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MA (Hons) Anthropology and Gender Studies

MA Gender Studies

The Road Home: Masculinity, Vulnerability, and Violence

A narrative study using music elicitation with men who had childhood experience of domestic violence/abuse and on-road/gang-involvement

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Abstract

**Key words:** Domestic violence and abuse (DVA), on-road, gangs, gender performance, masculinities, Connell, narrative research

This thesis focuses on the narratives of men who experienced domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in childhood and have been on-road and gang-involved. Narrative interviews were aided by music elicitation. Connell’s (1987, 2005) approach was used to explore the changing ways the participants’ expressed multiple and diverse masculinities. This analytic focus was supported by the application of intersectionality to focus on the impact of race, ethnicity, class on gender performance. The findings illustrated how the participants went through changing constructs of masculinity through the life-course. Initially they inhabited subordinated masculinity at home when experiencing DVA, to emerging protest masculinity on-road. At the point of recovery and desistance both marginalised masculinity and complicit masculinity were identified.

The key thematic areas that emerged in the narratives were; masculinity; vulnerability; violence. These threads interlinked throughout and resulted in new understanding of how they interact. Specifically, I expanded Connell’s notion of protest masculinity, to explore how it was implicated with a shadow-self of vulnerable masculinity. I propose that they are in a symbiotic relationship, always co-existing. Violence was ever-present in the participants’ lives, through victimisation of DVA in childhood, to agentic and instrumental use of violence when on-road and gang-involved. The changing relationship to violence both caused and reflected the changes in masculinities through the life-course. I used Anderson’s
(1999) ‘code of the street’ to discuss the changing roles of violence from home to on-road. Ultimately this thesis contributes to wider knowledge around gender theory, gender performance, and gender-based-violence. It also adds to an understanding of the way in which children actively, and reflexively, experience domestic violence and abuse in childhood.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my three daughters, Frida, Brooke, and Astrid.

May you believe you can do anything you put your mind to.
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My first heartfelt thanks goes to the men who have spoken to me as part of this study. Without you sharing your stories this PhD would not have been possible. I was struck by your courage and openness, sharing with me the highs and lows of your lives with good faith that it may be used to improve things for others in similar situations. I heard your stories and I will endeavour to make it count.

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The idea for this study came out of conversations with Charlie Rigby, a gang-outreach worker who helped me see this gap in knowledge when I was working for Standing Together Against Domestic Violence. At that time Anthony Wills and Sally Jackson were great mentors and offered me opportunities to learn and stretch myself in policy work. I also acknowledge with thanks my former manager when I worked at a DVA refuge, Vivien Harvey, who urged me to find my voice. I finally feel I am beginning to.

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Definitions

I did not present the participants with the below definitions during the research. Instead I asked them to self-define as experiencing domestic violence and abuse (DVA), on-road and gang-involvement. However, as a point of reference for the thesis I have drawn on the definitions outlined below.

Domestic violence and abuse (DVA)

The working definition of DVA, that is a point of reference in the thesis, is the UK Government’s definition;

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological; physical; sexual; financial; emotional.

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim

(Home Office, 2013).
Gang Involvement

Classifying what constitutes a gang has been an ongoing task for academics, law enforcers and governments over recent years. There has been little consensus among experts on what the defining features are of a youth gang (O’Brien et al., 2013). One way academics have worked around this issue is to promote an acceptance of definitional looseness, which has promoted a richness and variety in the research (Ball & Curry, 1995). Some gang scholars note that, although there are similarities between diverse gangs, no two are exactly alike (Deuchar, 2018). With this ambiguity in mind, I have cautiously drawn on the definition that the UK Government currently uses. According to this definition a gang is;

A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who;

(1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group,

(2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence,

(3) identify with or lay claim over territory,

(4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and

(5) are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.

(HM Government, 2011; The Centre for Social Justice, 2009)
On-road

The term ‘on-road’ is also meaningful as an alternative term to gangs, after previous empirical research indicated that young people could easier relate to it (Young, 2016). On-road does not only refer to gang-involvement, but serves more as a broader term that refers to both a physical space of the streets, as well as a, ‘way of being in the world for young people in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods’ (Young, 2016, p. 10). Young people themselves use the term on-road to refer to a catch-all of behaviours including gang-involvement, but also, ‘to associate with a group of people who regard the street as a social space in which to ‘hang out’ or the illegal drug economy’ (Young, 2016, p. 11). It is a phrase which allows for the ‘complexity and fluidity of urban street life’ (Young, 2016, p. 11). Gunter (2010) also characterized on-road as defined by violence, criminality, and low-level drug dealing.

In this research project, I used the term ‘on-road’ alongside the term ‘gang-involved’ throughout. Participants tended to refer to being on-road as being involved with the wider aspects of street culture and low-level criminality including drug-dealing. Whereas the gang aspects were those which were the group-oriented activities which were organised or facilitated by elders on the estate, thus included the aspects of retribution, as well as larger-scale criminality including organised robbery.
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Publications by the Candidate


Journal of Gender-Based Violence


URL:https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/published-reviews/childrens-experience-of-domestic-abuse-and-criminality-a-literature-review/


1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the narratives of men who experienced both domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in childhood, as well as on-road and gang-involvement. I aimed to understand the ways in which men’s masculine identities are shaped through adversity. Moreover, this research specifically explored how these aspects of male identity are implicated with intersections of race, ethnicity and class. Resulting from the research I have developed recommendations for front-line practice. These have already been shared with DVA charities and central government via the Office of the Victims Commissioner for England and Wales, who have taken great interest in the findings.

