. But because of its failure to address the issue of subjectivity, social learning theory is unable to explain why the link between traumatic childhood experiences and violent behaviour is only probabilistic, not predictive. The instrumentalist model of subjectivity assumed by radical feminism offers one explanation for why some men chose violence over other strategies of control, as does the clinical notion of 'identification with the aggressor'. But, as I hope I have demonstrated above, neither of these two perspectives deal adequately with the contradictory aspects of subjectivity revealed by Mark's narrative. Neither adequately explain why some heterosexual men practice violence against women in spite of their conscious belief that such violence is morally wrong, shameful and unjustified.

This paradox constituted the great irony in Mark's life; the fact that it was the possibility of similarities between himself and his father that both terrified and enraged him the most. Freudian theory anticipates such a paradox in the lives of boys with absent and abusive fathers, suggesting that the lack of an embodied father figure can produce crippling super-ego problems for them. Lacanian theory insists that it is the place of the Father in the symbolic order that renders this a problem for all men. In the symbolic order men experience the feminine as embodying a repressed emotionality that undermines the myth of masterful rational, masculinity – in Mark's case, his feeling that what he had suggested was 'always…the better thing'. Yet it is Klein's idea of defences against anxiety that presents the most versatile explanation of Mark's initial motivation for identifying with his abusive father and deriding his mother, as well as the shifting unconscious dynamics that follow Mark's conscious endeavours to disidentify with both his father and the emotionality he attributes to women.

But whereas the Freudian/Lacanian explanation seem to allocate an over-determining place to biological sex, the Kleinian account is in danger of losing sight of the significance of the child's 'sex' altogether. This should, as Benjamin argues, lead us to question how much importance we lay at the respective doors of gender difference and emotional dynamics. Against the more orthodox readings of Freud and Lacan, Benjamin (1990; 1995) argues that we need not necessarily go down the route of woman-blaming to explain the kind of psychic dynamics in relationships like Mark's and Maria's. Given the abuse Mark's mother was under, and quite possibly the social isolation her husband's career imposed, one might speculate that Mark's mother would have been too alone, too depressed, and too low in self-esteem to provide mothering 'good-enough' to contain the emotional disarray being experienced by her three sons. Similarly, Mark's father seemed insufficiently emotionally available and too rivalrous to facilitate the conditions that might have enabled Mark to better manage the tensions between self-assertion and dependency.

Thinking about Mark's life in this way enables one to break with the notion that violence causes violence, replacing this notion with the idea that there are certain conditions – of which the experience of uncontained trauma is one – that make it more likely that boys, and most likely girls too, will have trouble developing the capacity to think through (contain or mentalise) emotional tensions. As I have already hinted this means exploring the links between the material conditions and inter-subjective parent-child relations that that make for good-parenting. Furthermore, it entails thinking beyond the child-parent triangle (i.e. between siblings, peers, and the media) with an eye to the contradictory quality of subjectivity. Finally, it should also lead us to problematise what kinds of parenting - particularly what kind of fathering - constitutes good-enough parenting (see Diamond, 1998 & Kraemer, 1995). To do this we will have to analyse the case-histories of men who have never been violent, as well as those who have given violence up, or are still being violent.

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[1] See Cooper, 1990 for a concise summary.

[2] Mark described his father as ‘notoriously always off with other women’.

[3] Mark never finished this sentence, possibly because he realised the full implications of his admission. One might speculate that the sentence would end with ‘serious damage’ or ‘fatal injuries’.

[4] Notably because a decision had to be made as to who would care for her recently widowed and infirm father.

[5] 27% of men who kill their current or ex-partners do so by strangulation, as opposed to 3% of women (Stanko et al, 1998: 29).

[6] I suspect practising clinicians might be drawn to problematise the more ‘cyclical’ nature of Mark’s conflicts with Maria, not least because such seasonal shifts in mood often characterise the lives of those diagnosed ‘manic depressive’ or ‘bipolar disorder’.

[7] Mark’s inability to remember much of his childhood, along with his tendency to erupt into rage when people talked about his family, is entirely consistent with clinical observations about the correlation between the repression of painful memories, emotional inarticulateness and the experience of childhood trauma (Hodges et al, 1994).

[8] It is perhaps telling that Mark’s older brother also felt he had to be the boss as well, enforcing this violently. I know less about his younger brother.

# Chapter 6

# *Reconstructing Masculinity: a ‘politics of pure possibility’ or ‘pointless sermonising’?*

## Abstract

*This chapter problematises the place of non-violent men in current criminological theories of masculinity. I argue that James Messerschmidt’s structured action theory erroneously assumes a social order dominated by destructive forms of masculinity. This shortcoming - born of Messerschmidt’s selective reading of Connell’s work – forms the basis of Hall and colleagues (2001) argument that the ‘politics of pure possibility’ around ‘social justice in gender relations’ advocated by profeminist men, constitutes ‘pointless sermonising’ to those who are already being transformed by historical forces outside and beyond their control. Testing the relative strengths of the ‘cultural capital’ approach Hall et al advocate, Tony Jefferson’s ‘theory of subjectivity’, and Connell’s ‘hegemonic masculinity thesis’ against the case-history of a man I have called ‘Jack’, I seek to demonstrate that those approaches that deal with the issues of cathexis and personality continue to advance a considerable challenge to a discipline that still prefers to reduce psychic complexities to social determinants.*

## Introduction

The legacy of structuralism in both socialist and feminist theorising has made it difficult for those participating in criminology's 'masculinities debate' to imagine how men might change without broad-sweeping transformations to their social and material circumstances. This chapter therefore considers the case history of one man who adopted a specifically anti-oppressive approach to his paid employment, community activism, and relationships with women and children from four theoretical perspectives on 'masculinities'. I begin with the work of James Messerschmidt, contrasting this with Connell's original thesis. I then set out two very different critiques of Connell's work - namely Steve Hall and colleagues' argument that the 'hegemonic masculinity' thesis overlooks the class-based dynamics of the civilising process, and Tony Jefferson's, psychoanalytically inspired argument for a theory of subjectivity - before presenting the case history of 'Jack'. To ease the burden on the reader Jack's case history is broken down into four components: (1) an introduction, followed by (2) Jack's family of origin, (3) his schooling and education, and (4) his relationships with women and children. I hope to demonstrate that Jack's anti-oppressive approach to masculinity, although facilitated by his social and material circumstances, is also a product of biographically contingent anxieties and desires that have shaped his personality and motivated his actions.

## Messerschmidt's Structured Action Theory

James Messerschmidt is probably the most prolific writer within the criminology of masculinities. Endorsed by leading feminist criminologists (Heidensohn, 1995; Walklate, 1995, 1998) and masculinity theorists alike (Connell, 1993; Jefferson, 1995) his book *Masculinities and Crime* was immensely influential in inspiring many criminologists, myself included, to consider how a multitude of different crimes could be understood as resources for ‘accomplishing masculinity’. Weighing up the relative limitations of mainstream criminology’s dependence upon artificially polarised notions of sex-role socialisation, radical feminism’s broad-sweeping assumption that all men behave violently for the purpose of controlling women, and socialist feminism’s tendency to overlook the power dynamics around race and sexuality in order to preserve an idea of class uniformity, *Masculinities & Crime* argued for an alternative theory that would neither ‘obscure differences among men…in terms of race, class, age and sexual preference’, nor presume that violence is a ‘consciously chosen “male” instrument for purposes of maintaining patriarchal power’ (Messerschmidt, 1993: 45).

Reworking Anthony Giddens’ insight that social structures are “both constituted by human agency and yet at the same time the medium of that constitution” (Giddens, 1976: 121 quoted in Messerschmidt, 1993: 77) with the ethnomenthodological insight that gender is an ‘accomplishment’ - a performance dependent on the corroboration of a social audience who assess its compliance with normative conceptions of a particular sex category - Messerschmidt set about developing such a theory. Keen not to lose sight of the significant structural patterns of inequality both between men and women and amongst different groups of men and women, Messerschmidt drew heavily on Bob Connell’s (1987: ch5) argument that patterns of power relations between men and women – what Connell calls the gender order or regime – is a product of the workings of three irreducible structures: labour, power and cathexis. However, the aspect of Connell’s work that Messerschmidt was most reliant upon was his concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Messerschmidt (1993: 82) interpreted ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to refer to:

> the ascendancy of a certain form of masculinity that is “embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structure the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies, and so

> forth"…[T]he dominant form of masculinity to which other types of masculinity are subordinated, not eliminated…[F]orce and threat of force may be used to help maintain hegemonic masculinity (for example, violence against women and homosexuals) …[H]egemonic masculinity is the idealized form of masculinity in a given historical setting… culturally honored, glorified, and extolled…In contemporary Western industrialized societies, hegemonic masculinity is defined through work in the paid-labor market, the subordination of women, heterosexism, and the driven and uncontrollable sexuality of men.

Reviewing academic and media accounts of boys' behaviour in the street and at school, as well as studies of adult men's behaviour in private and in public, Messerschmidt used this new framework to demonstrate how crimes as diverse as vandalism, theft, hustling, robbery, rape and domestic violence enable men of typically subordinated social status to accomplish masculinity when other resources are less readily available to them. The problem, as critics of both *Masculinities & Crime* and Messerschmidt's (1997) subsequent book, *Crime as Structured Action,* were quick to point out, was that Messerschmidt failed to demonstrate how structured action theory could account for the fact that most men, including most lower class men, 'do gender' without resorting to crime or violence (Jefferson, 1995; Walklate, 1995; Stanko, 1998).

In his most recent book, entitled *Nine Lives,* Messerschmidt (2000) attempted to address this criticism specifically. Messerschmidt's aim in studying the lives of nine boys was to discover whether there are changes that could be made to school and domestic life that might help 're-embody' boys and men in ways that emphasise 'nonviolence and the celebration of bodily difference' to instigate a new form of 'democratic manhood' (Messerschmidt, 2000: 147). Messerschmidt divided his nine research subjects into three groups of three - the sexually assaultive (Sam, John and Zack), the physically assaultive

(Hugh, Perry and Lenny), and three boys whom Messerschmidt classifies as ‘non-violent’ (Jerry, Dennis and Allan) – and then looked for commonalties that might explain these boys’ three different behavioural patterns

In his analysis, Messerschmidt depicted both the sex offenders and the assaultive ‘offenders’ as variously ‘identifying with’, ‘bonded with’, ‘attached to’, ‘mentored by’ and ‘modelling’ themselves on, significant adult male relatives who ‘communicated …hegemonic masculinity’ by exercising ‘power over women and children’ (p.82). Messerschmidt explained the difference between the behaviour of the sexually assaultive and the physically assaultive offenders as a consequence of the physical inability of the former’ to accomplish a form of masculinity that required them to respond to provocation with physical violence and have heterosexual relationships (p.50). Whereas the sexually assaultive offenders all had small/obese physiques, the physically assaultive offenders were both socially and physically capable of ‘fighting back’. Hence, the three sex offenders,

> attempted to invalidate their subordinate masculine status at school through a personal reconstruction of masculinity at home. For Sam, John, and Zack, the common denominator consisted not of abuse by family members at home but abuse by peers at school, and the inability to physically “fight back” against such abuse, and the emphasis on (yet inability to “do”) heterosexuality. (Messerschmidt, 2000: 50)

Conversely, the three physically assaultive offenders,

> appropriated a definition of masculinity that emphasised the importance of male power, control of others, and the ultimate use of physical violence to solve interpersonal problems. (Messerschmidt, 2000: 78)

This left Messerschmidt with the problem of how to explain the behaviour of those he classifies as ‘non-violent boys’. One might anticipate, following the somewhat Mertonian logic of Messerschmidt’s analysis of the offending boys (see also Hood-Williams, 2001), that the non-violent boys were either socially and physically under-resourced to ‘fight back’ and be sexually violent, or that they were never exposed to the ‘strains’ endured by their contemporaries. However, as Messerschmidt points out Jerry, Dennis and Allan all engaged in fighting at an early age and continued to find themselves exposed to confrontational situations into their high school years. Messerschmidt thus draws the conclusion that these three boys eventually ‘experienced a masculinity that renounced the use of physical violence’ (p130) as a consequence of their ability ‘to discuss with their parents their unsettling masculinity situations at school’, their discovery that ‘walking away’ from taunting peers ‘worked’, and their close relationships with ‘other youth who deemphasized the importance of the body to one’s sense of masculine self-worth’ (p.136).

## Critical Comments

Why this walking away ‘worked’ for these three boys and not the other six is never explained in *Nine Lives*, leaving one wondering whether structured action theory is right to construct ‘non-violent masculinity’ as such an oxymoron. One might well ask if the under-reaction of the non-violent boys’ immediate social audience (i.e. their friends and teachers) to their ‘walking away’ enabled Jerry, Dennis and Alan to define this behaviour as the ‘tougher’ thing to do (p.112)? Or how the routine behaviour of these ‘non-violent’ boys, situated in circumstances in which violence was a distinct possibility, effected the social audiences definitions of appropriate masculine (or for that matter, raced and classed) behaviour? Or more structurally, what it is about the organisation of everyday (adult) life that enables a minority of children to be routinely victimised by adults and other children without incurring state sanction? How is the concept of hegemony relevant here?

The complexity of Messerschmidt’s own data as well as much important research literature in the study of school bullying and masculinities could have been used more constructively to answer some of these questions. For example, Messerschmidt’s three ‘assaultive offenders’ insist that it is never acceptable to force a woman to have sex. None of them endorsed incest and only one of them (Hugh, p59) endorsed slapping women (and only then if a girl ‘talks trash’ or ‘runs her mouth off’). Rather than treating the non-violent boys as exceptional, Messerschmidt could have equally drawn the conclusion that violent and non-violent boys do not differ significantly in their attitudes towards violence.

Recent studies of boys in British schools suggest just this. For example, a recent survey of 1, 300 British school children (Mullender et al, 2000) found that although boys often hold contradictory views about which parent is to blame for domestic violence, only a very small minority (between 2 and 4%) of boys think that hitting between parents is ‘okay’. Similarly, Edley and Wetherell’s (1997) qualitative interview-based study of ‘talk’ about masculinity found that many boys use their refusal to engage in physical combat as a way of positively distancing themselves from an increasingly unfashionable image of men as uncivilised, macho, irresponsible, and lacking in self-control. These sentiments are reinforced in Mártían Mac an Ghail (1994: 5) carefully nuanced ethnography of male students’ ‘cultural investments in different versions of heterosexual masculinity’. Mac an Ghail observes how some ‘black macho lads’ survive the school’s racism by adopting strategies of hyper-heterosexuality, whereas some white academic achievers survive by extolling the virtues of ‘mental labour’ and derogating the ‘low-life futures’ they anticipate await the (black and white) macho lads (p.63). According to Mac an Ghail, what both groups of boys had in common was the their use of bravado and camaraderie to conceal insecurities, especially around their sexual inexperience and performance.

Messerschmidt could also have made better links between the social-psychological literature on school bullying and feminist and practitioner observations concerning the effects of physical and sexual abuse on boys. American survey research into school bullying consistently demonstrates that children who look weak and vulnerable, are withdrawn, take life seriously and have trouble making friends are most likely to be singled out for victimisation (Hodges, 1999; Hodges & Perry, 1999; Schwartz et al., 1993). Often these characteristics are found to both ‘invite’ further peer victimisation and result from it. Adding to this, the limited literature on men’s experiences of sexual violence informs us that boys (like Messerschmidt’s ‘John’) who have been sexually abused by men are especially likely to have problems disclosing this information, feel (sometimes irreconcilably) stigmatised, powerless, angry, betrayed, and culpable, and fear that they may become homosexual themselves (Etherington, 1995; McMullen, 1990; Mezey & King, 1992). Similarly, those who work with children who witness domestic violence report that in addition to physical injuries, loss of possessions, poverty and disrupted schooling, such children often experience a range of emotional difficulties, stress related illnesses, have trouble building trusting relationships, feel ashamed and angry, and lack confidence in themselves (Abrahams, 1994; Women’s Aid, 2000).

These kind of links between the experience of family violence, susceptibility to peer victimisation and problems with subsequent interpersonal relationships all need to be dealt with more adequately if Messerschmidt is serious about developing a theory of how social structures both constitute human agency as well as serving as a medium of that constitution. In *Nine Lives*, Messerschmidt's overriding concern with 'common denominators', along with his rather uncritical dichotomising of 'assaultive offenders ' and 'non-violent' boys, prevents him from making these links, and hence his analysis fails to illuminate why Jerry, Dennis and Allan never received the message, allegedly so clear to the six 'assaultive offenders', that hegemonic masculinity involves the physical exercise of 'power over women and children'. As a consequence, the reader comes away thinking less about Messerschmidt's proposals for shared parenting and school anti-bullying polices, and more about the extent to which it is accurate to assume that most boys extol the virtues of subordinating of women, are uncompromisingly heterosexist, and assume men's sexuality to be 'driven and uncontrollable'. My conviction is that the social order of gender relations is much more complicated than this.

## Connell's 'Hegemonic Masculinity' Thesis

To what extent are these problems a product of Messerschmidt's approach to his data as opposed to being intrinsic to Connell's hegemonic masculinity thesis? In his 'foreword' to *Masculinities and Crime*, Connell (1993) claimed to find Messerschmidt's analysis both 'vivid and original', but he stopped short of wholeheartedly endorsing the relationship Messerschmidt proposed between hegemony and violence, explaining:

> In the regulation of violence among working-class youth, for instance, state power seems repeatedly to provide an object against which a violent resistant masculinity can be defined…as realized in the school as much as it does in relation to the police…Paradoxical effects of this kind are impossible to explain via sex-role theory and its concept "socialization." They are much closer to the way psychoanalysis understands the formation of personality…The problem Messerschmidt leaves us with is how we understand such dialectical, contradictory processes at the social level as well as the

> level of psychodynamics; for his evidence leaves us in no doubt about the importance of collective processes here. (Connell, 1993: xiv)

In his subsequent book *Masculinities*, Connell argued that whilst only a minority of men 'embody hegemonic masculinity', the majority are complicit with it, routinely fail to contest its display of authority, and draw a 'patriarchal dividend' from it. Put boldly, most men,

> respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home the family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminist are bra-burning extremists. (Connell, 1995: 80)

According to Connell (1995: 81) many of these complicit men simultaneously occupy subordinate or marginalised positions in the gender order – locations in specific configurations of practice that benefit them as men, but disadvantage and exclude them according to their race, class, age and sexual orientation.

Connell's own observations about masculinity's relation to violence are much more nuanced than Messerschmidt's. In his chapter "Live Fast and Die Young" Connell introduces us to Pat Vincent – once an extremely violent young man, who had tried to get 'out of the habit of fighting' not least because of his fear of losing. Pat claimed not to resent his violent father, even though he was still frightened of 'the old man coming down heavy'. Whereas another of Connell's respondents (a biker called 'Eel') thought it acceptable to smack 'loud-mouthed' women, Pat Vincent considered men who bash women to be 'wimps', presuming women to be unequal participants in the exchange of physical aggression (Connell, 1995: 100). In his other chapters, Connell also depicts six men who struggled to reconcile their own investments in masculinity with commitments to the environmental movement and feminist politics; eight gay men whose relationships with both feminism and hegemonic masculinity ranged, often contradictorily, from endorsement to contempt; and nine professional ‘men of reason’, a few of whom had begun to question the rationality of discrimination and inequality, forcing them to weigh up the various economic advantages and disadvantages of the preferential treatment from which they had previously benefited. In the analyses of all of his case studies Connell is sensitive to the complex patterns of identifications men usually have with their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and many other significant men and women.

What does this mean for the relationship between hegemony and violence? Connell’s answer is somewhat ambiguous here. On the one hand, Connell argues that violence is an expression of a gendered norm, exemplified by hegemonic masculinity, that maintains a particular pattern of material inequality between the sexes (see Connell, 1995: 82-3). On the other hand, he suggests that violence is increasingly the preserve of marginalised groups of men, who are either unable or unwilling to take up less oppressive alternative masculinities, sometimes reacting against gender politics and sometimes exposing ‘crisis tendencies…in the modern gender order’ (Connell, 1995: 84). Connell thus concludes that although the material and institutional structures that promote inequalities persist, the legitimation of patriarchy is increasingly open to contestation. In his most utopian moments Connell therefore advocates a ‘politics of pure possibility’ that moves,

> decisively beyond the one-dimensional strategic thinking that flowed from earlier models of patriarchy...men’s relational interests in the welfare of women and girls can displace the same men’s gender-specific interests in supremacy. A heterosexual sensibility can be formed without homophobia, so alliances of straight men with gay politics become possible...the familiar array of

> masculinities continue to be produced and institutionalized, but a cultural reconfiguration of their elements has become possible. (Connell, 1995: 242)

However, Connell (1995: 241) is characteristically cautious not to overstate the prospect of such a politics:

> [T]aking a cool look around the political scenery of the industrial capitalist world, we must conclude that the project of transforming masculinity has almost no political weight at all - no leverage on public policy, no organizational resources, no popular base and no presence in mass culture (except as a footnote to feminism and a critique of the excesses of masculinity therapy). By comparison, Gay Liberation mutated into new forms of gay community politics that confronted the HIV/AIDS epidemic, founded a range of new institutions, achieved major changes in social practice…and gained a voice in a range of policy debates…The simple calculus of interest would predict that any men's movement against hegemonic masculinity would be weak. The general interest of men in patriarchy is formidable…that is why I have been at pains to spell it out in this book.

Connell's constant qualifications suggest two possible conclusions. First, that Messerschmidt's reading of Connell's thesis is too selective and too literal. Or second, these qualifications cover up for Connell's thesis' inability to fit the facts. This second conclusion was drawn by Steve Hall, Dick Hobbs, Simon Winlow, and Stuart Lister (2001).