The approach taken for the research were life-history inspired narrative interviews (Plummer, 2001), aided by music elicitation (Allett, 2010). The interviews were carried out with men who identified as survivors of childhood domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and on-road and gang-involvement. Eight individuals participated in the study and shared details of their lives through retrospective narratives. The analytic focus was on the way the participants’ expressed their identities, in particular their gender performance. To explore this I used Connell’s (1987, 2005) analytic framework to explore the way structures of gender relations and diverse masculinities were expressed through the life course. I found that the participants initially expressed subordinate masculinity, whilst living with the perpetrator of DVA, to shifting towards protest masculinity. However, these identities were affected by the intersections of race, ethnicity, and class, which shaped these main two types of masculinity performance. When the narratives were considered in
depth it became clear that the participants enacted multiple masculinities across their ‘masculine biographies’ (Goodey, 1997). The participants talked at length about their lives and the changing ways they shaped their masculine identities as they grew older, including the pressures and expectations that they felt in relation to the violence that they had experienced. It became clear in the narratives that the participants used violence with peers as a way to seek to regain a sense of power and respect, that had been lacking when living with DVA. Using Connell’s analytic frame to focus on masculinities shed light on the specific ways they dealt with the DVA and showed how they attempted to subvert their subordinate masculinity by performing protest masculinity outside of the home; moving from a victimised to seemingly agentic position in relation to violence. The threads that run throughout the thesis are masculinity, vulnerability and violence. I particularly explore the ways in which these aspects interacted in the men’s narratives.

1.1 Research Rationale

Through my professional work in the DVA sector I became aware of a gap in knowledge around the intersection of childhood DVA and gang-involvement. Over the preceding ten years I have worked in all aspects of the gender-based-violence sector, including rape crisis, community support services, a DVA refuge, as well as in policy and training. During my career I received substantial training in safeguarding and support (outlined fully in Appendix five). Most recently I held a post working on the coordinated community response to DVA in West London, with a particular responsibility for children and health. In this role I worked with a gang-outreach support worker. He made me aware of a high prevalence of DVA in the
backgrounds of the gang-involved men he was supporting. After searching for more information, I found both Home Office as well as third-sector policy documents indicated a co-prevalence, however DVA was often conflated with other risk factors. I got a sense that little was known about the individuals who live at this intersection. As I investigated this topic more, I noted that there was no existing study which focused on the lived experience of men who have experienced both DVA at home in childhood and on-road/gang-involvement, in the UK or elsewhere.

A recent large scale survey has suggested that almost one quarter of children in the UK will experience DVA by eighteen years old (Bently et al. 2016). Numerous qualitative reviews have concluded that exposure to DVA in childhood can result in a wide range of psychological, emotional, behavioural, social, and academic problems (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003). In recent years there has been an increased focus on hearing children’s experiences through qualitative research too (Radford et al., 2011). There have also been studies focusing on adults who talk retrospectively about the impact that childhood DVA had on them (Hague, Harvey, & Willis, 2012; Mullender et al., 2002). Much recent research has focused on the positive and empowering narratives that young people tell about how they coped with their experiences (Callaghan, Alexander, Sixsmith, & Fellin, 2015; Katz, 2016).

What is unique to this study is that it shines a light on the participants’ home experiences immediately preceding and alongside their life on-road and gang-involved. My research offers an understanding of the nuanced ways this process is navigated. There was not always a physical departure from home to on-road but rather a mental and emotional shift. Many found that becoming gang-involved offered them the security, and a relative predictability and agency, that their childhood home could not with DVA present. Significantly, it also offered a space to
regain a sense of respect, power, and of an agentic masculinity that was not available whilst residing with the DVA perpetrator. A feminist approach informed my thesis. This situates it within a wider movement of feminist research into DVA, which has developed and interrogated the experiences of women with a view to enhancing service provision in a neglected, underfunded and sensitive area of social policy. My focus on boys and young men supplements this knowledge base and enhances an understanding of gender-specific experiences of DVA in childhood.

1.2 Research Questions

The overarching focus of enquiry was: What was the lived experience of men who have experienced both domestic violence/abuse (DVA) in childhood and been on-road and gang-involved?

The specific research questions that were addressed in the thesis are as follows;

1. How did the participants express different types of masculinity throughout their lives, as told in their narratives?

2. How did the intersections of race, ethnicity, and class impact on the ways in which the participants sought to perform masculinities?

3. How did the participants’ experiences of violence change through their lives?
Through these questions the research aimed to explore how the two experiences of DVA, and on-road/gang-involvement related to another. As this is a small-scale narrative study I was not focusing on causation, but rather aiming to use an intersectional perspective to get a greater and more nuanced understanding of how the individuals positioned themselves in relation to their experiences, and how these affected their masculine identities.