## Hall and Colleagues: on the piety of the 'hegemonic masculinity' thesis

From within criminology Steve Hall, Dick Hobbs, Simon Winlow, and Stuart Lister (2001) are those who have mounted the most persuasive case against Connell's thesis[1]. Steve Hall and colleagues' argue that the erroneous assumption of a 'patriarchal dividend' in Connell's thesis detracts from the very,

> *real social and economic crisis* of traditional working class masculinity and femininity in the heavy industrial heartlands that once relied on sex-specific variations of physical labour in both the productivist and domestic spheres, amongst populations in geographical locations that are relatively cut off from the centres and arteries of mainstream commodity circulation and symbol processing…[And] the contextualising fact that the pseudo-pacified mainstream has for six hundred years exploited the brutalising practices of hard labour, violence and the stultifying practices of domestic drudgery that the working class men and women - who inhabited a real position of economic dispossession and cultural manipulation - performed in the name of their respective caricatures. [emphasis in original, Hall et al, 2001)

Reiterating that Gramsci's defined 'hegemony' as the successful engineering of a fragile consensus in which those disadvantaged by the class order were incorporated mentally and emotionally into the dominant belief system, Hall et al insist that 'hegemonic masculinity' must refer to the ascendancy of a form of masculinity that does away with the need for crude coercion – not one that depends on it as Messerschmidt assumes. Like Nobert Elias, Hall et al explain that capitalism gained ascendancy through processes of pacification and civilising. As Bourdieu (1984) argues in his book *Distinction,* Hall et al claim the ability to move up the social hierarchy became tied to the capacity to sublimate aggression through the construction of different forms of habitus – sets of beliefs, rights, practices and expressive capacities – which demarcated the taste of, and hence social differences between those classes competing for cultural, intellectual or economic capital.

Updating this analysis to include the distribution of socio-economic resources in Western societies at the turn of the millennium, Hall et al argue that although a minority of young male entrepreneurs have managed to use traditional forms of violent intimidation to generate an income for themselves[2], most violence is perpetrated by and against poor young, urban, disproportionately ethnic minority males, rather randomly around the clubs and pubs of the night-time inner city entertainment zone. These 'comfortably heterosexual, unenthusiastically traditional' young men who populate our streets gain little of political worth – no 'patriarchal dividend' - from such intra-group violence aside from 'a brief moment of glory in front of an audience of fellow marginals'. As Paul Willis (1977: 18) observed, aggressive young men typically attract 'condemnation from authority figures and from pacified yet more successful peers', before getting shunted towards 'dead end jobs'.

One might retort here that Willis' study also seems to confirm Connell's point about most men's complicity with the gender order. Those boys who could walk 'a very careful tightrope…between laffing with "the lads" and doing the occasional "brilliant essay"' were also those adept at the 'pisstake'- 'fast-talking' and 'humour' used in the service of the 'the persistent searching out of weakness' in others (Willis, 1977: 32). It was these fast-talking, articulate boys who rendered other weaker, less popular boys suitable targets for the school bullies' aggression. To explain this behaviour Hall et al could have looked towards David Jackson's (1990) critical autobiography in which he documents how academic boys and men also use 'banter' to conceal their own physical and emotional vulnerability, potential bisexuality, and emasculating intellect, without being excluded from the privileges of male clubs (Jackson, 1990: 171-6). Instead, Hall et al accuse Connell of pointlessly 'sermonising to those who are already being slowly but inexorably converted by historical forces' and propagating a liberal 'culturalist discourse' that criticises those lower class men who occupy the 'brutal spaces' of social exclusion for not surrendering their mythical patriarchal dividend. For Hall et al this culturalist discourse colludes in the intensification of socio-economic exclusion by identifying yet more inadequate ‘others’ in need of reform (p.37).

## Jefferson’s Theory of Subjectivity

Tony Jefferson is the only other criminologist who has engaged rigorously with both Connell’s and Messerschmidt’s theses. Contrary to those who have assumed that Connell, Messerschmidt and Jefferson are advancing compatible lines of thought (see Daly, 1997) Jefferson has consistently urged Connell’s followers to theorise more adequately the agency of the subject - in Connell’s words, the relationships between ‘complexities of desire’ and ‘the structuring of social relations with their contradictions and dynamisms’ (Connell, 1995: 20-1, quoted in Jefferson, 1997a: 539).

Assuming an inevitable shortfall in most men’s endeavours to live up to contradictory masculine social expectations, Jefferson anticipates that many men’s experiences of masculinity are characterised by an ‘all but universal experience of failure’. He observes many different psychosocial responses to this experience of failure, ranging from,

> an active rejection of the ideal on offer and a positive identification with an alternative, albeit subordinate masculinity; painful sometimes frenzied, attempts to drag an unwilling psyche into line with unwanted social expectations; living a quiet life of desperation; or, perhaps more commonly, a lot of faking it. (Jefferson, 1994: 13)

Arguing that we need to think through the complexity of what Phil Cohen calls ‘multiply divided subjects in a multiply divided society’ – Jefferson (1994: 15) urges a shift to post-structure, towards ‘discursive relations within which particular practices…and particular subjectivities are constructed’. This shift to post-structure renders Connell’s notion of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities more like competing discourses, some of which, are invested with more power, and poses the question of how and why individuals ‘choose’ to invest in any or many of the multiple discourses potentially available to them.

To answer this question, Jefferson reintroduces the psychoanalytic notion of the ‘unconscious’ – the psychic space where the socially unacceptable gets repressed only to resurface, often inopportunely, in slips of the tongues, jokes, and dreams. This unconscious creates a split in subjectivities that thwarts the development of fixed, unitary identities (stable masculinities or femininities) from ever being achieved or accomplished. Jefferson’s preferred way of theorising this split owes much to the work of Melanie Klein, who argued that anxiety is a fundamental aspect of the human condition that individuals must constantly defend against using psychic defence mechanisms such as splitting and projection. Taking up this insight via the work of his collaborator Wendy Hollway, Jefferson (1994a: 27) argues,

> historically specific discourses…provide the normative, power-conferring public significations and subject positions; an individual’s specific history of desire…provide a set of meanings which are unique to that individual and, insofar as these are in conflict with available public significations, these may need to be defended against, by suppression, or splitting/projection. Given the power-conferring nature of taking up ‘appropriate’ positions in particular discourses (being heterosexual rather than homosexual, mother rather than childless, etc.), it is not hard to see why particular power/knowledge configurations get routinely reproduced.

Jefferson’s own empirical research - notably on a student date-rape case (see Hollway & Jefferson, 1998) and the life of Mike Tyson (Jefferson, 1996b, 1997a, 1998) - has tended to demonstrate the value of this theoretical framework for conceptualising the psychosocial precursors of violent acts committed by men. But how might his analysis help us explain the masculinity of those men – that Hall et al accuse of pointlessly sermonising, those men who are diametrically opposed to violence? Messerschmidt's own 'non-violent' case studies are too abbreviated to test against either Hall and colleagues' or Jefferson's theories. Instead, it is necessary to present new case material and test each theory against it. Below I document the life-history one man whom I shall call 'Jack' in order to embark on this *theory testing* in the penultimate section of this chapter.

## A Case History of Jack

### Introducing Jack

Jack, white, aged 47, was a man of small build, educated to postgraduate level in the humanities. His story interested me because both his personal and public life had centred around avoiding violence and oppression, particularly in relationships with women and children. Jack hated physical confrontation - 'I've always hated it. I've never. You know. I shrink from it'. Jack had actively tried to avoid using violence to chastise his children. His current employment involved designing and delivering theatre workshops for a project which approached the topics of domestic violence and bullying with school children, teachers, health and social workers. Jack was also active in overseeing the construction and implementation of anti-bullying policies in his son's school. Jack had an impressive capacity to furnish his story with evocative detail and constantly checked to see whether I understood what he was saying throughout our interviews.

### Jack's Family

Jack and his twin sister were the seventh and eighth children to be born to his mother. Whilst Jack's twin was born healthy, Jack only narrowly escaped death during the first week of his life. He was given the ‘last rites’ five times. Jack’s parents were both Irish Catholics who believed that if a marriage produced eight or more children one child should be given back in the service of God. Jack’s parents figured that Jack was ‘saved to do something’ and hence Jack was ‘groomed’ as a priest. Jack told me he was never quite sure what exactly this ‘something’ was, except he knew it involved ‘a reflex to deny oneself’: a feeling that putting oneself first was ‘self-indulgent’ and a ‘terrible thing to do’.

Jack felt he had always been much closer to his mother than to his father. He described his father as a very ‘patriarchal…authoritarian figure…the final court…if you misbehaved’. This is not to say that Jack did not ‘respect’ his father. Indeed, Jack respected his father ‘deeply’: for his community activism (his father was a trade unionist), for his twenty year commitment to an ‘appallingly inhuman’ production-line job that kept the family out of poverty; and because, unlike other men of his time, he did not engage in domestic violence. But Jack also had ‘very ambiguous feelings’ towards his dad. He never ‘felt a terribly deep connection with’ him.

> My father…was very well known in the community…a highly respected man…around the community…because he provided…I had friends at the secondary school I went to, whose fathers drank, and gambled and beat their wives. And domestic violence then…it just happened…It was part of the culture. And my father didn’t do these things except that he, I think, neglected my mother…left the burden on her.

This neglect of his mother was not only the only source of Jack’s ambiguous feelings about his father. Jack recounted being ‘totally crushed’ when his father dismissed his footballing aspirations. He also had ‘vivid memories’ of the times when his dad ‘beat the living daylights’ out his older brother for playing Bob Dylan’s *God On Our Side* and not having turned up for mass: an incident that culminated in his brother breaking off all contact with his parents for the 15 years that followed. But this neglect of his mother was a recurring theme in Jack’s accounts of his childhood, his adult relationships with women, and his political affiliations.

Jack could remember a family holiday during which his father unexpectedly left his mother (who was pregnant again) to care for their eight children so as he could attend a trade union meeting. In addition, Jack’s mother ‘never knew’ how much her husband earned. ‘She would have to manage. And if she didn’t manage would be told off’. Thus, Jack claimed that he felt both sorrow and relief when his father died.

> Mum had had a raw deal and…she deserved to be free of all of us…[T]he scenario I always feared was that mum would die before dad. And she would never get that space.

Jack claimed that his father was able to ‘stay free’ of chastising the children because he ‘left the burden’ on his wife. Jack’s mother was the one who did the chastising and hence was branded ‘the violent one’. In fact, Jack’s sisters had observed that their mother singled Jack out for violence more than the other children in spite of the fact that Jack was ‘the one who would try and help mum’. The most memorable occasion was when Jack, as so often happened, tried to ‘have the last word again’ and his mother responded by bashing him over the head with a hot grill pan, tipping hot oil down his shirt and burning him a bit.

For many years Jack had wondered if his mum singled him out for violence because of the grief he, like his father, caused her.

> I was saying [to my sister], ‘I wonder if I caused her [my mum] all this grief?’. And that’s the same as my dad. It’s this creature who caused them a lot of hassle.

On other occasions though, Jack attributed his mother’s violence to his father’s ‘deep neglect’, rationalising that ‘mum was a product of her time’.

> I realise now…it must have been impossible for her to say to anyone, ‘I’m being neglected or…psychologically abused’. Because what she would get back is, ‘Ah but he’s a good man…You’re so lucky’. What can you say? ‘Oh know he’s never hit me. There’s no bruises, but there’s deep neglect’.

### Jack’s Schooling & Education

Jack claimed that the rigid moral authority of the Catholic church permeated both his school life as well as his homelife.

> Priests, these men in black, would appear at junctures in your life. You know, if there was a problem it wasn’t just family. You felt surrounded by these people…There were no loopholes.

At school, Jack witnessed other pupils paying a price for questioning the Catholic faith. For example, a boy Jack knew was caned in front of the whole school for asking ‘Who says God exists?’. Unsurprisingly, it was very difficult for Jack, aged 13, to admit that he had turned against the priesthood.

> What turned me? I think two things…‘puberty’ really, and realising that this was quite a big decision to make. Not that I was active in any way sexually. (Laughs) It was not until years after that. But I started to look at the priests, and looking at my brother’s back and the price people were paying at school…It was a very oppressive, you know, violent environment…It was a great

> disappointment to my mum and dad. I remember they were appalled the day that I said ‘there is no way’…I was certainly excluded for a while for that behaviour.

For a time, Jack invested his energies in the school’s drama productions; an interest which enabled him to use the skills he had learnt from his pulpit training to get the attention he often felt he was lacking at home. It also enabled him to deal publicly with vulnerabilities and anxieties without the risk of humiliation and reproach that such openness can invoke. The theatre, like the pulpit, presented Jack with a ‘safe space’ where he could express his feelings, but simultaneously disown them by attributing them to ‘characters’. As Jack explained, the theatre and the pulpit are both places,

> where you could say what you thought before anybody could contradict. So it’s like having structures which were safe…You weren’t vulnerable, at least immediately…[Both provide] a protective space in which to be vulnerable without being challenged. Because the convention is that you won’t be challenged.

Lacking the motivation to continue in the theatre once a particularly inspiring drama teacher left (a teacher who was ‘fierce’ but ‘cared passionately’ about ensuring the children had access to literature and poetry), Jack gave up on acting too. For a time Jack was a victim of ‘very severe’ school bullying. The brutal and exclusionary nature of the school playground added to his reluctance to keep up his theatrical aspirations.

> As a boy I was bullied a lot... coz I’m little. And I was a nance…a poof and stuff because…I liked acting. I was vulnerable...I was good at the school work...I was top of the class all the time in the secondary school…It’s why I’m very protective of my sons…of anyone who has been hurt really…[T]he armoury I developed was verbal…I used to construct this protective barrier through people who were bigger than me…I survived secondary school by these big lads who thought I was

> fun, who physically would act as my minders...if I was threatened. So I've always been unable to relate to this macho…violence, this fighting and yet (long pause: sigh) was faced with it, and forced to collude in it.

By the age of 15, Jack had learnt to avoid being bullied by getting a 'proto-skinhead' to look out for him. Jack would tell the skinheads jokes and make them laugh in return for their protection. Jack claimed he 'was like a bloody court jester', injecting humorous witticisms into the sexist and racist banter of the school playground.

In his spare time Jack became active in promoting socialist politics. He became a member of a small collective. The collective was lead by a teacher (a man he now thinks of as a 'fundamentalist'; a 'robotic Marxoid') who would read Lenin's '*What is to be done?*' and offered Jack the job of 'tsar for education'.

> And we'd plot the revolution. I was attracted by…a totalising account of the world. You know, after Catholicism. Which was its [socialism's] great comfort…It covers everything. There is no area which is not explained by it…[hence] its demand to be the religion of the world.

Jack's two interests were reconciled several years later after he had studied English Literature at university. He had only recently realised how fortunate he had been to go to university. His father had not been willing to pay for his sister's higher education. Jack had a short spell as a school teacher, but although he could 'cope with the children' he 'couldn't cope with the teachers and the school structure'. After a 'brief flirtation' with the Socialist Labour League, Jack took up work with a leftist theatre group, where he learnt how to design his own 'theatre of the oppressed'. He continues this work to this day, making 'theatre accessible to working class, and gay or black or whatever community' who are 'in struggle and campaigning' to stop violence and oppression. The theory behind these workshops is that theatre can ‘mobilise people…gays, blacks the working class’, empowering them to ‘to understand the world in order to…to act, to change it’.

### Jack’s Relationships with Women and Children

Jack was not confident in his ability to seduce women. Despite his capacity as a ‘pathological talker’ he had always ‘froze’ when trying to chat women up. Jack’s first significant adult relationship began when he was aged 29, and was with a woman (Jane) who became increasingly ‘woman-identified’, politically, emotionally and sexually during their time together. Although Jane could not see a future together with Jack, she told a friend that she knew Jack would support her if she got pregnant.

> When we had this child (Ian) Jane decided that, and already was, I part knew, but that she was a lesbian and that she was going to become woman-identified. And this house had to be a ‘women-only’ house. And I had to go. And I said, ‘Right. Okay. That’s the politics at the time. And we can share him. And that’s groovy. Coz everyone’s doing it. And these are the moments we’re living in’…So I did go. We shared Ian, although I had the main care of him, if you want to look at it proportionally.

Jack’s only other significant relationship was with a woman (Julie) who was also politically active. Jack pointed out that there were some striking similarities between Jane and Julie (whom he later married).

> [They] aren’t exactly similar. It’s very unfair…pointless saying that. But they have similarities in the sense that they were both very angry and…needy kinds of people…with a lot of problems…because of their childhood and stuff.

Both women were violent to their sons – something that Jack found ‘unbearable’. Both women were (according to Jack) ‘deeply unhappy people’, ‘intelligent’, politically strong-willed and thus ‘interesting’, ‘charming’, but ‘low in self-esteem’. Both women had experienced men’s sexual violence prior to meeting Jack. In both relationships Jack felt he carried more than his share of the emotional and material responsibilities associated with childcare.

Jack told me that when his relationship with Julie ended it ‘affected him deeply’, not only because ‘of the way that Julie was suffering from depression’ but also because he ‘didn’t want to end up with another child whose parents had split up’. To help themselves cope with their separation Jack and Julie entered couple counselling. In this counselling Jack identified that he often tried to be ‘selfless’ in his relationships because of his ‘feeling’,

> that one had to do everything...to look after everyone. There’s this thing of taking everybody’s problems away and particularly there’s partly a, ‘Men must do this to compensate’…It sounds bizarre [but] I’m likely to pursue…someone who is angry and rejecting until I’ve overcome that reaction...I think it’s the flip side of the, if you like, uncaring male… It’s like, ‘God. If only all this could quieten down and you’d feel happy, and you’d feel happy, I could actually cut off (laughs) and get on with what I wanted’…I think my basic impulse…is a fear that…there will be chaos.

Jack related his own desire to appease women, to a desire to appease his ‘angry’ mother, a fear of chaos, and the problems of men engaging politically with radical feminism. Jack had experienced this desire in both of his adult relationships with women, not just with Julie. When Jane had given him Andrea Dworkin’s (1981) *Pornography* to read Jack was ‘appalled’ and thought, ‘Oh my God! …This is me and men are guilty’.

> I think a great deal of the impulse for me [was]…a sort of historical guilt…that one had to redeem this thing…Everything that happened could be interpreted as fitting the oppressor/oppressed jigsaw. It was almost like, 'You have made yourself deliberately small as a man so that you can get away with more things, coz women will be taken in by the fact that your not big'... I wasn't very good at dealing with all that, basically…On the one hand, there was all this politics which was right and one had to struggle and change, and men had to change. And on the other hand, there was this specific relationship in which those things…were damaging decisions that would have been made differently…if one hadn't been trying to be so fucking right on basically.

Jack came to refer to this tendency to 'do everything' as the adoption of a 'rescuer position': a position that rendered him,

> this person who would go holding up everything, [by saying] 'I'll do it…It's my responsibility…All the unhappiness is my responsibility. And the world won't be okay until I've sorted it out'.

This is not to say Jack saw himself as exceptional, although he probably had done in the past, as the following statement suggests.

> Doing all this work around men's violence it just strikes me, you know, in looking at oneself, is that the temptation is to see oneself as some kind of exception…And I just…I suppose I would want to feel I didn't fit whatever being a man was…size-wise and a lot of other ways. And I just think that is true of so many men. And the great tragedy is that is true…The redeemable feature of all this is that we're all victims…of a social structure and context that needs challenging.

One other negative aspect of this rescuer position was that Julie never knew what Jack's 'needs' were. The positive consequence of this rescuer position was that Jack developed a very close relationship with his sons. Thus, Jack had been able to support Terry when he was bullied at school and when his mother left. Jack told Terry,

> ‘No matter what happens, I’ll support you…My first instinct will be to get behind you. No matter what’…I think Terry knows that and I think I’ve encouraged him very strongly to express his feelings, his anger and his feelings about what happened with Julie…I wish it had been said to me more…If he feels genuinely hurt he keeps with that hurt until he feels that it’s been resolved…I want him to grow and…be a man who can express his feelings without needing…to use violence.

Interestingly, when Julie suggested to Jack that they get back together Jack told her that he couldn’t ‘risk it for Terry that she might go again’.

## Analysis

How might we *conceptualis*e and *explain* Jack’s transition towards a masculinity in which he struggled to avoid reproducing the oppressive tendencies he associated with other men’s relationships with women and children?

There is a form of ‘presentation of self’ involved in many of the situations Jack described. On first inspection Jack’s playground jestering conforms closely to what Messerschmidt refers to as the ‘situational accomplishment of masculinity’. But then again, Jack’s inability to relate to the macho violence he felt ‘forced to collude in’ should lead us to question Messerschmidt’s tendency to elide the ‘performance of masculinity’ and its ‘accomplishment’. Connell’s point about men’s complicity with certain versions of masculinity they do not necessarily aspire to seems to fit here, although what exactly constitutes ‘hegemonic masculinity’ in Jack’s account is unclear to me. To reduce the masculinities of the school hard-nuts, the Catholic priests, and men like Jack’s father to ‘hegemonic masculinity’ seems to ride roughshod over the vastly different ideas these men had about what constituted appropriately masculine behaviour.

But if the issues of hegemony complicates more than it illuminates, Connell's notion of cathexis does help us make sense of those aspects of Jack's case that cannot be explained entirely through reference to his social interactions. Highlighting the parallels in many anti-sexist men's desire for 'strong women', dislike of macho and/or patriarchal men, and the (Freudian) Oedipus' desire for his mother and contempt for his father, Connell (1995: ch.5) speculates that such men undergo a process of teenage masculinisation – dissociation from the feminine parts of their personalities – only to reverse it several years later (Connell, 1995: 135-9)[3]. Connell argues that such a pattern of development hinges on the boy's capacity to entertain contradictory identifications with both parents[4] yet re-open identification with a mother who, like himself, occupied a subordinate position within the family. Taking this perspective seriously we might also interpret Jack's involvement in the school playground culture, politics and academia as the kind of masculinisation Connell describes. Jack became an articulate, well-respected, politically active man, just like his father. But evidence of contradictory identifications can be seen in Jack's fear of becoming a trouble-causing 'creature' like his father, and his parallel identification of himself as a 'victim of a social structure that needs changing', just as his mother was a victim of his father's neglect.

Of course, for Hall and colleagues this structuring of personality is immaterial. Their challenge to Connell questions whether men like Jack really choose to take up reconstructed masculine subject positions. Wasn't Jack's adoption of such positions really the outcome of an intra-class struggle for cultural distinction, the contestation of the value of inherited social and economic capital? Wasn't Jack simply reproducing a very familiar culturalist discourse regarding certain middle class men's struggle to change?

Those favouring Bourdieu's (1984) 'cultural capital' approach could theorise Jack's investment in socialist theatre work and feminism as the collective endeavour of a group of upwardly mobile intellectuals who wished to retain something of their class heritage and differentiate themselves from those who (selfishly?) used their cultural capital to their own economic advantage (i.e. the entrepreneurial affluent workers of the 1980s) and those who (frivolously) invested their artistic energies in the entertainment industry (i.e. actors, artists). This approach also lends itself to explaining how Jack was able to exploit the intellectual and cultural advantages he gleaned through his priest training to acquire popularity on the playground, succeed academically, and gain credibility amongst left-wing political activists. In Hall and colleagues' terms Jack possessed just the capacity to 'sublimate aggressive liminal urges' needed to succeed at school, university, and amongst right-thinking middle-class radicals.

But perhaps the most critical insight that Bourdieu's approach has to offer this case is the notion of 'social reproduction' – the idea that in order to distinguish themselves further certain class groups endeavour to invest in the next generation. Hence, however 'crushed' Jack's father made him feel, his urging Jack towards a realisable career (as opposed to a 'job' on the process line or the fantasy of becoming a footballer), as well as his economic expenditure on Jack's higher education, makes it difficult to deny that Jack's parents invested in him certain cultural and intellectual resources that many of his contemporaries, especially his sisters, were denied. We might also cite the career compromises that Jack has made to care for his own sons as further evidence of this social reproduction at work. The politically 'right on' sacrifices Jack made for Jane could be interpreted as the extension of Jack’s cultural investment to the entire family unit, although clearly not an extension that generated economic dividends for him in the longer term.

But if there were no real economic advantages in some of Jack’s shifting investments in different forms of habitus, then should we not look elsewhere for Jack’s motivation - perhaps at the effect of the restless desires and troubling anxieties that were produced out of his contradictory identifications with the masculinity and femininity exhibited by each of his parents? Jefferson’s argument that hegemonic and subordinated masculinities are better conceptualised as different discursive positions in which men may invest enables one to build on Connell’s insights regarding personality. Hence, it does not require much imagination to make the link between Jack’s failed attempts to live up to the ‘high ideals’ his father and the church set for him, the threat of being labelled a ‘nance’ by his playground peers, his investment in the playground culture, and his admiration for those exhibiting alternatives to traditional masculinities; namely his rebellious brother, his ‘fierce but caring’ drama teacher, the fundamentalist socialist who offered him the job as ‘tsar for education’, his industrious mother and perceptive sister. Indeed, Jack’s choices resonate with many of Jefferson’s observations about men’s responses to feelings of masculine inadequacy. Given Jack’s feeling that he ‘never fitted with this concept of whatever a man is’ we might interpret his jestering playground behaviour as evidence of ‘painful attempts to drag an unwilling psyche into line with unwanted social expectations’ through a lot of ‘faking it’[5]. Jack’s tendency to ‘freeze’ when his desire for particular women was exposed is probably something many men and women will relate to, but it also exposes the defensive quality of Jack’s tendency to suppress and conceal his own emotional needs. Jack’s unwillingness to ‘risk’ getting back with his wife and his life-long fear of being ‘this creature’ could well insinuate resolve to a ‘quiet life of desperation’. Similarly, Jack’s desire to ‘understand the world…in order to change it’ conveys the kind of striving for transcendence that some psychoanalytically informed writers perceive as masculinity’s ultimate value (Jefferson, 1994: 11).

Following Jefferson, these disruptive desires and anxieties provide an explanation for Jack’s motivation for shifting his investments in various power-conferring discourses. Hence, Jack’s abandoning of school drama and the pulpit in favour of football and playground banter enabled him to position himself as ‘one of the lads’ in spite of his orthodox religious upbringing, outstanding intellectual ability, and small physique. Jack’s realisation that he colluded in the oppression of others might have pre-empted the anxieties that motivated his subsequent interest in socialism - a discourse that offered an alternative, but equally totalising moral vision to Catholicism and his father’s trade unionism[6]. School teaching suggested itself as a conventionally respectable means of trying to change the culture Jack had experienced as so oppressive. But when the school structure proved more resilient than Jack had hoped, he invested his efforts in the less conventional business of socialist theatre work. This, combined with the profile of feminist work in the social sciences during the early 1980s, probably fostered Jack’s interest in gendered injustice. However, we might also note that Jack’s involvement with a very independent woman seemed to help him resolve some of the difficulties he had - born of his shyness and reflex to deny himself - initiating intimacy. Subsequently, Jack tried to surmount the psychic discomfort he experienced as a consequence of taking on a form of ‘historical guilt’ by investing in the discourse of the ‘rescuer’ - reconciling an idea of the self-sacrificing hero common to biblical stories and Hollywood fiction alike (see Siedler, 1998; Sparks, 1996) with ‘the flipside of the uncaring male’. Jack’s ultimate investment in a discourse of the *positively involved father*, who not only provides for his children, but gets ‘right behind them…whatever' represents a more conventional manifestation of the same tendency. Investing in a discourse of fatherhood that valued 'being there' emotionally for one's children might also signify Jack's desire to compensate for the (common) fear he has of being left with children 'whose parents had split up'. By investing in this discourse Jack reclaimed the positive 'respected provider' status he shared with his own father without having to embody the (negative) detachment he attributed to men like him[7].

In sum, the 'cultural capital' explanation helps one appreciate the social structuring of the choices that Jack made available to himself. Whilst it does not reduce Jack's life to one of class (dis)advantage, it does illustrate why men and women whose families invest less in them, economically and culturally – either through choice or necessity - find it harder to follow this kind of social trajectory than some others. But if we are all motivated towards the assertion of difference (Bourdieu, 1984: 172) why does Jack choose this particular trajectory and not another? Why does he not become a priest, a capitalist, a politician? In moving 'post-structure' Jefferson's approach enables one to make a more fluid and, hence, more biographically sensitive characterisation of the transitions in Jack's life than Hall and colleagues' approach. However, in order to do so Jefferson requires the reader to make their own links between the biographical contingencies in the individual's life and experiences of anxiety and desire.

Jefferson urges us to look to psychoanalysis for such answers, but clearly psychoanalysis suggests a number theories of subjectivity, not all of which are reconcilable. Connell's largely Freudian formulation is not the only way of thinking about the way in which the boy's identifications with his parents impacts upon his adult masculinity. Using the Kleinian idea of womb envy Ros Minksy (1998), argues that some men's discovery of the bogusness of patriarchal ‘masculinity’ motivates them to re-identify with their mothers, who along with other women are envied as being somehow more complete than they are [8] - an idea that certainly resonates with Jack’s tendency to see both his mother and his female partners as ‘strong’ and ‘capable’. Others analysts, like Rosalind Parker (1997b), remind us of the post-Kleinian work of Wilfred Bion who argued that ‘desire to understand’ emerges out of individuals’ unconscious attempts to reconcile conflicting feelings of love and hate – suggesting a link between Jack’s ambiguous feelings towards his father and his empathic and intellectual approach to life. Finally, there are others who attribute a more primary role to ‘the social’ in the construction of anxiety and desire. For example, Vic Seidler (1997: 88) highlights the way in which Catholicism constructs sexuality as ‘dirty’ and its subjects as sinners, again issues of obvious relevance to Jack’s life.

The material I have presented here does not discredit any of these theories. Nor does it negate the idea that Jack’s life was shaped by opportunities, social structures and constraints that make it impossible to talk of possibility in the ‘pure’ sense. But what his case does demonstrate is that it is only by paying attention to the psychic dimension that we can begin to make sense of why most men of his age, race and class ‘accomplish’ their masculinity somewhat differently.

## Conclusion

Jack’s story presents a significant challenge to all interpretive approaches to the study of masculinity. Jack’s experiences conform to the kind of struggle men engaging in anti-oppressive masculinity politics often claim to have. On the one hand, this experience of struggle was ‘real’ to Jack. On the other, we know that Jack was investing in a number of pre-existing discourses or systems of classification that locate virtue in just such a struggle.

This tells us that it matters how we conceptualise and characterise men's lives. Those events that we might read as determining or pivotal through one theoretical lens can often seem to signify something more fundamental about the individual's own classificatory schemas when viewed through another. As I illustrated at the start of this chapter, Messerschmidt's preoccupation with common denominators overlooks this insight at considerable cost.

This will not come as too much of a surprise to those influenced by Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1984: 170) defined the 'habitus' as 'both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification'. Jefferson's approach formulates this insight in poststructuralist terms, assuming subjects who construct themselves by taking up positions in circumscribing discourses. Jefferson also shares Bourdieu's conviction that the subject cannot apprehend the totality of their social relationships and unconscious psychic motivations. But in theorising these psychic motivations, Jefferson and, in slightly different way, Connell, depart from Bourdieu's unwillingness to theorise the subject's agency outside of his or her immediate social group. Hence, Jefferson and Connell get us thinking about the patterns of identification that motivate the subject's investment in *particular* discourses or forms of habitus when there are so many different ones to choose from.

The problem left unresolved here is how to decide which to attribute primacy to: the choosing subject or classificatory schemas/discourses. Paradoxically, theorising the psychosocial in Jefferson and Connell's ways tends to confirm Hall and colleagues' point that the 'politics of pure possibility' are nowhere near as 'pure' as some of its protagonists would have us believe. Both Jefferson and Connell's mode of theorising point us towards a heavily over-determined notion of the subject at both the social and psychic levels. Conversely, the concept of ‘habitus’ takes us more directly to the social processes that enable groups of individuals to re-classify the world, to see things differently. Of course, Hall and colleagues’ point is that certain economically marginalised members of the populace will always be rendered ‘other’ in class struggles to redefine what counts as civilised respectability. Hence, Jack’s ‘theatre of the oppressed’ will undoubtedly be experienced as pointless sermonising by many of those who have not benefited from an upbringing like his. To this end, we need to ensure that our thinking about the struggles of men like Jack does not diminish the hardships endured by those men and women who are neither sufficiently resourced nor sufficiently motivated to engage in gender politics of this sort. As Jack’s case seems to indicate, there are probably no safe, problem-free, masculinities that enable men to enter easily into egalitarian or empowering relations with women. Indeed, the striving towards this form of ‘change’ often increases the tensions within heterosexual relationships (Parker, 1997b). It should come as little surprise to us if such change is often not a priority in those families where social and economic resources are scarce.

However, I think this ultimately means that Connell and Jefferson are right - even if one departs company with their particular psychoanalytic allegiances - to locate the political prospects for change within the contradictions between the social and the psychic. If we focus only on the social dynamics, whether conceptualised as the class struggle for distinction or some other logic – then we underestimate the strength of those stubborn determinants of the psyche, and overstate the possibility of change. Conversely, if we are willing to entertain complex relations between the social and the psychic we glean a fuller picture of where there might be genuine alternatives; possibilities for distinction that do not rest on the construction of pathologised others.

To this end, the spirit of Jack's community activism - 'to mobilise people… to understand the world in order to…change it' is not just pointless sermonising, but evidence of one man's very real emotional and cultural investment in work that genuinely attempts to reduce the oppression of certain marginalised groups, including the various harms many disadvantaged young men and women inflict on each other. In the light of the reprisals that the *News of the World's* 'Naming and Shaming' campaign provoked after the murder of Sarah Payne, work that enables people to understand the social and psychic complexities that reproduce discrimination, fear and inequalities seems to me like the most progressive way of motivating ordinary people, academics, and the state alike to look for other sustainable solutions to problems of social exclusion, injustice and oppression.

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[1] see MacInnes (1997) for a critique from outside the discipline.

[2] an idea that might apply to Messerschmidt's (2000) Hugh and Perry.

[3] Connell also highlights 'a desire for passivity expressed in the renunciation of masculine striving', the goals of 'openness, total honesty and emotional vulnerability' and 'guilt about "being male"' as characteristic of such men.

[4] This is a different trajectory to the one that Jefferson observes in the life of Mike Tyson. Jefferson (1998) implicates Tyson's differentiation from his mother in mobilising the kinds of primitive defence mechanisms Melanie Klein attributes to the paranoid-schizoid position.

[5] Indeed, humour often works best when the joke enables the social audience to collectively project vulnerabilities safely onto another real or imagined character and attack them there (Wright, 2000).

[6] As Marshall Berman (1983) observes in his brilliant *All that is Solid Melts into Air,* socialism endeavours to order the world's 'chaos' smuggles in empathy, rage and passion behind a publicly rational, intellectual, commitment to social justice (see also Elliot, 1996).

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[7] See also Lupton and Barclay (1997: 144) for a description of the discourse of the ‘positively involved father’.

[8] Minsky (1998: 119) elaborates:

> Crucially, then, in some men’s *phantasy* women may be seen as not just men’s equals but substantially *more* than men. They threaten men with being ‘too much of a good thing’ - sexually attractive, emotionally literate and capable of intimacy and containment, capable of having babies if they want to, intellectually and creatively clever and effective in what was previously considered the male sphere…In many men’s phantasy, a creative mixture of activity and passivity, there seems to be something ‘real’ about women which the culturally accepted phallic version of ‘masculinity’ cannot compete. (emphasis in original)

# Chapter 7

# *Recollecting the Family Man*

## Abstract

*This chapter begins by considering how recent media and political discourses position the centre-left's leading men as 'good family men'. Taking this as evidence of one of strategy through which political legitimacy is being currently negotiated, I ask how hegemonic masculinity is implicated in some men's interpersonal violence. I go on to analyse the discursive construction of safe/familial and dangerous/inadequate masculinities in the recollections of four men. Two of these four men were unemployed men who had been violent to their female partners. The other two men worked with violent men in order to help them to change, but had hardly ever been physically violent themselves. The case histories I present suggest that the dominant discourses around family life render most domestic violence illegitimate, explaining why perpetrators typically rely on techniques of neutralisation to mitigate their culpability. Why some men are violent when others are not is better explained by reference to the recursive impact of social disadvantage and emotional distress on the subjectivity of individual men and their partners than it is by reference to social discourses alone.*

## Introduction

Twice this year the British Prime Minister's competence as a father and husband has attracted media attention. The first time was when his fourth child was born. The new-born was named 'Leo' after the premier's own father, a man whom *The News of the Word* (Oswald et al, 2000) noted, 'hauled himself up by his bootstraps to become a barrister' despite having been 'the adopted son of a shipyard worker, *The Sunday Times* (Boztas, 2000) referred to as Tony Blair's 'inspiration…a very ambitious man…a go-getter', and *The Observer* (Ryle, 2000) depicted as a 'classic self-made man'. Shots of Blair's coffee mug, which had a photograph of his children imprinted on it, were used by the media to fuel speculation as to how or whether such a 'devoted father' would be able to balance his political commitments with the demands placed upon him by baby Leo's arrival (Kirby, 2000; McDougall, 2000; Pryer & Patel, 2000). Two months later Blair capitalised on his 'family man' reputation when he was faced with the news that his 16 year old son Euan had been arrested for drunk and disorderly behaviour; news that was all the more embarrassing to Mr Blair given his proposals for empowering the police to administer on-the-spot fines to drunken 'louts' and 'thugs' (Hooper & White, 2000). On the day the news broke, an 'emotional' Mr Blair explained[1]:

> Being a prime minister can be a tough job. But I think that being a parent is probably tougher. Sometimes you do not always succeed. But the family to me is more important than anything else…My son is basically a good kid. We will all get through this and see him right…I think if anyone breaks the law they should suffer the penalty of the law, whether they are my son or anyone else's son…I don't ask for any special preferences for my kid. I guess most of us at the age of 16 have done things we regret. Not everyone has to see it the next day in newspapers…As a politician I cannot say that my family is always going to behave to the very highest standards but the fact that my son has done something wrong will not stop me from speaking out and saying what I believe. (quoted in White & Watt, 2000)

On the other side of the Atlantic the centre-left has made the virtues of their leading ‘family man’ a central component of their political campaigning. For example, at the Democratic National Conventional Karenna Gore Schiff began by telling her audience that she could see a lot of her grandfather in her father, her grandparents having been ‘small farmers trying to plant big dreams in rocky soil’. After detailing how her dad had excelled in a range of fatherly activities – raising, feeding, clothing, teaching and loving her, as well as accepting more late-night collect calls than she’d ‘like to admit’ - Gore Schiff (2000) proceeded:

> I’m not asking you to support Al Gore because he’s my father, or even because he’s been a great dad for his kids. What really matters is what he will do for all our kids…America must decide, will all children get health care or won’t they? My dad wants to win the fight for affordable health care…Will struggling single mothers get a fair paycheck so they can care for their kids? My dad wants to win the fight for an equal day’s pay for an equal day’s work…There’s something else we must decide…It’s about every woman’s control over her own body and her own life…I believe in every woman’s right to choose, and I know my father will always, always defend it. I hope, for the sake of our country and our future, that my father is elected president. But I want you to know, to me he’s already won, for he’s been the most wonderful father in the whole world.

As political commentators have been adept to point out, much of this is empty ‘spin’, ‘marketing’, ‘ideology’. Blair and Gore’s political success must have been bought at the expense of ‘being there’ for their families. Their careers have demanded long working hours, making prolonged periods of absence from the family home inevitable. Indeed, the birth of Blair’s fourth child was the first he had been able to attend – and even then he only took three days paternity leave. Yet, given Gore’s predecessors’ reputation for infidelity, the homophobic press coverage that asked whether the UK was being governed by a ‘gay mafia'[2], and the left's legacy of losing votes to the right's agenda on 'family values' (see Williams, 1998), it is perhaps unsurprising that as election time approaches centre-left parties on both sides of the Atlantic are championing 'devoted dads': men whom it is claimed excel as 'protectors and providers', are sufficiently sensitive and reasonable moral guardians, as well as loving and caring husbands and fathers in spite of their demanding workloads.

Those of us interested in the study of masculinity might question whether this form of political spinning is necessarily as novel as political commentators would have it. The overt politicisation of these leaders' family lives may be new, but the deployment of an ideology around the 'family man' to renegotiate political legitimacy has a history dating back at least 200 years. As Richard Collier observes in his (1995a) book, *Masculinity, Law and the Family,* whenever the legitimacy of the traditional, patriarchal father/husband has been called into question the legislature has responded by bifurcating masculine subjectivities along implicitly class-based lines: contrasting the 'respectable' family man (who is desired, especially when absent, because of the protection, provision and stability he brings) with the lower-class, 'dangerous' man whose violent and/or sexually transgressive behaviour poses a threat. The eminently reasonable, elusive 'family man' of law acquires his legitimacy through the construction of a subordinated 'other'- typically 'undomesticated' men 'who reject the responsibilities of their betters' (Collier, 1995b: 210). In so doing, the loyalty, love and support the 'good father' expects of his wife and children are construed as a modest dividend for the stability his presence brings to the 'symmetrical' heterosexual family matrix.

Those accustomed to studying the discursive construction of the ‘family man’ will probably be able to identify five relatively familiar tactics within the centre-left’s current political strategy.

1. The romanticising of a traditional white masculine heritage (Bhaba, 1996), i.e., the industrious, innovative and reasonable head of the household symbolised by Blair and Gore’s fathers.
2. The reconciliation of this romanticised image with an idea of the ‘new sensitive man’ who is conversant with the contemporary critique of *other men’s* violence, and/or physical and emotional absence (Lupton & Barclay, 1997).
3. The endorsement by significant ‘expert’ others (wives, children, quasi-sociological and psychological commentators on ‘the family’) who attribute this new juxtaposition to party leaders.
4. The depiction of party leaders as the embodiment of the best of ‘the people’. Blair required ‘no special preferences’ because he is like all good parents: fallible, dependent upon the support of others, trying his best and uncompromising in his principles and commitment to put his family first. Gore’s children and the American people were conflated in his daughter’s speech.
5. The singling out of familiar folk-devils. In Gore Shiff’s case these included those who do not do a decent day’s work but still expect a decent day’s pay, irresponsible fathers who do not support single mothers, right-wing moralists and abusive men who do not respect a woman’s right to control her own body, and (potentially) all those who hinder the ‘ordinary’ heterosexual man in his endeavours to surmount the hurdles confronting his family, and indeed, all our families. More problematically in Blair’s rhetoric, the drunken, anti-social, loutish thug was singled as a drain on the economy, a public

> nuisance, and a threat to vulnerable people's (i.e. women's, children's, and the elderly's) safety.