1.3  Approach to the Study

The research was carried out using life-history inspired narrative interviews (Plummer, 2001) aided by music elicitation (Allett, 2010). The interviews were inspired by Plummer’s work (2001) on the use of unstructured interviews in life-history research, instead encouraging individuals to segment and sequence their life stories. I used music elicitation as a tool to enable the participants to structure the interviews, by asking participants to bring three music tracks to the interview which would help them share their narratives. Music elicitation was used in a variety of ways in the interviews. Several participants discussed using music as a coping mechanism in childhood when they experienced adversity and found returning to music from the past encouraged them to access their memories. In several interviews, the historical cathartic function of music was mentioned. In some cases, both the music tracks and their associated videos were used as a means of communication, as metaphors, or as illustrations of what they wanted to share. Some participants used the act of playing the music in the interview as a narrative.
tool, by changing topic through playing a new track, or using the music to give a break from a topic before moving on to the next one. This aimed to give participants greater control of the interview space as well as the ability to consider their answers in advance. Some participants mentioned that the challenge to find three songs to convey parts of their life story was intriguing and positively affected their interest in taking part. This approach lubricated a potentially awkward and sensitive research interaction and created an activity which both the researcher and research could participate in; the act of co-listening. Using music and music videos as elicitation tools showed promising results when used in sensitive research.

The analytic frame I used to explore the narratives was Connell’s (1987, 2005) model of analysing masculinities. This model enables understanding about the ways in which masculinity was adopted and constructed. I carried out a structural analysis of gender relations, concerned with; power relations; production relations; relations of cathexis. The exploration of power relations was particularly focused on the wider gender order, in particular the way in which patriarchal structures in society affected gender performance at the individual level. Secondly, I focused on the ways in which production relations were expressed, in particular, through the allocation of tasks according to both gender divisions, the economic consequences, as well as the dividend that accrues to men as a result. The last area of focus was on expressions of cathexis, concentrating on the ways in which sexual and platonic relationships are constructed in the narratives, looking to what they reveal about the wider gender order.
1.4 Key Findings

This thesis reveals an understanding of the multiple masculinities that emerged as the participants shared their life-histories. The narratives revealed the complexities and challenges of their lives as boys and how they negotiated the pressures that they felt, made visible through their masculinity performances. The analysis showed that this negotiation incorporated a complex relationship with violence, initially through being directly or vicariously exposed to violence in their homes, to then moving from victimisation to agency as they perpetrated violence themselves. As they made this shift they grew from adolescence into adulthood and navigated the other pressures they felt as men, i.e. to earn money, to gain respect and express power. They then coped with these pressures on-road, resulting in a performance of protest masculinity. Connell’s (1987, 2005) conceptualisation of protest masculinity was centred upon a problematic rejection of some conventions of hegemonic masculinity.

During the analysis I found that when the participants described aspects of protest masculinity, they also indicated co-existing vulnerable masculinities. This took the form of a shadow-identity, for instance when they were acting tough out of fear. I theorised this shadow-identity using Gilson’s (2014) work on vulnerability and violence. All of the participants in the study told their stories from a retrospective position post-gang-involvement, and thus represent a particular kind of survivor who was reflecting on their former lives. They also considered their current day personas, after they have tried to shake off the past constraints, and through this process have sought to develop new masculine identities. The findings indicate the participants had varied and multiple masculine biographies.
In the discussion I present the way I have stretched and expanded Connell’s theoretical framework in order to explore the narratives in the study. I widened the understanding of identity through the application of intersectionality throughout the analysis, to ensure that gender relations were understood through a wider consideration of structural inequalities. By doing this, I have updated and broadened Connell’s approach to be more inclusive of the factors which shape and change the experience of gender at a structural level. The other part of Connell’s theorisation of masculinity that I added depth to through this thesis is the conceptualisation of protest masculinity. In Connell’s work this is defined through the experience of marginalisation and societal exclusion. I note in the literature review that this typology of masculinity performance has not gained traction within existing UK gang research, however I argue that Connell’s typology of protest masculinity performance has utility, in particular when combined with an intersectional analysis. I make the case throughout the thesis that vulnerable masculinity has a symbiotic relationship with protest masculinity, thus extending Connell’s approach. I also explore the key thematic areas which emerged through the thesis, which are the relationship between masculinity, vulnerability, and violence. These issues were intertwined throughout and reveal the underlying tensions between the masculine expectations the participants felt and how they responded to it, highlighting underlying tensions of power/powerlessness and victim/agency.

In the conclusion I put forward recommendations for front-line practice arising from the research. One way that findings can be applied is for DVA organisations to consider masculinity performances in their work with male child survivors. To date, no DVA support service (with the exception of those working with male
perpetrators of DVA) deliver gender specific interventions to child survivors. The narratives suggest that this is an omission which results in a lack of awareness specifically around how male child survivors are affected by DVA, which results in interventions which may not get to the heart of DVA as an adverse experience. I have also shown in the literature review (chapter two) how the experiences of boys who experience DVA has been historically marginalised within feminist DVA organising and the importance of understanding masculinities within this context. In addition, my findings underlined the importance of early recognition of DVA among school children, as well as the importance of safe spaces away from home and on-road for young people. I also suggest that music elicitation could have application as a novel way of listening to people in support contexts.

The recommendations for practice (discussed in full in chapter nine) are:

1. I advocate for DVA organisations to develop gender-specific and masculinity-aware interventions for male child survivors.

2. I recommend closer joint work between DVA (and gender-based-violence organisations) with youth offending/gang outreach organisations.

3. Increased recognition of the importance of early identification of DVA occurring at home. Recognising violent behaviour at school as a potential indicator of DVA at home.

4. Increased provision of safe spaces for young men who experience DVA at home and live in gang affected areas, with a focus on understanding and accommodating vulnerable masculinities.
5. I recommend that tools are developed that use the strengths of music elicitation as a novel way to listen to children who have experienced DVA and on-road/gang-involvement.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The literature review (chapter two) presents the historical gap in focus on the experiences of those who live with DVA as children. In particular I focus on the recent paradigm shift from framing children as exposed to DVA, to people who experience it in their own right (Callaghan, Alexander, Sixsmith, & Fellin, 2015). However, in the previous literature around children’s experiences, they are treated as a generic group rather than in a gender-specific way that distinguishes male and female experience of DVA in childhood. Historically there has been little recognition of the male experience of DVA in childhood, outside of social learning theories which concentrate on male propensity for future violence. By centring the male experience of childhood DVA I hope to contribute to closing this gap.

The literature on gangs focuses largely on the criminality of young people through their time on-road and/or gang-involved. As such there has been less research written about the lived experience of gang-involved men’s lives in a holistic way whilst on-road, but also prior to their involvement. I then move on to focus on the gap in existing literature around the dual experiences of both DVA and on-road/gang-involvement. Existing literature on predominantly draws on quantitative studies with elements of the risk factor paradigm, which has become re-framed in the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) literature. Although informative, both of
these approaches are based on checklists of negative experiences which are counted and thus equated with each other. These approaches do not get to the crux of each issue, for instance DVA as a specific gender-based-violence which has unique and nuanced effects on individuals. Chapter three focuses on the theoretical underpinning of the thesis. They key thematic areas are masculinity, vulnerability, violence, framed through intersectionality, which form the thread throughout the thesis.

The main area of focus throughout is how the participants’ performance of gender identity changed through the transition from home to on-road/gang-involvement. The sense of performed masculinity shifted from being positioned in subordinate masculinity at home to protest masculinity on-road. This was discussed by the participants through narratives about going from ‘a man’, to ‘The Man’. An underlying theoretical area that emerged in my analysis was the way that the use of violence changed through the participant’s narratives. There were different ‘codes of violence’ in the home, school and on-road. I used Anderson’s (1999) concept of the ‘code of the street’ to conceptualise the differences in intelligibility in violence in the different spaces.

The findings and discussion chapters are organised chronologically, broadly focusing on three age ranges within the participants’ narratives; childhood (living with DVA); adolescence (peak on-road/gang-involved period); adulthood (post on-road/gang-involvement). Chapter six deals with narratives from childhood, which focused on the construction of masculinity in relation to experience of both DVA and the perpetrator. Chapter seven is centred on narratives of the participants’ time on-road and gang-involvement. In the period of adolescence, the participants spoke about the emergence of protest masculinity, enacting toughness and
violence as they became connected to the gang and used the ties as alternative families. In the narratives of this period in life I explore the varying masculine identities expressed by the participants; protest masculinity and vulnerable masculinity. These identities interacted and were foregrounded at different points in the life stories. Chapter eight is focused on the participants’ accounts of the process of desistance and recovery from their time on-road and gang-involved. They discussed strategies they employed to create alternative masculinities which supported and enabled their journeys to recovery and integrations into society in new ways however were mostly typified as marginalised masculinities.

The discussion and concluding remarks chapter (chapter nine) is centred around expanding the core themes that emerged in the thesis, in particular masculinity, vulnerability, and violence. These were threads that were woven through the narratives and revealed much about the tensions that arose between protest and vulnerable masculinity and being both victims and perpetrators of violence. Violence was shown to be at different times an expression of the pursuit of power and an expression of vulnerability. These almost contradictory tensions are discussed, and I argue that protest masculinity and vulnerable masculinity have a symbiotic relationship. To conclude I return to the main research questions to show how they have been answered in the research as well as outline the recommendations for practice that have arisen through the study. These aim to turn the academic theory into positive change in practice.

1.6 Delimitations
This study only included male participants due to its focus on the way that masculinities changed through the experience of DVA and on-road/gang-involvement. In the literature review I outline how the experiences of boys who live with DVA in childhood is seldom heard and I wanted to understand this more. There is future scope for this study to be repeated with females who have experienced DVA and gang-involvement, with a focus on their gender identity. The participants self-identified as having experienced DVA and on-road/gang-involvement and then self-referred to the study, which may have affected the sample.