The new theoretical problem this raises for criminologists is whether it is still possible to chart a link between men's violence and what seems like a very different form of hegemonic masculinity to the patriarchal figure identified by radical feminism. Bob Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity thesis suggests a two-fold answer. Firstly, Connell notion that hegemonic masculinity is a particular place in gender relations from which other masculinities are subordinated or marginalised suggests that those men who lack 'masculinity accomplishing' resources in the family and workplace are more likely to experience some form of 'crises'. This is the argument which one-time socialist writers like James Messerschmidt and Jock Young have incorporated into their theses. Messerschmidt (1993, 2000) argues that poor unemployed men use violence to accomplish masculinity at home because they lack status and resources in the public sphere, just as some boys who sexually abuse children often have low status in their school classrooms. More evocatively, Jock Young (1999) claims those propelled by 'the contradictions of opportunities and ideals, of economic citizenship denied and of social acceptance blocked' respond by 'over and under-identifying' with elements of the wider culture. Lower class male youth are likely to be particularly conversant of their inability to 'take up the role of husband or breadwinner portrayed daily in the backdrop of comfortable homes', and consequently, end up 'having the most extraordinary crisis of identity and self-worth'.

> The 'hard' man of macho-culture whose toughness of physical features is contrasted to the derogatory 'softness' of women or of men acting like women. Both heterosexual masculinity and the 'otherness of women', 'soft' men and homosexuals are essentialized. (Young, 1999: 402)

Second, Connell (1995: 81-6) argues that privileged groups of men use violence to sustain their dominance over women. The verbal threats that accompany much of men's domestic violence effectively label the female victim a 'helpless incompetent', rendering her dependent and normalising the man's abusive behaviour. Jeff Hearn (1998a,b) argues similarly: men often wittingly and unwittingly support other men's violence by lending legitimacy to their excuses, repudiations, justifications and rationalisations. In short, empathising with the violent man's predicament might be interpreted by him as vindication for his behaviour, enabling him to further undermine his partner's resistance. If this is so, we might assume that the idealisation of the 'family man' lends ambiguous support to men's violence. Whilst violence is rendered an aberration within 'normal' family life, the idealisation of the 'family man' perpetuates the belief that families need fathers, defines the good wife/mother as one that supports her husband, justifies men's control over the family's material and social resources, and conjures up a whole series of dangerous or inadequate male folkdevils, all adding to the emotional, physical and economic hurdles that prevent women from leaving abusive relationships.

This chapter attempts to test these two lines of argument through an analysis of the lives of four men I interviewed. In what follows, the reader will meet four white heterosexual men. Two of these men (Dan and Joe) were unemployed at the time of my interviews with them. Both of these men were getting help for their domestic violence. The reader will also meet two men who worked to challenge violent men's behaviour: Mike, a clinician who set up a programme for domestic violence perpetrators, and Simon, a retired middle manager who worked as therapist with men who had been violent.

## Four Cases

### Dan

Dan, a 34 year old unemployed labourer, was married and lived with his wife and four children, two of whom were his own. Dan had entered counselling on a voluntary basis to address his violence and try to salvage his faltering marriage to a woman called ‘Jenny’, who worked in a local pub. Dan had a number of criminal convictions for burglary and violence dating back to his teens. Dan was no longer a burglar, although he still occasionally had fights with men on his estate, recently having earned the ‘respect’ of the local children for breaking the ribs and leg of a man who had accused his (Dan’s) step-son of breaking his (the man’s) sons’ toy.

Dan believed he had a lot of his father’s ‘traits’, both men having been mentally and physically abusive to their wives over a prolonged period. Both men were alcoholics, both had a history of suicide attempts, had been to prison, and had (at times) refused to accept that they had ‘got a problem’ with violence. Dan remembered how when he was younger his dad was a ‘nice bloke’ towards his ‘mates’, who would have a ‘laugh and joke with them and act as if nowt were going off’. But Dan’s dad also had a sadistic streak. Not only did Dan’s father routinely abuse and humiliate his mother[3], but he would also ‘punish’ Dan for aggravating him, punching, kicking and beating him with the buckle end of his belt. If Dan got assaulted by other boys, his father would call him by girls’ names. For reasons unknown, Dan’s father had once tried to force Dan to put a knife into an electric socket.

Dan believed that his father was the cause of his early involvement in criminal activities.

> Many a night he would come home from work and his tea would go up wall…He’d be beating my mum up. I’d jump on his back to stop him. And that is when I’d get attacked…I grew up through

> that. As I got to a teenager I started to rebel…Ended up going to prison. Urm, which at that time I didn't think about it, but when I reflect on it, that were an escape. That were the only way I could get away from him.

Dan also blamed his dad for the break-up of his marriage.

> I thought to myself, "If it weren't for him being the way he were towards me then I wouldn't be the sort of person that I am"…And also he were making excuses, saying it were the beer that were the reason he were violent towards me mum and what have you. And I'm like saying, "What about me? Why were you violent towards me". [He said,] "I've never touched you. Never laid a finger on you". Totally denied it to me face. And like I were just gob-smacked. I just couldn't believe it. And I just said to me wife, "That's it. I just don't want to know him. He can't admit what he has done to me. As far as I'm concerned he's dead".

Dan had been violent to most, if not, all of the female partners he had ever had. Amongst his various accounts of violence towards women was a time when he had punched a woman in the mouth splitting her lip and knocking her unconscious. The woman was an ex-girlfriend of Dan's whom he had met again in a night-club. Dan's motive for punching the woman was that she had got his name wrong whilst they were having sex[4]. Dan had also had a very violent relationship with a prostitute – whom he only ever referred to as 'the prostitute', rather than by her name. Dan claimed their relationship was never about love, 'just money and sex'. Dan explained that his assaults on this prostitute – with whom he actually lived and took money from - were often in retaliation for her violence towards him and/or her abuse of his dog.

Dan's violence to his wife Jenny began within six months of them meeting:

> She didn't know what I were like…I think it were after the kids were born. My two kids. Things started to get really bad. Urm [Pause]…She actually split up when I were violent towards her and my daughter was involved. Urm. I pushed my wife out of house…down steps and slammed door while she got my daughter in her arms…And it slammed on her wrist and broke her wrist in three places. And that were the end of the relationship as it had been…She were no longer telling me she loved me…Sex life practically disappeared. Urm, and this went on for about two years. Basically it were a nightmare, worse time I have had in years.

Dan explained that some of his and Jenny's arguments arose over his (selfish) use of the very little money they had: sometimes he would spend their last £10 on cannabis. Other conflicts arose over Jenny's 'impression that it were all right for a woman to hit a man, but not a man to hit a woman'. Dan claimed Jenny could be like a 'woman possessed' and pointed to times when she had ran a carving knife through his hand and tried to stab him from behind[5]. Tellingly, Dan never defined himself as 'possessed' even though his 'mental abuse' would

> go on and on and on and on and on. She'd say, "I'm going to bed". I'd follow her. I'd keep her awake at night. If she tried to get out of the house I would lock her in. Make sure she couldn't get out the house and run away. Urm. Name calling. Urm. [Long Pause] Accusing her of things that she has not done. Going with other men.

Dan's sexual jealousy was not entirely unfounded. Bizarrely, Jenny's decision to give the relationship another try came after the man she was having an affair with stood by and watched her and Dan fighting.

> Basically, Jenny says, "He's just same as all others. Full of shit". Urm. And didn't want to know him. And that is when we got back together.

Yet, Dan realised that he needed to take responsibility for changing his behaviour. When Jenny had observed her 'eldest lad' behaving similarly to her husband, 'slamming doors when he doesn't get his own way, storming off upstairs, stamping his feet', Dan reached the conclusion that:

> I have got to be the one to break that chain. Because I don't want my son to grow up like I grew up. Even though I'm not violent towards me children urm it's still going to have an effect on them.

Although Dan claimed not to be violent to his children he had been known to physically chastise them. When explaining how their eldest son's truanting continues to be 'a major source of conflict' between Jenny and himself, Dan told me:

> I've laid off. I don't chastise him anymore. Basically I let him do what he wants. Because if I say anything to him me and him end up arguing.

Dan felt Jenny was 'too soft where the kids are concerned'. But Dan was proud of the fact that his stepson did not resent him as much as he resented his real father.

> There's been these empty promises - "I'll come and see you every week. And I'm going to buy you this, get you that…". And plus the fact that his dad has been in and out of prison. Urm. And he's like not so much said that he's disowned his dad, but he's [Pause]…Me wife's been saying for years, "One day he'll realise what his dad is really like"…And we think that time has come…

## Joe

Joe, a 30 year old ex-factory worker, was remanded in a bail hostel at the time of my interviews with him. He began his story by telling me had a 'good upbringing', was 'good' at school – not ‘clever’, but passed his exams, and that his that his problems originated with his drinking at age 14.

> Because I were fighting when I’d had a drink. I always got violent…I used to just walk past people and pick on somebody just for the sake of it. Just for trouble.

Joe claimed that as a child he was close to his mum and had a ‘good relationship’ with his dad, who never smacked him, was ‘really patient’ and never let his children ‘want for owt…If we could afford best, he’d get best’. Joe’s father had not lost his temper when he found out about Joe’s drinking, forewarning him to ‘only drink in small amounts’. Joe’s father’s reaction to the news that his son had a ‘reputation’ for fighting with other boys at his school was to say, “Let him get over it. He’ll get a good hiding one of these days. He’ll learn”.

Joe claimed that he had never been a victim of violence, but his earliest recollection of fighting concerned how he ‘got respect’ from the bullies when he began fighting back. Like Dan, Joe identified his teens as a time when he ‘started rebelling’ against his parents.

> It were not through them, it were just through me…I didn’t show no love or affection. It were, I were me own person. I find it difficult to show love and affection…I just didn’t take no notice whatever they said to me. Disregard whatever they said.

Joe claimed that his alcoholism and violence towards men ‘got worse’ after a period of prolonged unemployment during his mid-twenties. Joe would ‘drink heavily’ because he couldn’t cope with people hassling him to ‘get a job’ and calling him ‘idle’. Typically, Joe and his drinking partner would precipitate fights with men they did not know, particularly young men who were ‘causing trouble’ on the street or ‘scaring lasses’.

Joe had ‘horrible’ memories of how his ‘mate’ used to beat up his own mother. Yet when Joe moved in with his girlfriend (Anna) he also became violent towards her. Initially, Joe told me this was:

> For no apparent reason. My mind just goes blank sometimes. And for about 30 seconds, 30 seconds of madness it were, it were like, she were really hurt. Like had bruises all over her.

When pressed, Joe admitted that at the time he had been feeling ‘a bit jealous’ after seeing Anna dancing with another man at the Christmas party. When Joe had questioned Anna about this she shouted at him. At the time Joe had rationalised his violence by saying to himself:

> She’s not treating me like that. She’s not talking to me like that. I’m going to shut her up…If she hadn’t of started she wouldn’t have got smacked. She deserved it.

Four years later, Joe and Anna married and Anna fell pregnant. This proved an exciting and worrying time for them both. On the one hand, Joe was ‘over-joyed’ when he found out he was going to be dad. On the other, Anna had previously been diagnosed with Munchhausen’s Syndrome by Proxy. When it was discovered that Anna had put needles into their newly born daughter’s ears Joe was forced to choose between living with his wife and living with his daughter (Holly). After ‘smacking Anna round the room’ Joe left the marital home taking baby Holly with him. He and Anna divorced and Joe retained custody of Holly.

Two years later Joe entered into another relationship with a woman (Belinda), who gradually took over the childcare of Holly whilst he worked. Soon after Joe's violence started reoccurring. Indeed, it escalated in the relationship, as both Joe and Belinda made threats (and attempts) to kill each other. The sources of Joe and Belinda's conflicts were various. Joe explained that often it was 'little things' that would turn into 'big' arguments. Mundanely it was over money or the fact that Belinda hardly ever saw Joe, who was working 13 hours per day and leaving her to care for his daughter full-time. Other times it was over Joe's somewhat traditional expectation that Belinda cook his dinner for him:

> She used to say, "What do you want for your tea?". And I'd say, "I don't know". And she used to start arguing about that because I'd said, "owt". "What will you do if I make something you don't like? Are you going to throw it back in my face coz you don't like it?". I said, "Well make something I like".

Joe also recollected two other occasions when he was violent towards Belinda. The first was the time Belinda had tried to wake him up, 'pushing' him to 'make love'. There was also an occasion when Joe had discovered a big gash on Holly's ear. Belinda made up a story about Holly falling over, but later admitted hitting the infant with her potty. Joe explained,

> I couldn't understand why she was saying that she'd fallen out of bed which she hadn't. I lost a lot of trust in Belinda…[I told her] "I'm not going to forgive you".

Joe had felt 'mixed emotions' about his violence, fluctuating between blaming himself and then blaming Belinda. He would start by telling himself:

> "You done it again" and, "You are going to lose your relationship. Everything you have worked for, you have worked at…And it's not worth losing them because you've got so much going for you".

And then he'd think, "Why should I sit back and listen to her go at me? I'm not letting no women tell me what to do and what not what to do". Joe was, however, concerned about the loss of 'respect' he incurred as a consequence of his domestic violence, from Anna and Belinda themselves, their families, and his own mother, father and sister[6]. Yet when Belinda apologised Joe would usually let her take all the blame for 'starting it'.

Joe and Belinda's relationship continued in secret because they feared incurring the disapproval of family and friends. Their relationship finally terminated when Joe threatened to smash up the house, banged Belinda's head against the wall, kicked her repeatedly, and then walked out and took an overdose. Belinda had Joe arrested and as a result he was charged, prosecuted and put on a probation programme for perpetrators of domestic violence. Belinda informed social services that Joe had 'smacked' Holly. Joe claimed that he had never hit Holly, that 'there was no proof', and that Belinda had only said this to prevent him gaining custody of his daughter.

## Mike

Mike, aged 33, single, was a clinical psychologist who worked predominantly with those female mental health in-patients who exhibit violent or dangerous behaviours. He was also responsible for establishing the counselling service for violent men that Dan was, in fact, attending. Mike's interest in violence had spawned from four sources, although he felt the first three of these to be less significant than the fourth. The four sources were: (1) Mike's close relationship with a female friend who had been raped by a stranger; (2) frequently witnessing male-on-male violence as a student, once having been attacked because of his Gothic appearance; (3) having to counsel a woman who was referred for ‘treatment’ because of her ‘depression’ even though the problem was that she was a victim of severe domestic violence, and; (4) seeing his father beat his disabled brother.

Mike’s brother (Martin) was two years younger than Mike. When Martin was aged 5 he began exhibiting some ‘behavioural difficulties’. Mike’s earliest memory of this was of a walking up a really steep hill that Martin wouldn’t or couldn’t climb up.

> He kept flopping down and laying and crying and getting very upset. And my dad just blowing his top…and giving him a walloping…and that still not being effective in getting Martin to walk up the hill.

Shortly after that incident Martin was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. He also developed some phobias that may or may not have been connected to his muscular dystrophy.

> So that if you went into public toilets…and the toilet flushed that would just set him off screaming. And it would take ages to settle down again.

Mike’s mum did most of the physical care for Martin, although both Mike and his dad also did a lot: ‘We were sort of obstinately determined to not be held back by the disability’. In fact, Mike’s dad did a ‘huge amount’,

> took Martin out for walks…If Martin was disturbed or upset at night, he would be, you know, very patient and kind…[And when it came to the school’s fancy dress competition] he would take on an

> idea with Martin and just explode it to huge proportions. And actually sort of making huge cardboard constructions that could sit over my brother's wheelchair.

Mike did not see his 'dad as being someone who is particularly violent'. Rather Mike described his dad as someone with a quick 'temper' and a 'heavy-hand'.

> We had lots of difficulties settling Martin down to go to bed at night. And urr and my mum would sort of have a large role in that. But when things got difficult and she just couldn't deal with it anymore, dad got called in…and took on the stern disciplinarian kind of thing.

During his teens Mike would often come 'crashing' home late and 'a bit drunk', unintentionally waking his brother. Mike's dad would say of Martin,

> "He'd better shut up and stop it and settle right down or else"…And then Martin would cry out again and so dad would come storming off down the hallway…and threaten again, and leave him and go back. And urr then end up belting him, basically. Smacking him - but hard on the legs or thighs. Which just always seemed an appalling thing to be doing. I don't. I am not angry with my parents for it because I have my own memories of…what hard work Martin was. How frustrating it was. But it just seemed such an utterly pointless thing to be doing. Because it made no difference…It seemed to be about making himself feel better. My dad feel better. Getting something out rather than actually changing anything inherently about the situation…And I remember it…having quite a chilling effect on me…and feeling helpless myself in relation to it[7].

This was in stark contrast to the few times when Mike himself got 'clouted' by his father[8].

> With Martin if he was punishing or whatever urm it was, was pointless…particularly because Martin himself was helpless and defenceless…There were very few incidents where dad was

> violent…towards me...and each time I knew what that was in response to. I'd fucked up or done something wrong.

Mike also said that he said he 'wouldn't be at all surprised' if he himself hadn't smacked Martin. As a teenager, Mike could remember times when he resented having to care for Martin because his parents had other commitments, even though he understood that Martin's persistent calls to have his bed re-arranged were often the only way in which 'he could gain some control over his life'.

Mike believed his experiences with Martin had helped him develop a much more 'open-minded view of life and people and disability'. But Mike also felt that Martin's predicament caused his parents to put more expectations on him. Mike's dad had hoped Mike would go into 'engineering type stuff' and was thus disappointed in Mike's poor 'A' Level results and decision to study psychology. Mike's father had also insisted that Mike stay at university and stick out his mock exams, effectively preventing him from being with Martin when he died aged 18. Mike's feelings of anger about this were compounded by his 'guilt' for having pursued his 'own life'. The conflict between father and son came to a head a year or so later when Mike went to America to live. His parents went 'ballistic', their 'upset and concern' being exacerbated further by the AIDS scare. When Mike's dad found out Mike had got his ear-pierced he wrote to Mike calling him a 'complete wanker'.

During his twenties Mike had a number of relationships with women. A couple of the break-ups were very 'difficult emotionally' although there had never been any violence. In particular, Mike still felt 'bad' because one of his ex-partners, whom he cared a lot for, still didn't understand 'what was wrong' despite his numerous efforts to explain. Mike had come to realise that the reason he had so many relationships with women was because he was ‘not very good’ at being on his own:

> When significant relationships have gone awry or not worked out I’ve kind of tended very quickly to fill the gap. I kind of find myself in some other situation in a relationship and, “Oo! That feels better!”.

Mike entered therapy with unsettling doubts about whether he was ever going to ‘get it right’. In therapy he decided to ‘spend a long time out of a relationship’, even though he was ‘getting to a point’ where he was ‘wanting to do a settling down thing’, entailing a ‘permanent commitment’ and children. More recently Mike had entered into a relationship with a woman who had a child through a previous marriage. Mike managed to overcome his ‘anxieties’ about this ‘just through getting extremely drunk’.

> I’m very aware that I have mixed feelings about myself in relation to Sandra’s son…Whether I want to see Sandra or not is about whether I want to see Sandra or not. And yet I can’t help being aware that in that process you then become a significant person to, to this other…It sounds a bit pessimistic but, the possibility that things don’t work out for me and Sandra…is always a worrying possibility…And you feel hurt yourself. But within this scenario there is also then an impact upon her son.

## Simon

Simon was a 51 year old, retired middle manager who had been working as a therapist since being made redundant from the coal board six years prior to our interview. Simon began training as a counsellor shortly after a ‘personal growth’ holiday where he had been encouraged to reflect upon his fears regarding the loss of money, a role, and status his redundancy would bring. Simon’s interest in counselling men who are violent emerged subsequently, when he encountered a few clients whose families had been effected by intergenerational abuse. Since his divorce 15 years prior, he had also had a couple of relationships with women who had suffered what he felt was ‘appalling’ sexual abuse at the hands of other men. Simon felt his knowledge of these women’s experiences brought extra dynamics of caution and sensitivity to his relationships with them.

Simon had a longstanding interest in politics. As a six-former his father had paid for him to buy a different ‘quality’ newspaper everyday so as to ‘be open to different views’ and not ‘restricted to one ideology’. When he went to university, Simon joined all three political parties ‘in the spirit of inquiry’. Thinking about his children’s future during the early 1970s, Simon’s interests ‘gradually became more focussed on environmental matters’ – notably *Friends of the Earth’s* campaigns against nuclear energy. At the start of Thatcher’s first term in government Simon had become active in the Labour Party, fearful of the right’s ‘very materialistic way of looking at the value of things’, and aspiring to ‘a strong idealistic thread of wanting to make things better’.

Looking back, Simon felt his 20 year marriage to Lisa ‘was in many ways, well, in the context of the time…quite an equal relationship’. Simon had turned down promotion opportunities so as not to disrupt his wife’s career or his children’s schooling. Although more mundanely, ‘equality’ sometimes meant Simon taking a lesser role in the domestic decision-making process. For example, Simon explained that his ex-wife Lisa probably took more initiative in their decision to have children, but he had been ‘happy to go along with that’.

> She did more of the childcare, but I did change nappies. I did get up at night and help with the kids and stuff. And there were some traditional sort of asp-. I was the one who was going out to work.

> She was the one who was staying at home looking after the kids. So I suppose we were growing in awareness…just through living it…[I]t wasn't a surprise to me that she wanted to go to work when the kids were of school age. And I was fine with that. I mean it did put more of urm a sort of logistical strain on us both in terms of juggling time and childcare and so on. Urm. I don't think I ever saw myself as in a position of power over her.

During the course of their relationship both Simon and Lisa became interested in therapy, although they both pursued their interests independently. Simon explained that part of his motivation for getting into 'transactional analysis' was that he had become 'increasingly uncomfortable' with his Roman Catholic upbringing.

> Well my parents had a very traditional sort of Catholic, middle class value system…Like it wasn't okay to express feelings, especially uncomfortable feelings like anger. All that sort of stuff tended to be suppressed…And I think urm it became increasingly clear that my wife and I had both been very immature, emotionally, when we got married. And that we were growing apart. (Pause) So we eventually agreed - well there was a lot of sadness and quite a lot of trauma, but with a lot of goodwill too - it would be best to separate.