1.7 Conclusion

The overarching aim of this thesis was to hear and understand the narratives of men who had experienced DVA and on-road/gang-involvement. Using gender theory to explore the participants’ narratives resulted in an identification of different and at times competing masculinity performances affected by intersectional identities through the life-course. This aided an understanding of the competing pressures of masculinity, which was embroiled in performing fearlessness and toughness in order to gain pride, power, respect. These identities are embroiled in the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, the markers of which were not accessible to these men, who then turned to protest masculinity, defined by marginalisation and limited resources. Existing at all points of the participants’ journeys was a shadow-self of vulnerable masculinity. In retrospect the men referred to the ways in which they enacted toughness through personal presentation and violence as a form of protection. They recounted the emotional pain they were going through, as well as the anger that they carried from the
experience of DVA. These tensions show the complexity of masculinity in the context of DVA, on-road, and gang-involvement.

Ultimately, this PhD thesis has responded to a gap in both academic research and professional practice. Using a lens of gender theory and narrative criminology has been fruitful to shine a different light on the intersections of DVA and on-road/gang-involvement. The findings and recommendations aim to be as relevant to academics as front-line professionals working in these areas in order to create positive change.
2 Literature Review

The first part of the literature review focuses specifically on research around children and domestic violence and abuse (DVA). In the exploration of the literature I paid particular attention to the ways in which children’s experiences of DVA have been historically marginalised. This has been changing in recent years, where attention has been brought to children’s own experiences of victimisation. Within this research trajectory, the experience of boys has been on the periphery of feminist activism and support work concerning DVA. In existing literature there has also been little attention paid in research to how boys and girls experience DVA differently, apart from social learning theories which strongly associate boys’ experience of DVA in childhood with future perpetration of violence. In the literature review I critically examine this approach. DVA is widely recognised as gender-based-violence which is disproportionately perpetrated by males against females and is supported by wider gender inequality (United Nations General Assembly, 1993; World Health Organisation, 2002). Thus, gender is implicated in the entire sphere of DVA and as such, I argue that a gendered view of it in relation to masculinity is essential.
2.1 Literature on children’s experience of DVA

2.1.1 DVA and Gender Inequality

DVA has historically been a social issue with little attention from Governments. It was not until the 1970’s that DVA began to be considered as a major social problem (Pleck, 1987; Schecter, 1982). Prior to this the criminal justice system referred to DVA as a ‘domestic disturbance’, and social service organisations termed it ‘family maladjustment’ (Leisenring, 2006, p. 310). The second-wave feminist movement was explicitly political and sought to raise consciousness on a range of issues including DVA (Leisenring, 2006). In the 1970’s feminists started to respond to DVA in a new way; providing emotional support and refuges (Taylor & Rupp, 1993). For the first time, DVA was framed as a serious societal concern and importantly depicted victims of DVA as not responsible for their victimisation (Leisenring, 2006).

In the first and second wave feminist movements sex was the basis for organising and provided the sense of a ‘shared essentialized victimisation among women’ (Pratt & Sokoloff, 2005, p. 19). Feminist theory of the second wave movement focused on the oppressive links between power, violence and sexuality (Ray, 2018). During that time Liz Kelly (1987) conceptualised the continuum of violence, which was a way to understand the way in which violence occurs in a wider patriarchal context. In particular the link between everyday micro-aggressions such as cat-calling and casual sexism can be seen as on a continuum with DVA at the other extreme. For Kelly, it is the maintenance of patriarchy which is at the root of gender inequality.

DVA has always been linked to wider gender inequality in the UK; ‘one hundred fifty years ago in Britain, it was legal for a man to beat his wife provided he used a stick
no thicker than his thumb’ (Harwin, 2006, p. 556). This highlights the historical legitimacy of both gender inequality and DVA that is central to the institution of marriage in the UK context. Evan Stark noted that DVA, ‘is gendered in that it relies for its impact on women’s vulnerability as women due to sexual inequality’ (2007, p. 24). Thus, many aspects of DVA capitalise on wider historical societal assumptions of women’s inferiority and men’s status as the head of the household. Factors such as men controlling money, resources, working outside the home, create a context where DVA can go un-noticed or be justified. Ray noted that DVA is, ‘ubiquitous and a routine means of maintaining patriarchal power and authority’ (2018, p. 123). Despite gender equality having made progress, the United Nations (2006) still assert that violence against women is, ‘deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men’ (cited in Lombard 2015, p.1). Institutional recognition of DVA is widespread now and the issue has been recognised globally, by organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). DVA has been framed as being both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. Indeed Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish First Minister, stated that, ‘we’ll never have gender equality until we stop DVA’ (Sanghani, 2015).

2.1.2 Research into Children’s Experiences of DVA

A large-scale self-report survey of young people by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) was carried out in 2009 nationwide. It was the largest UK-based prevalence study of harm to children. The aim was to identify a fuller picture of young peoples’ experience across the UK outside of just
the young people who are engaged with statutory services. When asked about DVA specifically, they found that by the time they reach eighteen years old, almost one quarter of children in the UK will have been exposed to DVA (Bently et al., 2016). Another prevalence study for children in London estimated that one in seven (14.2 per cent) children and young people under the age of eighteen will have lived with DVA at some point in their childhood (Radford et al., 2011). Research had indicated that when children are living with DVA, they are very likely to be exposed to it. In 75 per cent to 90 per cent of incidents of DVA, children are in the same or the next room (Abrahams, 1994; Hughes, 1992). In McGee’s research with forty-one families the majority (85 per cent) were physically present while their mothers were being abused in some form (2000, p. 61). In 58 per cent of families children overheard violence against their mothers (ibid). Several of these children said that they felt that hearing the abuse and their mothers’ distress was worse than seeing it happen. Even in cases where children were not privy to the violence, many (27 per cent) saw the outcomes of the abuse in the form of injuries (ibid). An estimated 130,000 children in the UK live in households with high-risk DVA; that is, where there is a significant risk of harm or death (Jones, 2016).