Simon identified the ending of his marriage as 'the most significant thing' to happen to him during the 1980s. Transactional analysis proved 'really quite an eye-opener' at this point in his life. Simon realised there was a 'whole branch of learning about…how much of behaviour as an adult arises from our upbringing'. He discovered that whilst his wife's 'main driver' was 'be perfect' his own was 'be strong'.

> …which my father had been. And realising that that was what my family had taught me to be. "Be strong, appear solid, even if you are not feeling solid. Don't show feelings. Especially if you are upset"…I can still see it in myself now…And realising that there were things that I didn't like about my family when I had grown up, and that I could think about it and possibly make changes…

Through transactional analysis Simon ‘realised’ that through his upbringing he had internalised an ‘underlying fear’ of ‘not being good enough’.

> At a fundamental level the whole sort of religious system was based on fear. The fear of going to hell...I realised I was coming away from church feeling very uncomfortable…And eventually I realised that the discomfort was anger. (Pauses)…And I suppose seeing it from a perspective as a father, thinking, “Are these the sort of messages that I want to give to my children?”. “I am not worthy”…I’d rather they thought that they are worthy.

It was not until one day at work when one of Simon’s colleagues asked him what he thought had caused a fault in the plant that Simon began to realise how misplaced his self-doubts were[9].

> I remember him going off confident that this thing that I had felt quite tentative about would be it. And as it turned out it was. And I…thought, “He has got more confidence in my opinions than I have…What stops me having a belief in me that this guy has?”

Similarly, when Simon and Lisa divorced, Simon also struggled to realise that the guilt he was feeling about the effects on his children was ‘not to do with them at all’. The children spent half their time with Simon and half with Lisa, but Simon coped ‘by being incredibly busy’ in his paid work and political campaigning. It was not until a couple of years later when Simon started talking to his children that he realised that his son (then aged 14) had coped admirably. Simon’s son told him,

> “I think it would have been better if you had split up sooner”…I think he saw it as something that…had contributed to his kind of maturing, growing up.

In fact, Simon's son described him and Lisa as 'model, liberal parents'- something that Simon said he felt 'quite uncomfortable' about, exclaiming 'we weren't that good!'.

There had been 'almost no violence' in Simon's households either as a child or as an adult. The only childhood incident he could remember was when he had kicked his older sister, feeling very 'jealous of how important she seemed to be and the things that she did'.

> My mother was there and observed this. And I don't remember her saying anything, but I do remember her kicking me hard. (Pauses). And how hurtful that was, not just physically but kind of emotionally.

Simon argued that this example exemplified his parents' unwillingness to recognise his anger. He offered the following example to further illustrate this point. When Simon was four his mother had tried to get him to wear a tie to kindergarten (which he hated).

> She came in from the ice cream van and said, "The ice cream man says anyone who isn't wearing a tie can't (laughs) have an ice cream". So I said to her, "In that case you can't have an ice cream". I find it fascinating to look back because it confirms what I know, which is that it wasn't okay to talk about feelings, but it was okay to play these mind games…Scoring points off each other. So next time it was, "The ice cream man says any little boy who hasn't got a tie on." (Laughs). So the next week on the Thursday morning I put on my tie to go to kindergarten. I was rewarded by an ice cream. And then I took my tie off. And eventually she won, but I, you know, I just made it as hard for her as I could.

What was even more fascinating about this story was the fact that Simon had discovered it written up in his father's diary some forty years later. Simon described his father as ‘always dependable, reliable…but not close’, ‘not involved’ in his life. After his father’s death, Simon was therefore surprised to discover that his dad had written a journal dating from the time Simon was born until he and Lisa had their first child. The odd thing was that the journal was written through the eyes of Simon – in the first person. When Simon discovered the journal he felt ‘lots of different emotions…It’s a very loving and well touching thing to do. And it seems to indicate that he did want to be close to me in a way’. The trouble was that the journal covered incidents that Simon could actually remember. For example, Simon felt that his father’s account of the ice-cream incident was written rather patronisingly as just a ‘little amusing anecdote in the life of Simon’.

In his adult life Simon could only remember being involved in one incident of violence, and that was early on in his relationship with Lisa.

> I was not used to having arguments. And basically quite placid. Placid isn’t the right word. I could be stubborn. (Pauses)…And she slapped me across the face. And I reacted by slapping her across the face…It would be easy to say, you know, “I just did it”…I think in that moment I kind of made the choice to respond in that way. It’s like urm I really felt I needed to stand up for myself…I couldn’t think of a better way of doing that, at that moment.

## Discussion

How is the hegemonic idealisation of the ‘family man’ evidenced in these four accounts? And does it help us make sense of some men’s violence and other men’s abstention from it?

In Connell's (1995), Messerschmidt's (1993) and Young's (1999) terms, Dan and Joe were economically marginalised men, disenfranchised by the effects of long term under- and unemployment, poverty and imprisonment. The 'respect' they both sought prized local reputation for toughness over more middle class preoccupations, such as occupational status and educational. Yet both Dan and Joe embraced the wider cultural concern with domestic conformity in terms of the valorising of the heterosexual family matrix (see also McDowell, 2000). Dan and Joe defined their 'toughness' in opposition to women's assumed softness/vulnerability, and other men's physical and moral weaknesses – what Edley & Wetherell (1997) refer to as men's tendency to accomplish masculinity by 'jockeying for position'. Hence, Dan depicted himself (somewhat precariously) as not as bad as his abusive father who hadn't the decency to admit what he had done, his 'soft' wife who didn't discipline her children adequately, his wife's ex-husband who had broken his promises to his son, and his wife's lover who was the kind of man who would stand by and watch a woman get assaulted. Similarly, Joe distinguished himself from those men who frighten 'lasses', as much as from the frightened women themselves. The law's undomesticated 'dangerous man' is constructed as 'other' in these marginalised men's accounts of themselves as much as it is in the world's most powerful men's political spinning.

For both Joe and Dan, having a family and permanent female partner was a marker of an achieved status. Hence, for Joe losing his relationship meant losing 'everything' he had 'worked for': not just his partners' respect, but also the respect of other respect of family members (cf. Hearn, 1998b). Similarly, for Dan it was not so much the physical pain he had caused that troubled him, but the loss of love and status his violence induced, evidenced in the 'nightmare' period when his wife wanted to leave him, was no longer telling him she loved him and their ‘sex life practically disappeared’. Here Dan refers to sex as an indicator of the state of his relationship. Joe did similarly when he invoked his partner’s ‘pushing’ him to make love (perhaps defensively) as evidence of her lack of understanding of his exhaustion: a lack of support for her protector/provider.

The double-standard at work here is evidenced in the way both men locate women’s respectability in the realms of motherhood and monogamy (see also Hollway & Jefferson, 1999; Lees, 1997). For both Dan and Joe women who sold their bodies for sex, were unfaithful or disrespectful to their male partners, or harmed children or animals were not to be ‘respected’: reflecting the dichotomising of women into either ‘Madonnas’ or ‘whores’ that Naylor (1995) observes in her analysis of media discourses. It is this double standard which enabled both men to neutralise their culpability for violence, and position themselves as ‘reasonable’ men, guardians of the heterosexual family’s moral standards. Dan’s failure to name ‘the prostitute’ he lived with dehumanised her. Hence, he made no apology for his violence to ‘the prostitute’, given her violence towards him and the fact that their relationship was founded on ‘just money and sex’. Dan also contrasted himself to a mad and/or morally misinformed wife - a ‘woman possessed’, who believed ‘that it were all right for a woman to hit a man, but not a man to hit a woman’. Similarly, Joe reasoned that he had a right to shut Anna up for talking to him in a certain way - ‘If she hadn’t of started she wouldn’t have got smacked. She deserved it’. However, Joe unwittingly exposed his awareness of the transparency of his misogyny when he offered temporary, inexplicable pathology - ‘30 seconds of madness’ – as an explanation for his violence. As the social circumstances in which Joe was violent could not excuse his behaviour, he resorted to a notion of the ‘usually reasonable, temporarily disturbed’ man who became a victim of the social drinking his ‘mates’ required of him. The tragic circumstances surrounding Joe's break-up with his first wife provided him with a further set of rationalisations for violence, positioning him as his daughter's protector, against a deceitful and abusive mother: a 'doubly deviant' miscreant who breached both the law and the conventions of femininity (see Heidensohn, 1985)[10].

Informed by memories of a dad who never let his children 'want for owt', Joe relied on his status as family breadwinner to justify his absence from family life (physically and emotionally). The combination of childcare responsibilities, his long working hours and low pay disadvantaged the family as a unit, but enabled Joe to retain a position of power within it. In taking on mothering responsibilities for Holly, Belinda had become economically dependent on Joe, and probably more susceptible to his treatment of her as his domestic servant. Conversely, it was Dan's recollections of his father's abuses that ultimately problematised his investment in the notion of the family disciplinarian. Implicated in perpetuating a cycle of violence, Dan repositioned himself heroically as 'the one' who had to 'break that chain', or escape from the intergenerationally transmitted 'traits' that defined what he 'were like'.

In contrast, Simon and Mike conformed more closely to middle-class notions of respectability in terms of their occupations, education and family background. Indeed, both Simon and Mike had probably benefited from professional occupational structures that work to some men's material advantage at women's expense. Simon and Mike depicted themselves as not only reasonable, but also sensitive men; resistant to purely rational, non-emotive ways of seeing the world, willing and able to talk over problems before they become destructive (Lupton & Barclay, 1997: 91). This blend of sensitivity and reason was manifested most clearly in Simon's account when he spoke of how he and his wife ‘eventually agreed to separate - after a lot of sadness and quite a lot of trauma, but with a lot of goodwill too’. Mike’s talk of how he felt ‘bad’ that he could not get an ex-partner to understand why he wanted to end their relationship, as well as his hesitance over initiating a relationship with a woman because of the potential impact on her child should it not ‘work out’, positioned him similarly as balancing rationality with emotional sensitivity. For, Simon and Mike masculinity was not so much about being ‘tougher than the rest’ – to borrow a term from Sim (1994) - but about constructing nuanced differences between themselves and other men (see Edley and Wetherell, 1997).

The strengths and weaknesses of the purely reasonable, rational man are detailed in both Mike’s and Simon’s recollections of their own fathers. Hence, Mike’s dad excelled as a good dad when he ‘did a lot’ and when he was obstinately determined not to let Martin’s disability hold the family back. But his father’s lack of emotional understanding - exhibited when he encouraged Mike to put his studies before his brother, when he wrote to Mike calling him a ‘wanker’ (probably motivated by a mixture of homophobia and ignorance at the time of the AIDS scare) as much as his ‘utterly pointless’ and ‘appalling’ abuse of his physically ‘helpless’ son – are invoked by Mike as a point of difference between them. Similarly, Simon praised his father for his economic and intellectual provision, dependability and reliability, but was frustrated by how ‘uninvolved’ his father was in his life, and both of his parents’ inability to recognise his anger.

Hence, what Mike and Simon shared with Joe and Dan was the value they placed on a combination of economic success and the accomplishment of a heterosexual family matrix. But whereas Dan and Joe’s talk of rebellion worked to anticipate their ‘dangerous behaviour’, Mike and Simon’s talk of internalised guilt, feelings of misrecognition and childhood helplessness served to position them as striving towards emotional reciprocity, even if often thwarted in achieving their high ideals. Hence, Mike wondered if he was ever ‘going to get it right’ and Simon conceded having defensively used his status as breadwinner/community activist to avoid dealing with emotional complexities at home and admitted that he still often felt compelled to ‘appear solid’ even when he wasn’t feeling strong. Despite striving towards equality, like many contemporary ‘involved’ fathers, Simon was in fact a part-time assistant to a full-time mother, whom he was ‘happy to go a long with’ (see Sunderland, 2000).

## Conclusion

The social taboos around violence towards women and children are mostly consistent with the discourses of respect/respectability, protection/provision, reasonableness/sensitivity through which the ‘family man’ is constructed. Hence, few men, irrespective of their social class would want to be known as deadbeat dads, wife-beaters, child sexual abusers, or unwieldy brutes (Collier, 1998). The idealisation of the family man may naturalise a substantively unequal heterosexual family matrix, but it does not directly and explicitly legitimise men’s domestic violence. The family man’s commitment to reasonableness, and his obligation to protect, render violence a largely illegitimate expression of power within the family. As Connell (1995: 84) puts it, a ‘thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate’. If this is so, then we might assume that the ambiguous relationship between men’s violence and the idealisation of the family man is a product of the way in which the non-fixity of meaning embedded in the ideal enables those men who fall short of it to position themselves positively in relation to its demonised ‘others’.

Some marginalised men's investments in 'macho' or 'tough' masculinities may be explicable as a response to 'strain-induced' crises, occasioned by their inability to live up to widely held cultural ideals. But as the cases above suggest, there are a number of other social and psychic dynamics that may explain lower-class men's disproportionate use of violence against partners and the fact that many couples persist with abusive relationships, without forcing us to resort to the kind of determinism that predicts that all poor families are destined to endure domestic violence. For some men (and no doubt, some women) their 'possession' of a family constitutes their only stake in an ideal of family life. This helps legitimate some men's use of force to prevent their family from fragmenting, literally *fighting* to keep the family together. Knowing that they are at risk of assault from other violent men, some women (as Dan's wife seemed to have) may be persuaded that they are better off with a violent husband, if that same husband is willing and able to protect them from the abuses of other men, known and unknown. Moreover, those at the lower end of the social spectrum are more likely to be dependent on under-resourced state run support services when troubling life events occur. When this support is inadequate, delayed or insufficient there are likely to be longer lasting physical and emotional repercussions. Neither Dan nor Joe had the benefit of receiving the kind of therapy Mike and Simon had received, yet Dan and Joe's history of suicide attempts and alcoholism were more than likely both causes and consequences of their poor mental health. Although Dan and Joe's experiences were qualitatively different, both men had many troubling experiences of violence and abuse that they struggled to make sense of. This could well have contributed to their inability to manage conflicts and anxieties in their everyday lives without resort to destructive or aggressive behaviours. Paradoxically, it could also have enhanced their dependency on their partners' emotional support.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the relationship between violence and the hegemonic ideal manifests itself in ordinary men's lives by effecting how men position themselves in relation to the various discourses through which the good male partner/parent is constructed. The particular subject positions men take up are likely to be *motivated* by a combination of rational self-interest *and* psychic defensiveness, and *constrained* by the resources and reputation each man already has. The challenge facing those of us trying to explain the extent and pattern of men's violence is to disentangle the psychosocial factors that precipitate violence from those which motivate particular men's investments in certain subject positions in discourse. At the same time, we will also need to stay alert to the fact that most men who perpetrate domestic violence have more in common with the victims of their abuse – in terms of their values, socio-economic status and power – than they do with those men influential enough to get themselves publicly nominated the 'most wonderful fathers in the world'.

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[1] Quotes taken from both Blair's speech that morning to a conference for black church leaders, and his evening interview on *Question Time.*

[2] On 09/11/98 *The Sun's* front page asked if the UK was being run by a 'gay mafia of politicians, lawyers, palace courtiers and TV bigwigs'.

[3] Dan could remember his father ripping his mother's clothes off and dragging her round the street by her hair. Dan's father also routinely abused the family pets, one time nailing their cat to Dan's maternal grandmother's front door.

[4] The woman had said "Oh Ricky. I love you": a statement that resonates with what was once a well-rehearsed impression of a popular soap opera character.

[5] 76% of women who kill their current or ex- male partner use a sharp instrument (such as a knife) to do so as opposed to 30% of men (Stanko et al, 1998: 29).

[6] Joe's father and sister 'went mad' when they found out about Joe's violence to women.

[7] Mike would sometimes plead with his father "Don't do that. Don't hurt him…It doesn't make any difference".

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[8] Mike could not remember any times when his father was violent to his mother. However, he could remember times when his father was ‘verbally abusive’ towards her: ‘not swearing particularly, but just putting her down…implying that she is stupid or daft or urm, always gets things wrong’.

[9] There were other messages emanating from the Catholic church that Simon also struggled with, most notably its position on contraception. Simon felt the church’s line on contraception was simply ‘flying in the face of reality’, but he still felt very uncomfortable and guilty about contravening this line.

[10] Joe’s insistence that ‘there was no proof’ that he had hit his daughter could be read as unduly defensive and hence, incriminating – not least, because he had said the same when the police arrested him for assaulting Belinda, an assault to which he later admitted.

# Chapter 8

# *Interventions with men who are violent to female partners*

## Abstract

*This chapter examines some of the research and practice literature on interventions for perpetrators of domestic violence to assess what those working in this field have learnt during the last decade. Six examples of practice and (where available) research evaluations and/or critical commentaries are reviewed. The case for paying particular attention to the broader context in which interventions occur is emphasised throughout. The chapter concludes by urging practitioners to (a) take advantage of the strengths of qualitative case analysis when evaluating the effectiveness of their interventions, and (b) reflect upon how work which 'ensures the safety of women and children' and 'reduces re-offending' also contributes to a broader social project of 'reconstructing masculinities'.*

## Introduction

Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence are currently en vogue in the UK. The vast majority of these programmes are being established within the Probation Service, often in partnership with the independent sector. Around 40 such projects are registered in the Domestic Violence National Practitioners' *Network Directory* (CHANGE/Working with Men, 2000), although there are many smaller, often short-lived, projects in the independent sector that are not listed in this publication. It is commonly observed that those British perpetrator programmes that are most well established typically combine cognitive-behavioural techniques with a pro-feminist analysis of the nature of power and control in heterosexual relationships, derived from the *Duluth* model (see below) (Scourfield, 1998; Scourfield & Dobash, 1999). Taking this observation as fact, the Home Office (1999) singled out two particular probation perpetrator projects in 1999 – those offered by Merseyside and Cheshire Probation Services – for *Pathfinder* status. These projects, which were already up and running (see Hamill et al, 1997) are currently being evaluated to enable the government to prescribe best practice across the UK through a process of *accreditation.* The Home Office intends to develop similarly accredited domestic violence perpetrator programmes within the prison service.

These moves towards standardisation have caused some concern amongst members of the *National Practitioners' Network* who had otherwise welcomed the government's commitment to developing co-ordinated, interagency responses to domestic violence (Home Office, 2000; Keithley & Robinson, 2000; Women's Unit, 1999). Those working with violent men are (quite rightly) concerned that the Home Office is attempting to prematurely standardise interventions in a field in which no-one knows for sure 'what works' (Bell, 2000); a threat which the misreadings of the American pro-arrest policing experiments suggest is both real and dangerous (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996).

Part of the problem is that interventions themselves are rarely quite as standardised as evaluators and policymakers would like them to be. Those practitioners with social work and counselling backgrounds are amongst those most conversant with the practical and philosophical shortcomings of the cognitive-behavioural approach (Williams, 1996). Many feel that standardised cognitive behavioural packages are insufficiently versatile and sensitive to cope with the complexities and peculiarities of the change process in terms of its direction, precariousness, and dependence on resolutions to other social, physical and mental health problems. The practitioner's job involves more than just anticipating which programmes will 'work' for which offenders. Until the client is motivated to question the necessity of abusive behaviour and takes some responsibility for it then no intervention, however sophisticated, is likely to 'work'. Thus, whilst few practitioners disagree with the feminist insight that men's domestic violence is a symptom of, and mechanism for, maintaining power within heterosexual relationships, most practitioners also know from experience that perpetrators typically do not construe the problem in this way. Indeed, perpetrators often perceive women as powerful sources of the fear and vulnerability they feel in themselves, and it is often necessary to tap into these vulnerabilities in order to generate sufficient motivation in the client to identify problems before any process of effective change can be pursued (Macrae & Andrews, 2000). Balancing the need to challenge men's justifications for violence with a recognition of the uniqueness of individual men's lived experiences is a cumbersome business in both groupwork and one-to-one counselling. If this balance is not managed adequately interventions can easily exacerbate resistance amongst clients (manifested as reluctance to participate, hostile responses to exercises, and non-attendance, (see Claytor, 1996)), exposing workers[1] and partners to additional dangers (Lee, 1999; Mullender, 1996). To achieve this balance practitioners often have to be both innovative and eclectic in their interventions. Hence, best practice is rarely reducible to a set of techniques that can simply be described and prescribed for less experienced staff to simply administer (Vanstone, 2000).

Furthermore, the ‘effectiveness’ of particular interventions often owes as much to the context in which they were delivered than to programme content and practitioner skill. This context includes the ease with which women are able to access support services that enable them to leave, the actual and expected response of the police and courts to domestic violence, and the extent to which violence is culturally accepted within the offenders family, peer group and community. The problem with prioritising criminal justice interventions with those offenders deemed more amenable to change is that this can have unanticipated consequences on the service provision available to other violent men and abused women. Thus, treatment may be denied to certain sections of the violent male population because they seem less suitable for the standardised intervention – either because of their ‘dangerousness’, mental health or addiction problems, locality and/or ethnicity, or because they have not been arrested, charged and prosecuted. Men considered less suitable for treatment may eventually get sentenced more punitively by the courts, having first had to rely on under-resourced voluntary sector services for support, and/or never having reached the top of the ‘waiting list’.

Perhaps more significantly, services for women and children are likely to be put under increasing pressure as a consequence of the additional work being undertaken with perpetrators, many of whom are unlikely to change in the near future, if ever. Observers of domestic violence forums have noted how probation interventions that equate ‘reducing re-offending’ with ‘effectiveness’ can easily over-shadow the (arguably) more important business of ensuring the safety of women (Anonymous, 1999; Hague & Malos, 1995). This, in combination with more pro-arrest styles of policing, tends to leave those women who need protection little choice but to engage with a criminal justice system with a reputation for producing unexpectedly undesirable outcomes for them (Radford et al, 1999). It is too easily forgotten that for some women the fear of breaking up their family and/or losing their children through statutory agency involvement is as disconcerting as the fear of further violence (Hoyle, 1998). Moreover, a disproportionate 40% of women living in UK refuges are from ethnic minority communities (Uddin, 1999). Some of these women are recent immigrants to the UK and risk deportation if their partners are arrested or their relationships terminate. Conversely, many British Asian women risk social isolation, stigmatisation, and further abuse from male and female family members if they inform police or social services about their husband’s violence (see Choudry, 1996; & Hamner, 1998).

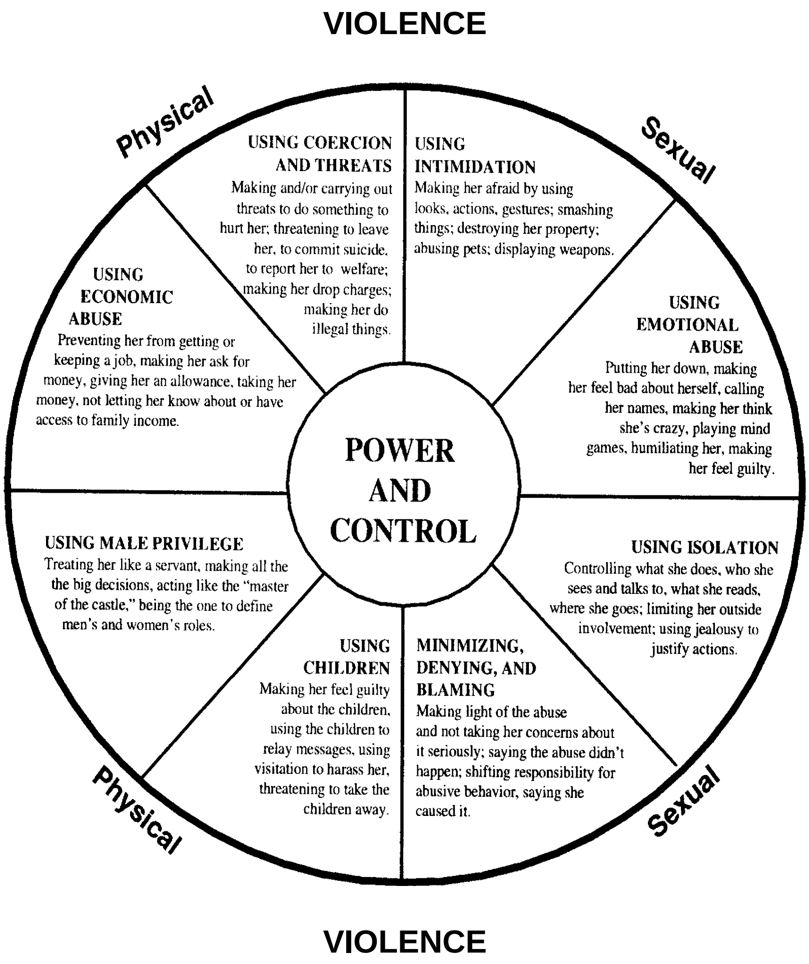
Perpetrator programmes are often just a small part of local, national, and international initiatives[2] aimed at enhancing the safety of women and children. The extent to which *Women’s Aid’s* aim of ensuring the safety of women and children remains a priority within domestic violence forums can have a significant impact on how police and other agencies determine their own effectiveness. At their best such forums provide an outlet through which ethnic minority women’s groups are able to encourage statutory service providers to respond to their needs, initiate preventative work with school children, promote inter-agency training and communication and hold programmes for perpetrators accountable. At their worst such forums can become unresponsive ‘talking shops’ that enable police and probation services to claim to be addressing the problem of domestic violence without actually doing so (Hague & Malos, 1995). If those support services that enable women to leave abusive relationships become less readily available, this is likely to have a 'knock-on' effect on men's motivation to change. Similarly, pro-arrest policing and 'confronting offending behaviour' programmes may produce some short term changes in some men's behaviour, whilst fostering macho, and/or defensive responses from the perpetrator populace in the longer term (Buckley, 1999; McLean, 1999; Williams, 1996).

All of this means that evaluation data regarding the effectiveness of interventions with perpetrators of domestic violence needs to be read with an eye to the processes occurring within and around particular projects. This chapter thus begins by outlining how practitioners have attempted to address and resolve issues of process and context in their own work. The programmes I shall review include the *Domestic Abuse Intervention Project* (Duluth, Minnesota, USA), *CHANGE* (Stirling) and *Lothian Domestic Violence Projects* (Edinburgh), the *Domestic Violence Intervention Project* (London), *Nottingham Agenda*, the *Everyman Project* (formerly in London, but now in Plymouth), and the *Gender-Awareness Project* (Wakefield prison).

## Interventions with Male Perpetrators of Domestic Violence

### Duluth

The Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) was set up in 1980 as an experiment to confront the problem of men's violence towards their partners (Paymar, 1993; Pence & Paymar, 1993). In Duluth, the overall strategy effected arrests and prosecutions and was not just a 'programme for batterers'. The project argued for practices that would hold offenders accountable and place the onus of intervention on the community, not victims. In Duluth, criminal justice, health, welfare, and educational services were developed and improved to ensure women's safety. At the same time the Duluth Police adopted a pro-arrest approach to men accused of domestic violence. In the courts, sentencers made it clear to male offenders why they were being put on domestic violence perpetrators' programmes and outlined the punitive consequences that would follow if they re-offended. Most notoriously, the Duluth project subjected male perpetrators to a psycho-educational intervention informed by the *Power and Control Wheel*, illustrated below[3]:



**USING COERCION AND THREATS**
Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her; threatening to leave her, to commit suicide, to report her to welfare; making her drop charges; making her do illegal things.

**USING INTIMIDATION**
Making her afraid by using looks, actions, gestures; smashing things; destroying her property; abusing pets; displaying weapons.

**USING EMOTIONAL ABUSE**
Putting her down, making her feel bad about herself, calling her names, making her think she's crazy, playing mind games, humiliating her, making her feel guilty.

**USING ISOLATION**
Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, where she goes; limiting her outside involvement; using jealousy to justify actions.

**MINIMIZING, DENYING, AND BLAMING**
Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously; saying the abuse didn't happen; shifting responsibility for abusive behavior, saying she caused it.

**USING CHILDREN**
Making her feel guilty about the children, using the children to relay messages, using visitation to harass her, threatening to take the children away.

**USING MALE PRIVILEGE**
Treating her like a servant, making all the the big decisions, acting like the "master of the castle," being the one to define men's and women's roles.

**USING ECONOMIC ABUSE**
Preventing her from getting or keeping a job, making her ask for money, giving her an allowance, taking her money, not letting her know about or have access to family income.

The wheel served to illustrate for the violent men, as well as the female victims, that domestic violence:

- is an intentional abuse of (male) power in conditions of structural inequality.
- comprises pattern of behaviours, not all of which are physical or criminal, rather than isolated incidents of abuse or cyclical explosions of pent-up anger.
- reinforces the power of other tactics of control (e.g. emotional abuse, isolation, threats of taking the children), effectively undermining women's ability to act autonomously.

Men were court-mandated to attend a programme of approximately 20 classes that would enable them to develop critical thinking skills around eight themes: non-violence, non-threatening behaviour, respect, support and trust, honesty and accountability, sexual respect, partnership, and negotiation and fairness (Healey, Smith & O' Sullivan, 1998). Examples of controlling behaviour from the wheel were demonstrated using video vignettes. Men were expected to discuss and complete homework assignments in order to make sense of their behaviour in these terms.

Shortly after the DAIP was set up, the entire project was widely heralded as effective in the US, as well as the UK and Canada. But subsequent commentary has tended to be more qualified and critical. Only a very small proportion of perpetrators (20%) actually completed the programme, but most disappointingly, whilst two-thirds of the group's completers were reported to have stopped being physically abusive at the 18 month follow-up point, most persisted with controlling and threatening behaviours (Mullender, 1996: 244). Furthermore, the project's own evaluation found that completion of intervention had no impact on recidivism *after five years* (Shepherd, 1990, quoted in Healey, Smith & O' Sullivan, 1998). Indeed, one might remember Gondolf's (1997) argument that the strongest conclusions we can draw from the U.S. research evidence is that Duluth style interventions are equally effective as most others. Research has only shown that such interventions are effective in the short-term, and then only for men who actually complete the programme.

Government commissioned observers (Healey, Smith & O' Sullivan, 1998) have also noted that not all group leaders at DAIP are sufficiently skilled at preventing group-members from using the perpetrators' programme to complain about their partners. Furthermore, the classroom style format fosters a tendency amongst some group members to sit back without participating. In addition, American black men tend to become resistant to the intervention if practitioners' challenges to their 'rationalisations' seem to deny the significance of the history of racial discrimination in the US. Only when group-facilitators are sufficiently skilled to deal effectively with the topic of racial oppression from the outset can Duluth style interventions capitalise on racial identities to engage black men in a process of change.

## CHANGE & the Lothian Domestic Violence Probation Projects

The CHANGE project in Stirling and the Lothian Domestic Violence Probation Project in Edinburgh came together in 1989. Both were set up as experimental projects, heavily informed by the work of Duluth's DAIP. DAIP staff even visited CHANGE during its early stages. In particular, the CHANGE project was developed as part of a co-ordinated approach to community services linked to refuge and advocacy services for women and policy directives instructing the police, courts, and prosecutors to deal with domestic violence in a more consistent manner; although as Morran (1996) reminds us many sentencers were suspicious of the projects' overtly feminist objectives.

Operated as probation programmes, both CHANGE and Lothian provided perpetrators mandated by the courts with a 16 week programme of groupwork. The intervention was not to be used by sentencers as a diversion from prosecution. This was both a point of principle for the CHANGE project organisers and a necessary concession to Women's Aid who were unwilling to support the intervention if men were able to use programme attendance to avoid prosecution. Women whose partners attended the programme were informed that CHANGE could not guarantee that male attendees would stop being violent. They were also offered support from Women's Aid and information sessions about the work with perpetrators.

Both Lothian and CHANGE were evaluated using a longitudinal design. Partner reports of whether men had been violent, caused injury, or controlled women's behaviour, as well as quality of life measures, were collected at three points over a twelve month follow-up period. These partner reports were compared with those of the partners of men convicted of similar offences but subject to ordinary criminal justice sanctions such as fines, admonishments, and straight probation orders. For both practical and ethical reasons this comparison was not based on an 'experimental' design.

Early reports on this evaluation inspired many British practitioners. The research evidence suggested that the projects had been successful at simultaneously reducing men's violent behaviours and their controlling behaviours - rather than a fall in the former accompanying an increase in the latter, as observed at DAIP. In their report to the Home Office, Dobash et al (1996b) highlighted that only 33% of men participating in the interventions committed another violent act against their partners during the twelve month follow-up, compared to 75% of men subject to the ordinary criminal justice interventions. The programmes were also said to be more effective at reducing the frequency of violence since only 7% of those participating in the programme initiated five or more violent incidents during the follow-up period, compared to 37% of men sanctioned in other ways.

However, these research findings have recently been criticised as being based on too small a sample to 'make cause and effect claims' (Mullender, 2000). Indeed, original findings have since been interpreted more tentatively by both the programme evaluators (Dobash et al, 1999) and the programme co-ordinators (Morran, 1999). In their (1999) account of the evaluation Dobash et al point out that they did not study any of the groups in progress and note that they only received responses from 21 partners in the programme group, and 44 in the other criminal justice group at 'Time 3'[4]. Dobash et al also admit that that men attending the programme were less likely to be unemployed and unmarried than the other criminal justice group - both factors that correlate with recidivism. Moreover, whilst we might argue that partner reports are more helpful in assessing whether men have changed than criminal justice recidivism rates, this evidence is biased towards those men who stay with partners – perhaps as opposed to those who have many short-lived, abusive relationships. Furthermore, we cannot discount the possibility that the research and/or the partner support work had greater impacts on the men's motivation to change than the perpetrators programme, since these men would have known that their partners were reporting on their violent behaviour and would receive assistance if they wanted to leave[5].

Based on comments returned by post, Dobash et al claimed that those men who did actually change fell into two groups:

- there were those who were under close surveillance by law-enforcers who engaged in limited and temporary behavioural change, and;

- those who changed their attitudes and learnt to regulate their behaviour for themselves.

Dobash et al (1999) divide this latter process of change into eight components, beginning with recognising that ‘change is possible’, through to ‘desiring change’, ‘evaluating the costs and benefits of violence to self and others’, relying more on ‘self-regulation’ as opposed to ‘external constraints’, learning ‘new discourses’ about relationships and violence, and ‘talking and listening’, through to acquiring ‘new skills and orientations’.

In an early account of his work as a group facilitator on the CHANGE project, David Morran (1996) flagged the need for other projects operating in the same locale that could work with those violent men who could not attend the CHANGE programme. Those who could not attend included men who were not court-mandated, those who seemed insufficiently motivated to change (perhaps because they were still in denial), those who needed to be incarcerated because they represented such a danger to their partners or children, and those with drug and alcohol problems. Thus, whilst the CHANGE project worked with a model of power and control that referred to all men’s heterosexual relationships, the intervention actually dealt with a sample of violent men selected because their problems were, in some respects, not as a complex as other men known to exhibit similar behaviour. As Morran (1999) highlights in his reflections upon leaving the project, the threat of losing the support of women activists deterred him from pursuing a more holistic focus that might have got beyond the surface of the men’s talk about violence. One consequence of this was that the intervention was not as responsive to individual men’s learning needs as it could have been. Those who were illiterate or struggled with schooling tended to find a syllabus based around ‘theories’ and ‘homework assignments’ daunting.

Often these men would drop-out of the programme prematurely and be breached for failing to meet the conditions of their probation orders.

It is because of this poor responsivity that Macrae and Andrew (2000) from the Lothian project[6] have looked towards "Personal Construct Theory" for techniques that enable men to begin to define their problems in their own terms, set out their own ideas about change, and to take responsibility for this change - as opposed to having their ideas dismissed from the very outset, or embedded in didactic modes of instruction. As Macrae and Andrews (2000: 33) argue this does not mean abandoning 'a clear theoretical understanding of patriarchy and violence', but it does mean substituting dogma for approaches which pose questions and develop critical thinking in ways that help the male 'client to test the validity of his own construct system'.

## The Domestic Violence Intervention Project

The Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) was also set up with the Duluth example firmly in mind.

> The overall philosophy of DVIP begins from an understanding that men use violence to achieve and maintain power over their partner. It has two basic aims: to empower women and increase their safety; and to stop men's violence and abuse (Burton et al, 1998a: 2).

Established in West London in 1992, DVIP linked together a programme for perpetrators with a proactive support service for women. The *Violence Prevention Programme* (VPP) accepted both court-mandated referrals and voluntary referrals – the latter constituting the majority. Although originally informed by the Duluth model workers have found a purist approach unresponsive to many of their clients needs, and therefore have incorporated the use of psychodrama and therapeutic techniques, as well as work on fatherhood, alongside the more cognitive-behavioural aspects of the model. VPP groups are based on a rolling entry to avoid waiting lists. Initially men attend twice a week for 8 weeks, then once a week for 26 weeks, and then a fortnightly support group. Men who report any violence at this third fortnightly stage have to go back to the first stage of twice weekly sessions or cease contact with VPP altogether. Around 12% of male applicants are not accepted onto VPP in the first place, either because they fail to take any responsibility for their violence, have no motivation to change, refuse to give details of their partner, or because drug and alcohol problems would prevent participation in group work.

The *Women's Support Service* (WSS) offers telephone advice, one-to-one counselling, group work and advocacy work. WSS routinely follows up women after their initial contact and works with them to develop 'safety strategies' in order to help anticipate further violence. All women whose partners are attending VPP are contacted by WSS, offered regular updates on their partner's participation, and advised when men leave the programme.

Between 1994 and 1996 both the impact and process of DVIP was evaluated by researchers employed by the *Joseph Rowntree Foundation* (Burton et al, 1998b). Whilst the study found that those men who completed the programme did reduce their use of violence, numbers were too low to generalise from. Only 31 men out 351 went onto the second stage of the programme. Only 6 of these 31 were tracked and interviewed subsequent to programme completion. As with the CHANGE project evaluation, particular problems were experienced in measuring whether the programme had an impact on those men who were no longer living with their partners since there was no way of knowing whether these men were capable of putting their new non-violent principles into practice.

Many of those who dropped out within the first six sessions were voluntary attendees who gave up once they realised they could not save their relationships or felt unable to end their violence. This was considered a serious shortcoming by both researchers and practitioners at DVIP, since those voluntarily attending men who managed to stay for the whole programme were often less resistant, and more motivated to take on a broader project of change than many of those court-mandated. DVIP has since decided to charge voluntary attendees (according to income) three months in advance, and this has brought about a radical decline in the drop-out rate. DVIP's researchers also found that the practice of 'time-outs' (where the man is supposed to walk away from confrontations when he fears he may be violent, first informing his partner what he is doing), was used abusively by some programme attendees (i.e. not telling partners where they are going, or not coming back).

In terms of service provision, DVIP experienced problems as the WSS and the VPP increasingly separated; the work with women often became subordinated to the work with men. DVIP has since endeavoured to re-establish the centrality of its partner support service, integrating the WSS and VPP teams so as to share information more effectively (Blacklock, 1999). The evaluation research highlighted how important it was to keep women's experiences in sight when doing work with violent men. One male client at VPP told his group how he was meeting his partner on the way home from the supermarket – something that he represented as 'positive' evidence of 'change'. But the woman's perception was that her *ex-partner* was stalking her, and she explained that he had already received a solicitor's letter asking him to stop following her (Burton et al, 1998b: 30).

In spite of these difficulties DVIP's evaluation concluded that that the project was successful in meeting many of its objectives. Not only did some men change, but DVIP created the opportunity for many women to end relationships without being assaulted or intimidated. This was considered especially important since women are often most at risk of assault when relationships are breaking up (Mullender, 1996: 36). The vast majority of women valued DVIP's proactive approach, felt the support they were offered helped them combat feelings of shame and self-blame, and valued feedback on their partner's participation in VPP where this was the case. Because of its proactive approach WSS was much more effective than many similar organisations at reaching both women with professional qualifications and ethnic minority women.

## Nottingham Agenda

Formerly called Nottingham MOVE, Agenda was a men's collective that derived its early practice model from Waring and Wilson's (1990) work on the Bolton *Men Overcoming Violence* project[7]. As Wilson & Waring's self-help' manual testifies, the work was not especially pro-feminist and Agenda was criticised accordingly (Mullender, 1996: 234-8). The main shortcomings were that Wilson and Waring's (1990) manual focuses on how relationships might be rebuilt, but offers little to aid women who might want to leave a violent relationship. The fact that men's agendas were being put before women's safety was said to be evidenced politically in Nottingham when the men's self-help project attracted more *Safer Cities* money than any of the local women's projects.

In response, those at Nottingham Agenda argued that whilst support for women is essential to 'prevent and mitigate the effects of domestic violence', working with men who are violent 'is an additional preventative strategy which may increase women's safety' because:

- Many women do not leave partners, or return to them after leaving a refuge.
- Even when women do leave, men often go onto abuse subsequent partners (Tomo, 1996: 5).

Although workers at Agenda recognised that change was an unlikely possibility for many of their male clients, they believed that some of their male clients had changed and this was 'highly significant, particularly for their partners and families' (Tomo, 1996: 5). However, Agenda agreed to be subject to an independent research evaluation, undertaken by Sarah-Jo Lee from Nottingham University, to investigate what this change entailed.

Lee's (1998) evaluation focussed on the reports of ten couples six months after the intervention was completed. Four of these couples reported complete cessation of violence, and seven women reported feeling safer. However, four women had sustained injuries inflicted by men since they had left the programme, two felt their lives were controlled through fear of violence, and all ten believed that their partners' violence and abuse would never go away. Moreover, although some women did report positive changes in their male partners subsequent to attending the programme, even those men who did reduce their violence used the programme to manipulate women partners. Reporting on this fact, Lee and Morley (1999) claim that attendance on the Agenda programme was used by men in the following ways:

- To persuade partners to let them come back. Men would claim that they had changed and/or that their attendance on the programme demonstrates their love and commitment. Some women took men back against the advice of family and friends and then had the added public humiliation of having to admit they had ‘been taken in by his lies’. These women often lost the valued support of friends and family members who would infer they only had themselves to blame.

- To put pressure on women to change. Some men used their own claim to have changed to shift responsibility for sorting out problems with the relationship onto the woman.
- To force women to listen to them by claiming they could only change if supported. This could mean women re-listening to accounts of abuse men had perpetrated against them or their children. Some men placed a considerable burden of guilt on women who wanted to forget what had happened.
- To minimise the severity of their violence by claiming that their offences were ‘not that bad’ compared to other men’s on the programme.
- To discourage women from seeking support for themselves, by telling them that the project workers blamed women for their own victimisation.

In addition, some men who did not even attend the programme used Agenda’s policy of *not taking men with court cases pending* to put pressure on partners to drop charges.

In response to these criticisms, and having received further financial support from the National Lottery, Agenda has made the following changes to its philosophies, policy and practice (Carnell, 1999):

- Men’s violence was re-conceptualised as purposeful behaviour that functions to control and dominate women.
- The groupwork was refocused on challenging men’s sexist belief systems. Groupwork with perpetrators is now facilitated by two female and one male worker to prevent

collusion. The programme length for perpetrators is now 73 hours over 23 weeks, and is administered by ‘rolling entry’ to prevent waiting lists building up. 50% of men are rejected at the assessment stage.