Research into children’s experiences of DVA has been scarcer than that into adults’ experiences of DVA. Until the mid-1990’s there was ‘almost no research on children themselves in relation to DVA’ (Hague et al., 2012, p. 23). One reason for this is that children have historically been on the periphery of the gaze of the police (Stanley & Humphreys, 2014). Historically there used to be little to no investigation by police into the impact of DVA on the children involved (ibid). When research did begin on this issue, one academic noted that children who experience DVA, ‘is a special case of counting the hard-to-count and measuring the hard-to-measure’ (Fantuzzo et al.,
1997, p. 121). In the UK the increased interest in the risk DVA poses to children was due to the various Child Death Inquiries which found that DVA should be seen as a child protection issue (Hague et al., 2012). DVA has become a central issue for child protection, as it has been a present factor in the two-thirds of families of the serious case reviews where a child has died (Radford et al., 2011). Children who experience DVA are considered under statutory guidelines to suffer emotional and psychological maltreatment, related to Section 31 of the Children Act 1989: impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another (LSCB, 2016, l. 28.4.2). Despite this, children are still experiencing DVA in silence. A SafeLives study of victims who accessed DVA support services they found that only half (54 per cent) of the children who were or had been exposed to DVA, and only two-thirds (63 per cent) of those exposed to severe DVA, were known to children’s social care prior to intake to a specialist children’s service (Jones, 2016). Research has shown that children are more likely to be abused or neglected in homes where DVA is happening. One study found 34.4 per cent of under-18s who had lived with DVA had been abused or neglected, in comparison with 7 per cent of the general child population (Radford et al., 2011). This research landscape indicates that children need to be seen as directly affected by DVA wherever it is occurring.

Research into children who have lived with DVA has primarily been concerned with the negative effects for children as a result of their experiences (Wolfe et al., 2003). The early part of this scholarship from the 1990’s, was focused on quantitative analyses of children and the categorisation of various long term damage that may have occurred (Evans et al., 2008; Wolfe et al., 2003). In recent years there has been more focus on qualitative accounts of children’s experiences. There have also been studies into adults who had been exposed to DVA as children (Hague et al., 2012;
Mullender et al., 2002). One reason that the direct impact of DVA on children has been overlooked is due to the lack of understanding about the extent to which the child is at risk of emotional and physical harm. DVA is often not labelled as such because this depends on both involved adult parties and a professional agreeing DVA has occurred.

Some studies have found that boys who have been exposed to DVA present more externalising problems than girls, such as disruptive behaviour and enacting violence (Wolfe et al., 2003; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, Kaye, & Zak, 1988; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1985) whereas other studies do not show this (Bogat et al., 2006; Jaffee et al., 2002). Other research has suggested that age of exposure was a greater factor resulting in externalising behavioural problems. Baradaran et al. (2006) found that the detrimental effects of exposure to DVA on externalizing behavioural problems were greater for older children (aged 7 to 14 years old) than for their younger peers (aged 4 to 6 years old) (Chan & Yeung, 2009, p. 315). However, neither meta-analysis of Wolfe et al. (2003) nor Kitzmann et al. (2003) showed that age moderated the effects of exposure to DVA (Chan & Yeung, 2009, p. 315). Research has suggested that even very young children are affected by exposure to DVA. Hester and Pearson (1998) found instances where children who had experienced DVA as young as two or three years old could recount episodes of abuse.

It is clear from the research that experience of DVA affects children and young people differently but not always in a negative way. In a meta-analysis of research into the effects on children it was found that 63 per cent of children fared more poorly, across a range of social and emotional factors, than the average child who had not been exposed to DVA (Kitzmann et al., 2003). Notably this means that
around 27 per cent of the children exposed to DVA showed similar outcomes to those who had, presenting a conundrum (ibid).

2.1.3 Paradigm Shift from Exposure to Experience

With the increase in research into children’s lived experiences of DVA there has been a paradigm shift. Research used to conceptualise children as being ‘witnesses’ or ‘exposed’ to DVA. However, this implies the adults are the primary victim, with children positioned as bystanders passively viewing abuse which does not directly affect them. Conceptualising DVA in this way, meant the focus was always exclusively on the adults, which implicated the resources provided for children involved. This shift in language and attitudes towards a greater focus on children was led by a small number of DVA researchers from both in the British and Nordic qualitative research fields. Överlien and Hydén (2009) championed the shift to looking at ‘experience’ in order to ‘stress the child’s subjective position’ (p. 480). They emphasised that, ‘Children who experience violence in their homes experience it with all their senses. They hear it, see it and experience the aftermath’ (Överlien & Hydén, 2009, p. 480). Callaghan et al. have argued for this shift in discourse in the UK context. In their justification for the shift in language, they note that shifting to ‘experiencing’ serves to, ‘disrupt this passive construction of childhood.’ (Callaghan et al., 2015, p. 2). In a review of 177 academic articles on DVA from 2002 to 2015, Callaghan et al. found that 85 per cent referred to children as ‘exposed’ to DVA, and 67 per cent used the term ‘witness’ (2015, p. 5). This language served to frame the experience of children as being ‘affected’ but, ‘does not give them the status of direct victims’ (ibid). Through this they are
conceptualised as collateral damage. Crucially Callaghan et al say that in doing this, ‘we fail to fully acknowledge their rights to be respected as individuals who live with, experience, and are affected by the violence, just as much as adult victims are’ (2015, p. 21).

The discursive shift is an important one, as through centring children’s experiences it makes the provision of resources for their recovery more imperative. It occurs in a wider societal context where existing services for children are sporadically, rather than systematically funded, resulting in a post-code lottery for children of DVA. From an academic perspective this change in language is fundamental as it emphasises that children who experience DVA, even if the direct target of the abuse is the intimate partner, it can profoundly affect children. It is important to look at the way that this experience manifests in the lives of children as they move through the life-course, as shown later in the thesis, DVA can cause a sense of powerlessness and emotional distress, within a context of gender-inequality. These can affect children’s behaviour, world view and identity.

2.1.4 Research Specifically into Boys’ Experiences of DVA

Gadd et al. (2015) conducted a multi-faceted study into the experiences of young men who had experienced or perpetrated by DVA. They combined analyses of attitude surveys as well as narrative interviews to give a more in-depth picture of the situation. In their study they found that 13-14 year olds who had experienced DVA at home were, almost three times more likely to report having perpetrated DVA (42 per cent) than those who had not experienced it (15 per cent) (Gadd et al.,
2015). However, despite this high prevalence, it also means that 58 per cent of the boys in the study, who had experienced DVA at home, had not perpetrated DVA themselves. These findings raise the question of the extent to which DVA perpetration by children who have experienced it should be seen as having a causal relationship i.e. supporting the cycle of violence theory, or whether it should be seen as proportionate to prevalence in wider society. The conundrum about the after effects of DVA experience is one of the core tenets of Gadd et al.’s study, which seeks to further the debate which they view as very black and white, with feminist theorising ‘blurring the distinction between violent men and those who had not perpetrated assaults’, resulting in a lack of focus on the factors that make some men violent and not others (Gadd et al., 2015, p. 129). The main premise of their study was to explore the ‘subtle differences between men’, in particular, ‘why most men are not violent most of the time, why some men are never abusive, and why many of those who have been strive not to be again’ (Gadd et al., 2015, p. 2).

One of the issues that Gadd et al. served to highlight in their exploration of young men who had experienced DVA at home was that caution should be taken between the polarised concepts of children, either as ‘done-to victims’ or ‘brave survivors’ (Gadd et al., 2015, p. 118). This was explored through the in-depth examination of the men’s narratives, which showed how close many men are to occupying both roles, almost simultaneously. They highlight how pertinent this is with the intersecting issue of gender. There has been a tendency to essentialise the gendered experience of boys who have experienced DVA, that they will merely copy the male role model and enact DVA. Gadd et al. urged academics to look at the nuanced area between the opposites of victim and perpetrator, agent and victim. Through focusing on these nuances between young men, who occupy these distinct yet close spaces, a greater understanding can be gained about their lived
experiences. It is this level of nuance which makes narrative research such a fitting tool to shine the light on such complexities.

2.1.5 High Profile Cases of Male Child Survivors of DVA

In recent years there have been two high profile cases where male child survivors of domestic violence have spoken out. These include the high-profile campaign by David Challen, son of Sally Challen who was imprisoned for the murder of her abusive husband. Whilst serving her sentence the law changed to outline coercive control as a specific offense. David Challen fought a successful campaign (see Burns, 2019) for his mother to be offered a review on her case because it raised the profile of coercive control within DVA cases as a mitigating factor for DVA homicide. It resulted in her early release from prison after serving eight years as her charge was discounted to manslaughter (BBC News, 2019). A distinguishing feature of this case was the way in which her son was central, raising the profile of male child survivors. Another recent campaign by male child survivors has been that of Luke and Ryan Hart. Their father was a DVA perpetrator and murdered their mother and sister after they tried to leave him. The sons have since written books, such as Operation Lighthouse (Hart & Hart, 2018), which documented their story and the impact on them growing up as children living with DVA. They are vocal in the media about ending DVA and sharing their story. Both of these campaigns have been markedly different to others, primarily because they are the first child-survivor led campaigns that draw on personal experience to enter the mainstream. Add to that, that they are male themselves and speaking out against DVA, it has served to raise the profile of the issue of masculinities as a performance and heightened the discussion of
different ways of being a man in the face of DVA experience. Hart and Hart are particularly vocal about the detrimental effects of toxic masculinity, referring to the way in which there are negative pressures and associations around masculinity which promote negative behaviours for both men and those around them.