- A fully resourced service for women was established. This service enables women to receive information about their partner’s participation in the groupwork without fostering unrealistic expectations of change. The *Women’s Support Service* provides six monthly feedback on the effectiveness of the *Male Perpetrators Programme,* without compromising the safety of women partners.
- The WSS was granted separate premises and budgets to the Male Perpetrator Programme. The WSS became proactive in making telephone contacts with all women whose partners were attending groupwork.
- Agenda began providing an interpreter and translation services partly as a response to an increasing number of referrals from African, Caribbean and Asian communities. Agenda also now provides additional support for men with literacy problems.

## Everyman

The Everyman Centre was set up in London in 1990, but recently moved to Plymouth after a period of financial hardship. The Plymouth Everyman project has now been renamed *Ahisma*, and is co-jointly funded by Social Services, the Department of Health, the Tudor Trust and the Probation Service. The London Everyman Centre has re-opened, but relies almost exclusively on client fees for financial support. Everyman workers have always been more eclectic in their approach than many of their contemporaries, providing therapy, education and challenge through one-to-one counselling services, groupwork, and a telephone helpline. Everyman’s management team has strong roots in the anti-sexist men’s movement in the UK, not least through the journal *Achilles Heel*. In its early days, Everyman benefited especially from the endeavours of black workers. Over 25% of male clients are reported to be black (Lees & Lloyd, 1994). At least one of the project managers/workers was an ‘ex-batterer’ himself who has described his own struggle to move away from violence (Daniels, 1999).

Although Everyman has been mostly about ‘men working to change other men’, its work seems to be less the subject of criticism than the early work at Nottingham Agenda. One reason for this is that Everyman has endeavoured not to encroach on the funding of local services for women (Daniels, 1996). Everyman’s funding has often been much lower than comparable local women’s projects, preventing the project from meeting the demand for its services. Another reason may be that Everyman has tended to put ‘masculinity’ in the spotlight more than other projects.

Commenting on what the men who attend the Everyman Centre are like, Paul Wolf-Light (1999a) has argued that:

> whilst no two men are ever identical…the first common thread is shame. Almost without exception, the men feel ashamed about their violence towards their female partners, which in most cases contrasts with a general indifference or even pride in their violence towards men.

Wolf-Light argues that this shame often has more to do with men’s own sense of inadequacy at having broken the taboo against violence towards women than empathy for those they have harmed. Men’s denial and minimisation is often motivated by this shame, as well as a belief in maintaining a traditional image of masculinity in public, low self-esteem and difficulty in tolerating certain vulnerabilities in others. Although emotional illiteracy, dislike of their own solitary company, and general feelings of worthlessness often underpin this intolerance, the men who attend Everyman often find it easier to respond to conflicting emotions with anger, effectively projecting their vulnerabilities onto their partners and attacking them there. For these reasons, interventions at Everyman typically begin with a short period of cognitive analytic therapy (a mode of working that unites insights from cognitive behavioural therapy with the object relations tradition of psychoanalysis), followed by co-counselling styles of groupwork. These interventions enable men to acknowledge and deal with feeling vulnerable, both when they admit the need to change and when partners leave them.

Men typically attend 12 x 1 hour one-to-one counselling sessions, followed by 36 x 2 ½ hour groupwork sessions. Counselling is only provided on the basis that the man commits to cease violent behaviour immediately. When men are violent again they can then be challenged for breaching their own commitment to non-violence (as much as abusing their partners), making it harder for them to offer persuasive justifications for it. In the short-term, male clients are given the opportunity to learn certain behavioural techniques that help them stay calm and remove themselves from confrontational situations[8]. But in the longer term, the Everyman client must not only become more conversant with his cognitive decisions, but also ‘what he feels and how this affects his behaviour and attitudes’ (Wolf-Light, 1999: 145). Men are encouraged to make connections between their past experiences and current cognitions, and to recognise that different choices are now available to them. In encouraging men to own their own feelings of hurt, terror, and loss Everyman workers help their clients to make empathic connections with others, including those to whom they have been violent.

This therapeutic emphasis is combined with a more psycho-educational approach in the groupwork. For example, one of Daniel's (1996) early syllabuses for the groupwork involved sessions on homophobia, sexism, men's liberation, racism, love, parenting, and addictions. Whilst Daniel's clients were forbidden from socialising with each other whilst attending the group, once the 36 weeks were up they were encouraged to become activists for change themselves. Daniels not only used his groups to confront the men about their behaviours and prejudices, but also to help them realise and express more positive emotions in order to give direction to the process of transformation. Workers at Everyman belief that men must be enabled to experience 'genuine remorse' for their abusive behaviour in order to move beyond a purely rational commitment to change, and towards a more holistic, embodied project of transformation. Throughout, men are encouraged to recognise the various forms of oppression that have characterised their own lives as both 'the oppressed' and as 'oppressors' (particularly of women), and to find ways of actively challenging the oppression of others in the future. The findings of City University's research evaluation of Everyman are eagerly awaited.

## 'Gender Awareness' in Wakefield Prison

Although there is a small specialist literature on Sex Offender Treatment Programmes[9] there are very few accounts of work in prison with perpetrators of domestic violence – undoubtedly reflecting the fact that there are few such programmes. David Potts (1996) reflections on the programme he facilitated are the only British example I am aware of. Drawing on his experience on *The Worth Project in Keighley,* Potts set up a groupwork programme, with 12 weekly two hours sessions, facilitated by himself and two female co-workers in Wakefield prison. The group took eight men at a time, many of whom were sex offenders who had completed the prison’s sex offender treatment programme. The programme centred around a number of discussion based exercises aimed at helping men make links between sexist beliefs and their behaviours, handle and express emotion, think about the impact of their experiences on their behaviours and attitudes, address feelings of jealousy, and problematise the macho aspects of prison culture.

The programme was largely designed to make the men more ‘gender-aware’, and is perhaps better viewed as preparation for other courses that might deal more explicitly with abusive behaviour. The groups Potts administered tended to ‘gel’ quickly, not just because the men already knew each other, but also because he and his co-facilitators were responsive to the men’s differing levels of literacy and were able to generate a safe space for men to discuss emotions that they otherwise had to conceal during their imprisonment (see also Sim, 1994). However, Potts experienced tensions between needing to take an ‘overt leadership’ role and enabling less experienced female co-facilitators take the lead. He also experienced added pressures as a consequence of being viewed by staff and inmates as ‘a pretty strange bloke’ for wanting to be involved in this work. Potts confesses that he sometimes relied on his own investments in a rather traditional image of masculinity to gain credibility within the group, i.e. he would speak of his own heterosexual experiences with women, times when he had been drunk, or had a manual job. Potts also points out this work is ‘emotion intensive’ and therefore should not be undertaken unless workers have access to sufficient time and resources for preparation, receive adequate supervision and training, and can opt-out through job rotation schemes when they need to take a break.

U.S. commentators on prison programmes are less sure of their appropriateness and effectiveness. For example, Kathryn Fox's (1999) analysis of the impact of a *Cognitive Self-Change* (CSC) programme on a group of prisoners in Vermont is much less optimistic about the effectiveness of offering such programmes in prison. Fox demonstrates how CSC is buttressed in a philosophy which attributes humans with 'autonomy, choice, and self-responsibility', but then denies group attendees their right to self-understanding. Although one principle of CSC is that 'no thought can be wrong', violence is attributed to 'errors' in thinking that group attendees *must* have made by virtue of their criminality. In Vermont, some prisoners became consciously resistant to the programme, deploying the rhetoric of CSC to validate their own claims to truth. For example, one inmate who was told to write a list of how he could 'think and feel differently' about the harassment he was experiencing at the hands of other prisoners responded angrily, explaining that 'writing lists' would not make the problem go away, and that he would not allow himself to be 'victimized' because *he was 'not a victim'*. Somewhat paradoxically, this statement, used to justify physical retaliation, actually echoed the group-workers' definition of the inmates as 'victimizers' and therefore not 'victims'.

There may also be additional problems when mixing 'violent men' and 'sex-offenders' together on such programmes. Incarcerated men who have been sexually violent often prefer to emphasise the physical side of their abuse, representing themselves as 'hardmen', particularly if they have no convictions for sexual violence (Godenzi, 1994). These men may attempt to indulge both workers and other group attendees into the 'legitimated nonce-bashing' which makes them appear 'tougher than the rest' (Sheath, 1990; Sim, 1994). Conversely, some commentators have observed that gang rapists tend to be more inclined to promote misogyny amongst batterers in their group (O' Sullivan, 1998).

O’Sullivan (1998) argues that carefully managed programmes may help the (solitary) batterer surmount some of his dependency problems, but there is a very real danger if gang-rapists attend the same groups that men will bond around sexually derogatory ideas about women. More serious or experienced offenders can cajole others into their own ways of thinking, or help convince those who have only been violent a few times that what they did was ‘not that bad after all’.

## Discussion

To summarise, those working on the various projects that deal directly with violent men have invaluable experience that the Home Office should draw upon in its endeavours to formulate ‘effective practice’. This experience suggests that there is not one particular way of intervening that can be guaranteed to ‘work’. Effective interventions hinge crucially on the existence of other supporting services, as well as the skills and integrity of programme facilitators. Even the most reputable projects are still in the process of improving their programmes, some ten years after they were first established.

The research evidence suggests that relatively short, pro-feminist cognitive behavioural programmes can be more effective at reducing certain groups of men’s violent behaviour in the immediate-term than other criminal justice interventions. This does not mean that there are not other modes of working with perpetrators that might be equally or more effective and/or appropriate for particular groups of men. Indeed, experience suggests that such interventions are likely to be more effective if men attend voluntarily, outside the criminal justice context, especially when this context includes prison. There is a theoretical rationale for this. As Anne Worrall (1998: 113) explains the Skinnerian principles, upon which many cognitive-behavioural programmes are based, dictate that behaviour modification is unlikely to be fostered by punishment, because:

- punishment can have serious side-effects (such as depression or copying negative behaviour);
- punishment does not help the person to learn new positive behaviour, and;
- people can learn to tolerate punishment.

Thinking about this in the context of domestic violence perpetrator programmes, it is not difficult to see how some men, particularly those who have been repeatedly through the system or are still enduring the various brutalising ‘pains of imprisonment’, might prove highly resistant to having their cognitions and behaviours modified. For this reason, change is unlikely to be promoted by forcing men to attend programmes. Therefore, attrition rates should not be reduced at the price of fostering resistance. DVIP’s has found that it is more effective to work with voluntarily referring men if these men can be gently *persuaded* to invest in completing the programme, and only if a very pro-active partner support service is in operation. Indeed, the partner support work may be the most crucial factor in motivating men to pursue change. As the experience of Nottingham Agenda demonstrates, if partners are unsupported, men can use programme attendance to manipulate women into persisting with a violent relationship. In such cases interventions with men can put women in even greater danger.

However, there are self-evidently some men for whom groupwork is simply not a feasible option. Many projects have highlighted the difficulties of working with men who have alcohol or addiction problems, little motivation to change, and/or are still being violent. Some men deliberately disrupt groups in ways that reduce the prospect of change for other group members. The family violence literature suggests that there are also men who *should be* excluded from interventions for mental health reasons. As Browne and Herbert (1997) point out, clients prone to affective disorders, such as depressive illness, are less likely to respond well to individual therapy, and interpretive counselling can trigger psychosis in those with borderline personalities. Conversely, clients suffering from psychotic illnesses and severe depression usually do not benefit from group therapy until after they have been helped in other ways (e.g. psychiatric medication):

> [T]he schizophrenic is too cut off from other people, the narcissistic are too egocentric, and the paranoid are too suspicious (Browne & Herbert, 1997: 93).

This does not mean that we should simply send these men away, telling them there is nothing we can do. At a minimum, the possibility of help should not be foreclosed, if only to create an opportunity to ensure safe provision for partners and children. If most men (whether violent or otherwise) are likely to be very hesitant to refer themselves to any form of therapeutic or mental health services (Tudor, 1999), then we have an obligation to ensure that early glimmers of motivation to change are fully exploited[10].

The advantage of criminal justice responses is that they can sometimes secure the immediate safety of women and children when all else seems to be failing. But if the UK's experience of inner city disturbances has taught us anything, it should be that tough, macho responses to violent men are likely to be counter-productive in the long run (Campbell, 1993). It is much easier for practitioners to work with men who have ceased being physically violent because there are fewer obligations to breach confidentiality once the immediate safety of the man's partner and children are secured (Morran & Wilson, 1999). But in choosing only to work with such men, practitioners leave aside those probably in most need of help, along with those whose motivation to change needs to be fostered. In reality the process for change is likely to be a slow and cumbersome one for most violent men, and rarely a once and for all accomplishment. Thus, thought needs to be given as to how relapse prevention might operate in this field[11], as well as how we can ensure men's own post-programme support groups retain an anti-oppressive, anti-sexist ethos. If 'ex-batterers' can be persuaded to retain some form of regular contact with programme facilitators after the intervention has ceased, albeit on a voluntary basis, practitioners will stand a greater chance of preventing relapse, and be in a better position to support new partners who suddenly find themselves at risk.

With regard to those men who seem unmotivated to change, there are ways of interviewing at the assessment stage that exploit men's ambivalent feelings about violence, enhancing their motivation to change without incurring defensiveness (see McMurran, 1996). As workers on the Cardiff *Ignition* project argue, more use could be made of these. Rather than forcing the unmotivated onto cognitive-behavioural programmes, we should be looking for alternative forms of interventions for men for whom groupwork is not an option. These alternatives might take the form of interventions informed by dual diagnoses, use of psychiatric and health services, or specialist one-to-one counselling services. Of course, innovation should not be at the expense of ignoring those minimum standards[12] that promote the safety of partners. But procedures and standards should not be unnecessarily exclusionary. Similarly, if we want to know where there are gaps in provision and how interventions with men impact on partners, we should not underestimate the importance of continuing to liase with a variety of services offering support to women and children. Effective practice should never be considered in terms of programme integrity alone.

## Conclusion

Practitioners working to change violent men have a momentous task ahead of them. On the one hand, they must work with the uncomfortable fact that most men simply will not change. Those men who do change will always be battling against overwhelming social and psychological pressures that make relapse a very likely possibility. On the other, practitioners must find ways of working with those men who are only barely motivated to change their behaviour. It would be a pity if men who have found the motivation to seek help for their violence are denied it simply because service providers have been either unable (through lack of resources or adequate information) or unwilling (because of uncritical allegiances to a particular mode of intervention) to offer support in ways that tap those glimmers of motivation to their fullest potential. Without help these men will almost certainly persist with potentially lethal behaviours, imposing abuse on new partners, and ultimately incurring the whole gamut of brutalising, and, so often, counter-productive effects of the criminal justice system.

For the future, those providing perpetrator programmes will need to be explicit about which groups of men they are *actually* working with (as opposed to *want to* work with), as well as the strengths and limitations of their interventions. Rather than constantly aspiring for monopolistic ‘one-size fits all’ provisions, the long term credibility of this work will be better served if project managers can illustrate where needs are not met by current provisions - and then fill these gaps. This is likely to be a difficult task when the tools for measuring effective practice seem to require inflexible implementation of programme designs (to ensure comparability) and too often, relatively meaningless quantification of outcomes that invariably turn out to be statistically insignificant.

One way of overcoming this inflexibility might be for practitioners to pursue action-led research models that have a proven history of developing responsive programmes in this field, and social work more generally. Another might be to devote more energy to providing descriptive case studies, harnessing the well-tuned report writing skills of many practitioners, to document how families were functioning when support was first sought, and what happened during and after help was offered. This may prove a more constructive and meaningful way of ensuring we are actually comparing ‘like’ cases with ‘like’. It may also expose more positive outcomes. If we are able to capture the complex predicaments and problems facing those families in which men are being violent when they approach practitioners for help, along with something of these men’s histories, evidence of reductions in abusive behaviour and/or enhanced feelings of safety amongst individual women and children will be more readily recognised for the significant achievements that they are.

Increasingly, practitioners in this field are working to ‘reduce men’s violence’ in order to ‘increase women’s safety’. This work may contribute to challenging masculinity, although this is not necessarily so, as Potts illustrates in his account of the tactics he used to gain credibility with his clients. In Potts’ defence, it is perhaps worth highlighting that he is one amongst few practitioners who actually queries the relationship between those doing the educating and those who are being re-educated. As Richard Collier (1998: 173) points out, we need to ask what we are hoping our clients will turn into. Are we ‘rehabilitating’ abusers to become ‘normal’ men? By ‘normal men’ do we mean men like us? And if so, is it either possible or desirable for clients to become men like their group facilitators, probation officers, or prison officers?

Differences of class, race, educational background, and age between workers and clients make it all the more imperative that the common ground around power and control *and* feelings of love, desire and vulnerability in heterosexual relationships remain on programme syllabuses. Indeed, it is these issues which will prevent male practitioners in this field from setting themselves above and beyond the problematisisation of men and masculinity. It would certainly be a shame if the language of ‘confronting offending’ ‘risk assessment’, ‘targeting of response’ and ‘cost-effectiveness’ (Buckley, 1999; Williams, 1996) were to overshadow the more radical visions of transformation that inspired activists to develop this field some ten years ago. On this note, we might do well to remember that the Duluth intervention focussed not only on the ‘power and control wheel’, but also an ‘equality and respect wheel’. One of the most difficult tasks facing those working with men is how to demonstrate ‘respect’ for those men they desperately want to ‘change’; after all, it is respect for the differences they witness in other people that is so often lacking amongst those men who blame their partners for their own victimisation. Moreover, if the projects of reducing re-offending and enhancing women’s safety are to become ones of ‘reconstructing masculinities’ we are going to have to motivate these men to take the message of ‘respecting difference’ to other men they know – their fathers, brothers, friends and neighbours – and to negotiate peacefully the potentially destructive and defensive responses the delivery of that message will very often arouse.

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[1] This may be particularly true for female group facilitators whose perspectives often come to be perceived by group members as representative of all women (Cayouette, 1999)

[2] The European Union now offers grants to support projects which aim to prevent violence, as well as research investment (notably through its DAPHNE initiative) to investigate and disseminate information about the effectiveness of this work.

[3] Reproduced from Healey et al, 1998.

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[4] Slightly lower than stated in the original ‘Research Findings’, Dobash et al, 1996b.

[5] Given that the ‘confrontational’ interviewing method (see Cavanagh & Lewis, 1996) used in the research elicited only ‘thin and impoverished’ narratives (Dobash et al, 1999: 111), and that only half of the interviews were transcribed (Dobash et al, 1999: 6), one might conclude that valuable opportunities to assess whether these men might have been better motivated by different styles of intervention, interviewing or assessment, were missed.

[6] Renamed the ‘City of Edinburgh Domestic Violence Probation Project’.

[7] Jim Wilson himself was an ex-batterer who used his personal experience to confront other men’s denials.

[8] Strategies may vary from breathing and relaxation exercises, taking ‘time-outs’ and keeping a ‘six foot distance’, to getting the man to find somewhere else to live.

[9] see Worrall, 1998, chapter 9, for a concise summary.

[10] A further implication of this is that we need to be thinking about a continuum of mental health in our constructions of ‘normal men’ or ‘normal masculinity’. Evidence of personality disorder and psychiatric illness amongst batterer populations (see Dutton & Starzomski, 1997) does not prove that men who are violent have nothing in common with the general population. Rather the batterer population display traits or psychic tendencies that most men experience less frequently and with less intensity (see also Parker et al, 1997).

[11] see Jennings,1990 for a discussion of the rationale for, and practice implications of, such an approach.

[12] See CHANGE/Working with Men, 2000 for a copy the National Practitioners’ Network minimum standards.

# Chapter 9

# Conclusion:

# Men's Narratives, Psychoanalysis & Morality

> *The bewildered and disorientated self finds itself alone in the face of moral dilemmas without good (let alone obvious) choices, unresolved moral conflicts and the excruciating difficulty of being moral*. (Bauman: 1995: 249)

Before, during and after undertaking the fieldwork for this thesis I routinely experienced the moral disorientation Zygmunt Bauman insists is characteristic of our time. A host of ethical 'what ifs' and 'maybes' frequently fettered my attempts to clarify how I should balance my respective obligations to those whom I was researching, the organisation from which my sample was derived, my sponsors, and the academic community at large. Could I promise confidentiality given that my thesis would ultimately become a publicly accessible document? Was 'informed consent' a desirable and realisable objective? Was it possible or necessary to alert research participants to all the potential consequences of making their disclosures? Under what conditions would I deliberately breach confidentiality? Was my thesis likely to prove sufficiently ‘useful’? Would this ‘usefulness’ justify both the intrusion I was making into other people’s lives, and the economic and social investment myself and others were putting into it?

Reassuringly, I found many methodology textbooks explaining that this moral disorientation is both a common and desirable experience in social research involving the study of ‘deviant populations’ (see for example, O’Connell & Layder, 1994; Hobbs & May, 1993). Indeed, there is a persuasive case for arguing that good social science is most likely to be produced when researchers keep ethical quandaries to the fore throughout the research process (see Homan, 1991; Norris, 1993: 136; Punch, 1994). Working through such quandaries not only increases the accountability of the research and ensures that the most damaging ‘trade-offs’ are avoided through their anticipation, but also adds to the interpretive weight of the analysis by motivating the researcher to constantly reassess the world from the perspective of the various parties with whom the research is concerned (Mason, 1996: 29-34).

In this context, a broadly consequentialist position on ethics becomes unavoidable. The researcher is constantly faced with situations in which moral absolutes must be abandoned in order to minimise the research participants exposure to harm and risks. This was very much my experience of the research process. On the one hand, I was committed to doing as much as I could to protect those participating in my research from incurring negative consequences as a product of their disclosures. On the other hand, my commitment was a conditional one, tempered by an unwillingness to stand by and do nothing if I discovered that my interviewees were intending to cause themselves, myself, or others significant harm, and recognition of my own limited ability to keep respondents ‘fully informed’ and their disclosures confidential. I knew that my thesis’ exposure to academic scrutiny would ultimately undermine my capacity to maintain the complete anonymity of my interviewees. In fact, I warned all of my interviewees that there was a slight possibility that someone would be able to identify them from what they had said at some later date[1].

Some of the moral dilemmas I encountered in taking this position were peculiar to my particular mode of analysis, particularly my preference for psychoanalytic interpretation. What right had I got to psychoanalyse my interviewees’ accounts? Who am I to claim to know something more about the emotional truths of the experiences of relative strangers than those strangers claim to know themselves? Should I have attempted to convey my analytic intentions to my interviewees? Would they have understood? And if, so would this jeopardise the research process? The problem the narrative interviewer (presuming a defended subject) and the psychoanalytic therapist share is that they can never know exactly what questions they will ask nor how they will be able to use the responses they are offered. But this is probably where the similarities end.

Methodology textbooks typically forewarn researchers of the dangers of conflating interviewing with therapy. In psychoanalytic therapy, the fee-paying analysand grants permission to the *therapist* to analyse. The analysand makes this agreement on the premise that the therapist is working to induce positive changes in them that they cannot induce on their own (Kvale, 1999). The therapists’ diagnosis is based on hours of conversation, sometimes conducted over a period of years. Through these conversations the therapist will have had numerous opportunities to try out his or her interpretations on the analysand. Further discussion of ‘findings’ is rarely an issue beyond the realm of an exclusive ‘professional’ circle, maintaining strict clinical standards of confidentiality. Clearly, the contract between the researcher and the interviewee is qualitatively different to the therapeutic encounter. The social researcher cannot (and, therefore, should not) promise to help ‘change’ the interviewee for the better - even if this is always a possibility (Thurston & Benyon, 1995). The discussion of distressing events may be a helpful experience for the interviewee[2], but the researcher has no way of ensuring this. Not only is the research relationship usually too brief and too directive to be truly therapeutic, but the researcher is likely to lack the skills, commitment and resources to counsel the researched, should this seem necessary. Social researchers make their analysis on much scantier evidence than clinicians, and then use this analysis in the service of broader social scientific objectives. These objectives may not coincide with the interviewee’s interests. In short, the research relationship may expose the interviewee to risks and scrutiny they had not anticipated and might not consent to had they known in advance what questions they would be asked and how their answers would be used.

As I explained in chapter 2, the main concessions I made to my interviewees were to cover their expenses and provide them with audio cassette copies of what they had said. I thought I had a moral obligation to ensure that that my respondents were not out of pocket as a consequence of their participation. I also thought that some of my interviewees might find a copy of what they had said useful in the personal development work they were pursuing in therapy. The cassettes also offered them some form of safeguard against misrepresentation in the unlikely event that their disclosures were traced back to them. However, at the time of my interviewing I was unclear as to how I would analyse the responses I received, and would have probably questioned the desirability of saying too much about this had I been able to.

Having made my analysis I consider it neither analytically useful nor morally desirable to track down my interviewees and show them what sense I made of their narratives. For example, I am not sure whether Scott (chapter 4) would welcome receiving my analysis of his impotence problems, nor whether Matt (also chapter 4) would like to be reminded of the relationship difficulties he was going through when I met him. It is very possible that both these men will have moved on, for better or worse, and will not want to dig over their pasts again. Moreover, showing my interviewees my analysis would neither prove nor discredit my arguments. If my interviewees disagreed with my interpretation of their narratives one would then have to consider whether the disagreement disproved my analysis or merely re-mobilised the interviewees' (and possibly my own) psychic defences. Indeed, it is a common-sense observation that one person's perceptiveness can make another defensive, as when people use the cliché 'that was too close to the bone'. More likely, many of my interviewees would find the social scientific discourses in which this thesis is buttressed impenetrable, and would be put off engaging with my analysis by both the complexity and density of the argument pursued. Paul Willis (1977) encountered a similar phenomenon. Willis discovered that the 'lads' he studied enjoyed reading the descriptive bits about themselves, but could not make sense of the analysis he had made regarding education and the reproduction of class inequality.

The fact that my analysis has not been validated by my research subjects is not something for which I feel inclined to apologise. The social scientist's role need not be reduced to 'giving voice' to silenced populations - although this may sometimes be a valid objective. The social scientist, although no longer a 'legislator', is assumed to be able to offer something more by way of interpretation to the voices of the researched, whether this be through statistical, political-economic or psychoanalytic modes of interpretation, than the researched can say about themselves (Bauman, 1987). Those evaluating this thesis will thus need to consider how persuasive, necessary and useful the additional level of interpretation I have added is, as well as whether the intellectual contribution this thesis makes constitutes a sufficient return on the material investment required to produce it, and worthy justification for the potential risks to which it exposed research participants. To aid the reader's assessment, what follows is a short summary of this thesis' contribution to the understanding of men's lives, masculinities, and violence against women.

My primary objective throughout this thesis has been to suspend judgement about the rights and wrongs of certain behaviours in order to chart an empathic understanding of the social and psychic dynamics that make some men violent whilst other men are not, and still others actively funnel their energies into challenging other men. Much academic writing about men's violence either explicitly or implicitly eschews this as a legitimate objective. As Colin Sumner (1996: 3-4) observes many theories of violence are

> best understood as the censure of some forms of human practice as unacceptable forms and levels of aggression...Our implicit explanations are structured more by our desire to condemn than the facts of the case, and the context in which judgement is made can colour all.

My argument has been that some criminologists' inability or unwillingness to separate the 'desire to condemn' from the explanatory task has led them to make broad-sweeping generalisations about men's vested interest in keeping women in a state of fear: generalisations that are simply not born out when one is open to a more nuanced and sensitive reading of men's narratives. Throughout my research I have tried to resist this desire to condemn, although it has sometimes been strong, and to interrogate the details of individuals' narratives for meaning – whether definitive or ambiguous. In particular I have found it useful to test out how particular sentences 'fit' within the context of the whole of the told story; whether contradictions make more sense when seen within the broader context of individuals' particular histories of biographically driven anxieties and desires[3]. In so doing I have attempted to evoke the experiences of individual men - 'fantastical' and 'embodied' - to capture a more contradictory sense of masculinity than most sociologically inclined studies have hitherto produced. In short, I have not just been trying *document* the perspectives of other men as these men would tell them. My aim has been to elucidate those elements of experience which often escape verbalisation in men's accounts, to demonstrate that there are 'emotional truths' which research subjects are not always able to consciously 'mentalise', 'think' or 'conceptualise', let alone 'speak'.

Most controversially, the language I have deployed to accomplish this task has borrowed heavily from Kleinian psychoanalysis. I have drawn particularly on those psychoanalytically informed social theorists who argue that the capacity to 'contain' experience and to organise thinking is built upon 'an emotional receptivity to the experience of otherness' and a capacity to tolerate 'ambiguity and confusion' (Elliot, 1996: 109-110). Anthony Elliot (1996: 110) captures well the conceptual links between the work of Melanie Klein and Wilfred Bion needed to make this theoretical leap:

> This capacity for ambivalence allows the individual to experience itself as a subject that creates its own thoughts and feelings, to develop a sense of responsibility for its actions, to engage with others as subjects, and properly to own loving and hating feeling-states in interpersonal relations. In short, this is the Kleinian notion of the depressive position, now modified by Bion to underscore the point that the capacity for thinking is essential to this development of reflective subjectivity. In this psychological state, in which the pain of loss and guilt is made bearable through mourning, it is the

> capacity for thinking which permits the desiring subject to mediate a space between symbol and symbolized…a recognition of the independent existence of the object.

My argument has been that eruptions of violence against intimates often occur when this capacity to entertain both loving and hating feelings at the same time is either not present or is temporarily immobilised. My suspicion has been that the answer to the $64 million dollar question of why men are the primary, although by no means exclusive, perpetrators of domestic violence owes much to:

1. The way in which the deeply embedded Western idealisation of rationality, autonomy and mastery manifests itself in the unconscious fantasies of many men by precluding the possibility of emotional receptivity and tolerance of difference, *and*;
2. The way in which the assumption of ‘heterosexual complementarity’ constructs the feminine as Other in many men’s fantasies. This, when combined with the Kleinian idea that people operating from the paranoid-schizoid position split significant love objects into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ before projectively disowning them, helps explain why women (amongst others) are often experienced as both threatening and lesser in men’s fantasies. This splitting renders women (and others) suitable targets for destructive impulses when terrifying feelings of vulnerability suddenly return from their repressed place in the man’s unconscious, especially when the myth of masculine mastery is exposed for what it is.

I have borrowed these ideas from the psychoanalytic work of Stephen Frosh (1994) and Jessica Benjamin (1995). Neither of these authors discount the significance of the material inequalities that prevent some, but by no means all, women from leaving abusive relationships. But what Frosh and Benjamin add is a crucial motivational dimension. This motivational dimension deals with those intersubjective dynamics of desire and dependency that sustain relationships of domination and submission, including most heterosexual relationships. It is this dimension which is usually lacking in those theories that reduce men’s violence to an instrumental accumulation of social power. My argument has been that adding this dimension helps explain the persistence of violence towards women in spite of the increasing taboos against such behaviour and the rather unfashionable status of traditional and/or patriarchal masculinity in the eyes of many men. As I hope I have demonstrated, the various discourses surrounding the ‘family man’ often position men as masterfully rational subjects, whether as protectors and providers, good disciplinarians, or moral leaders. It is when this masterfulness is exposed as a fraud that the experience of disorientation is rendered ‘bewildering’ and threatening, rather than something pleasurable or indicative of our shared humanity.

The consequence of this is that many men routinely encounter situations in which they struggle to balance the tensions between ‘self-assertion’ and ‘receptivity to difference’. This tends to manifest itself in excessive defensiveness; the kind of splitting and projecting Klein depicted so well. As my case study analyses show, many men criticise their female partners for being unable to cope with the emotional ambivalence, chaos, disquiet, they themselves find unsettling. The reader might recall how it was often those men who most needed everything to ‘quieten down’ who would respond in either highly emotionally charged, irrational and/or destructive ways to situations in which they felt things were getting ‘out of control’. Jack’s rescuing, Simon’s ‘being solid’, Mark’s feeling that his ideas had always ‘got to be the better thing’, and Gary’s attempts to make Rebecca calm, all suggest these men had difficulties in contemplating a loss of control and struggled to reconcile loving and hating feeling-states in their interpersonal relations. My point in making this argument was not to suggest some inner masculine core, but to highlight recognisable similarities in both violent and non-violent men's experiences; to draw attention to a more recognisably contradictory psychosocial notion of masculinity in the hope that this might form the basis of a more engaging critique of men and men's violence.

But if all of these men engage in 'splitting', the question remains why some men ultimately manage to contain psychic contradictions, to operate predominantly within the depressive position, without physically projecting their vulnerabilities onto their partners. In short, why are some men better able to cope with, contain, or manage threats to their vulnerability than others? Part of the explanation I suggested for this was a class-based one. My sample reflected a finding reproduced in both domestic violence surveys and criminal careers research alike (Farrington, 1997; Mirlees-Black, 1999), namely, that men who are violent are disproportionately poorly educated, lower-class, and from troubled family backgrounds, having more than their fair share of psychiatric, drug and alcohol problems. The advantage of using a psychosocial approaches to explain this phenomenon is that one is not forced to reduce the complexities underlying people's various biographical trajectories to a single personality variable (cf. Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1990) or a series of causal factors. Rather it is possible, within the model of subjectivity I have been advocating, to recognise the impact of social deprivation, social exclusion, bullying, and the routine humiliation experienced by many young men, on certain *individual's capacities to deal with emotional disarray* and *the collective cultural responses of other similarly situated individuals within their communities*. To this end, some men's investment in 'tough' masculinities are neither reducible to a series of purely rational responses nor purely defensive reactions. More likely the exhibition of 'tough' masculinities is a product of individual men's own routine experiences of anxiety, risk and danger within certain social relationships over the course of their lives. The continuity of men's responses to these experiences is sustained, in part, by the collective positioning of others within similar discourses that render threatening or anxiety-provoking experiences meaningful, and hence manageable, as well as the intersubjective dynamics between the individual and his significant others. Hence, I argued that Dan (chapter 7) positioned himself as a 'hardman' as a rational response to risk within his community, because it helped him defend against anxieties concerning his reputation as a poor provider and a wife-beater, *and* because it positioned him as somewhat better than other men in his neighbourhood – notably the man for whom his wife was thinking of leaving him. Dan's response was by no means unusual for men of his class and locality. Rather it was the culturally recognisable quality of his particular response that rendered it an empowering one in the context of his economic disadvantage and criminalisation.

Using this form of explanation, I have posited a much more tenuous relationship between 'masculinities' and the 'enactment of physical violence' than sociological criminology usually allows. Thus, whilst Messerschmidt offers us no explanation as to why most unemployed men do not accomplish their masculinity by doing domestic violence (Jefferson, 1995), I am suggesting that there are many culturally endorsed ways in which such men can experience and/or defend against the anxiety incurred by their loss of 'breadwinner status'. Violence is only one of these responses. For example, some men position themselves as fathers who are able to 'be there' emotionally for their children and deride a narrowly 'breadwinner' conception of fatherhood. Others project blame for their redundancy onto the state, their teachers, or their parents. Still others will argue they are good 'protectors', 'disciplinarians' or 'moral guardians', and further that they are not as bad as those lazy and abusive men routinely demonised by the media and politicians alike.

Clearly, some men will be able to resort to these kinds of defences more credibly than others, either because of what is known about them or because of material constraints. Further, each man's particular pattern of investments will depend upon his own unique history of anxiety and desire, his socio-economic status, and the ongoing intersubjective dynamics between him and others who lend meaning to his situation. Significantly though, many men will not respond by locating the source of their anxiety within some 'crisis' within themselves or their masculinity. Many will find it significantly safer to split off from feelings of vulnerability by projecting 'blame' onto others.

The difficulty comes in theorising the unique patterns of anxiety and desire in the lives of individual men, particularly the significance of early gender development on these patterns. To what extent are the child's relationships with its parents more determining than the a priori presence of pervasive social discourses, the 'cultural fictions' of gender? To some extent, putting the question this way sets up a false dichotomy between the social and the psychic. Anxiety and desire do not exist in an asocial, ahistorical vacuum. Desire is always *for* something, some other socially significant object, whether or not that social significance is constituted pre-discursively (as in the infant's desire for its mother's warmth and nourishment), or culturally and historically (as in the discourse of 'romantic love'). But, to the extent to which criminologists, including those interested in masculinity, have tended to rely on rather unspecified notions of social bonding and social learning, I think there is a strong case to be made for urging greater empirical and theoretical attention to the question of child development within the discipline. Indeed, as I argued in chapter 7, psychoanalysts, masculinity theorists and critical legal scholars alike need to devote attention to the question of how, if at all, the 'good-enough father' differs from the 'good-enough mother', if only to recapture some of the political terrain now being occupied by those claiming to be the most ‘wonderful fathers in the world’. Critical studies of family life need to devote attention to the question of which social and psychic conditions best enable children to assert themselves without denigrating the difference in others, and whether there is any particular sex-specific dimension to this.

For some readers this detour into the psychic will no doubt prove a step too far from criminology’s beaten track. It involves testing inferences about the fantasy lives of human beings that cannot be ‘proven’ in the deductive sense of the word. Others will see this as a yet more unaffordable theoretical indulgence - first ‘male sex roles’, then ‘masculinities’, then ‘subjectivities’ – hindering the urgent business of helping women and children suffering men’s violence. Still others will agree that psychoanalysis has much to offer a discipline that still conceives of humans as entirely rational choosers or blank slates governed by discourse, but may argue that the Kleinian view I have invoked is far too mechanistic. Perhaps criminology is the wrong starting point for asking these questions.

I have some sympathies with all of these critiques. On the one hand, I have collected material about men’s lives that is much more detailed and nuanced than many doing research in this field have had at their disposal when they made their policy recommendations. On the other hand, I find myself dogged with doubts as to whether it is possible to develop a good enough understanding of anyone’s life based on a few hours in an interview room. Perhaps we should assume that some of these questions are simply unanswerable without making morally unjustifiable and economically costly intrusions into other people’s lives? Maybe the money would be better spent on doing those interventions we know to work. But then again, as I argued in chapter 8, the meaning of the term ‘works’ in this field is a highly contentious one. I have few ready answers for those practitioners who ask what they can do to stop men’s violence, and I sometimes wonder how helpful it is to tell those new to this field that I think the prospects for immediate and radical change, either at an individual or societal level, are remote. In fact, despite my objections to many radical feminist assumptions about men’s subjectivities, I feel somewhat perturbed by the way in which the agendas of many one time ‘radicals’ have been assimilated within the British government’s rather mangerialist approach to social change. Whilst the government is taking the problem of ‘domestic violence’ more seriously than ever before, practitioners are being encouraged to only undertake those interventions that can be proven to ‘work’, quickly and cost-effectively. One danger here is that those who turn down the state’s offer of assistance, and/or find it unhelpful will find themselves blamed for their own victimisation and/or failure to change. However politically uncomfortable it is to say, many men and women do endure abusive relationships not because they lack the financial resources to leave or because they fear for their safety if they try to leave, but because they are emotionally dependent on their partners. This argument goes for those who perpetrate abuse as much as those who endure it. To this end, I am very much in agreement with Paul Wolf-Light (1999b) in his insistence that practitioners working with men and women in abusive relationships need to overcome the taboo with regards to talking about ‘love’. ‘Offending behaviour’ may well be the legitimate concern of the criminal justice system, but interpersonal violence is invariably motivated by human needs, not just ‘criminogenic’ ones. Psychoanalysis is one of the few critical discourses that enables us to think about these human needs, including their radical and conservative potentials (see Kovel, 1981; Rustin, 1991).

I also agree that psychoanalysts can be too self-satisfied, too inward-looking, too content to assume they already ‘know’, and above all, too guarded when it comes to explaining in comprehensible terms *how* they know (Frosh, 1997c). Psychoanalysis has a lengthy history of lending scientific legitimacy to the social norms its new protagonists now seek to question. As Stephen Frosh (1997c, ch.8) observes many of the radical insights now being made by those at the interfaces of feminism and cultural studies are inspired by academics' awareness of the extent to which psychoanalysis has historically lent scientific credibility to misogyny, pathologised homosexuality, and by and large ignored ethnicity. Yet, I cannot agree more with the late John Hood-Williams' (2001) argument 'that at present there seems to be no ready alternative discourse to psychoanalysis that can offer an account of the interior life of human subjects'. Of course, as Hood-Williams was well aware, psychoanalysis offers several competing toolkits which can help us to 'prise open' - to borrow a term from Jefferson (1994a) - the whole issue of the relationship between the social and the psychic. The contradictions and points of divergence between the various psychoanalytic perspectives can be used to prevent the business of analysis from being confounded by dogmatism, as I hope I demonstrated in chapters 5 and 6.

To conclude, whether or not criminologists seek to improve upon these psychoanalytic discourses, the implications of the critique of the rational unitary subject are too wide-ranging for criminologists to overlook. First, this critique should encourage us to reimagine our fixation with social 'causes' onto a terrain in which individuals, with their own biographically unique histories of anxiety and desire, come together, renegotiating, resolving and creating anew tensions between the social and the psychic. Second, this critique urges a rethinking of the terms of the debate between advocates of 'wounded psyche' explanations and those who see men, whether all men - or just a minority of demonised 'yobs' and 'dangerous strangers' – as the illegitimate 'purveyors of power'[4]. Men's experiences of masculinity are not one or the other. They are both/and. Men who are violent may experience feelings of considerable social power, as well as a terrifying fear of powerlessness. Third, this critique should discourage criminologists from reifying certain social categories. The dichotomising of men as offenders and women and children as victims has no doubt helped put domestic violence on the political map. But this has also fuelled the demonisation of women and children convicted of violence, and colluded in mystifying the differences between 'dangerous men' and 'family men'[5]. The critique of the rational unitary subject should make us suspicious of all studies that rely on overstating the pervasive effect of discourses of violence and/or decontextualising attitudes from complex narratives. By taking on a more complicated notion of subjectivity criminologists will hopefully contribute in some small part to a politics of change in which the human capacity to contain excruciating ambivalence and contradiction, to cope with the many bewildering 'truths' intrinsic to human suffering, is enhanced through understanding, rather than by pushing uncomfortable complexities and doubts to the margins of the social scientific enterprise.

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[1] My impression is that my forewarning often facilitated the negotiation of consent to be interviewed, convincing interviewees that I was sufficiently professional, prepared, and trustworthy. It also helped me resolve some difficult ethical dilemmas in the field, the most significant example being the time when a near suicidal interviewee volunteered his permission for me to discuss his case with his probation officer, knowing his disclosures to have put me in a potentially compromising situation.

[2] See especially Hollway and Jefferson (2000, chapter 5) for a compelling critique of the assumption that the experience of 'upset' is necessarily 'harmful'.

[3] See also Catherine Bennett's (2000) response to Andrea Dworkin (2000) on the significance of using evidence to negotiate between the multiple emotional truths that surround the experience and fear of sexual violence.

[4] See Robinson (1996) for a concise summary of this debate. See also media discussions (i.e. Cameron, 2000) of boys' and girls' differential school performances, for a recent example of the evocation of such binaries, as well as the persisting neglect of the significance of class and race.

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[5] It has also unhelpfully elided many children's interests with their mothers', in spite of power differentials in terms of both rights and resources between them (Featherstone & Trinder, 1997).

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