What these two cases brought to the forefront was the way in which these men claimed their own sense of victimisation as well as agency to campaign in relation to DVA, centring the voice of people who experience DVA in childhood. It was also powerful that they were men speaking out against the toxic masculinity of their fathers in public forums, highlighting both the performativity of masculine identity, and that it was a choice that they were not making themselves. Their vocal campaigning as men who denounced their father’s perpetration of DVA also was a clear push back against the cycle of violence theory which has tended to frame DVA perpetration as a logical conclusion for boys who had experienced it as children.

2.1.6 Refuges and Male Child Survivors of DVA

When refuges and women-only support services opened in the 1970s they provided a physical manifestation of the second wave feminist ethos and ‘registered the demand for female only spaces’ (Haaken & Yragui, 2003, p. 53). Radical second-wave feminism advocated both ‘separatism as strategy and separatism as goal’ particularly from men within women’s organisations (Taylor & Rupp, 1993, p. 43). Haaken and Yragui researched refuges and found that there were ‘only three rules at the house: no liquor, no drugs, no men’ (2003, p. 55). The dominant message from DVA services was that, to leave your partner (and men in general) is ‘the best,
if not only, route to women’s well-being’ (Krane & Davies, 2002, p. 180). The women-only policies of DVA services generally extend to the staffing, under the premise of safety (Haaken & Yragui, 2003). Women’s Aid note that volunteers and staff at DVA charities were often survivors of abuse themselves and so felt it important that the organisations were all-female (Hinsliff, 2009).

The majority of refuges (then and now) operated different admission policies for male and female children. Compared to female children, refuges typically do not allow male children older than twelve and in some case cases, sixteen years old (Haaken & Yragui, 2003). Refuge age limitation policies often operate alongside the general ‘no men’ policy in many refuges (Baker, 2009). If a family has a son over the age limit of the refuge, then they either cannot access the space and have to present as homeless to the local council, or the son could go into social services care whilst the rest of the family enter refuge (Sacks, 2008). The exclusion of women’s sons has a long precedent within the radical feminist movement. Some early lesbian feminist communes allowed male children to be involved, yet barred them from decision making and social events on the grounds that ‘male energy’ violated women’s space (Taylor & Rupp, 1993). There are a variety of reasons that refuges state to support the exclusion of boys. One reason is that older boys ‘look (too much) like a man and scare other refuge residents’ (Baker, 2009, p. 438). Using this as a reason is problematic, as it is grounded in an unquestioned association between masculinity and violence, which is framed as the opposite to femininity and non-violent, passive behaviour (Baker, 2009). A further reason given in primary research I conducted for my Masters degree dissertation was that the age limit coincides with the age of criminal responsibility for statutory rape and so boys could not share a room with female family members in the refuge. Again, this assumes
that young males are predisposed to violence, particularly sexual violence, based on their gender. A wider reason given for the exclusion of boys has been based upon a belief in theories of ‘cycle of violence’ and ‘intergenerational transmission of violence’, which are discussed fully later in the chapter. They rely on the assumption that boys will repeat the violence within their own relationships (Baker, 2009). It is striking that it is precisely these boys who are perceived as likely future perpetrators, who are then systematically excluded by DVA organisations, who thereby miss a chance of working with them to prevent them becoming this ‘imminent risk’. This rejection, it could be argued, may well actively contribute to these boys learning that their inevitable fate is to become the aggressor, thereby inadvertently contributing to and perpetuating the dynamics that maintain the cycle of violence. The discursive message this sends to boys is concerning and indeed Baker notes that existing studies indicate that teenage boys feel labelled as ‘potentially violent men’ by the operation of age limitation policies in many refuges (2009, p. 447). Furthermore, they state that these policies in refuges ‘send mixed messages to them about their future as men and may exacerbate the anger, stress, mistrust and confusion they already feel after escaping or trying to escape a violent perpetrator’ (Baker, 2009, p. 442).

The refuge exclusionary practice has been documented as being particularly difficult for Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee families, as it compounds an existing societal assumption that black males are inherently violent and dangerous (Haaken & Yragui, 2003). Connell (2002) also noted that minority black masculinity has been often framed as both a societal and sexual threat in majority white cultures, which is an issue that can be reinforced by an association in general of male children as likely to perpetrate future violence. Therefore, the implication of excluding boys
within black families can raise issues of existing marginalisation and exclusion. Furthermore, the second-wave feminist notion of women being inherently peaceful in opposition to male aggression has also been problematic for black women, as they are perspectives framed on an idealisation of white femininity. This has led to a lack of acknowledgement of white women’s complicity in violence against black women, in particular through the implicit and explicit harms of racism (Segal, 1990; Ware, 2015). Thus, mainstream second wave feminist perspectives, through which much of the approach to DVA has been founded in the UK, has historically centred the views of white women.

2.1.7 Section Conclusion

What the literature around DVA shows is that there is a body of work to support the notion of DVA as both a cause and consequence of wider gender inequality. It has been rooted in the historical nexus of societal histories that have centred male dominance in domestic settings. As shown in the literature, children who have experienced DVA have been historically overlooked and seen as on the periphery to the abuse. There has been a trickle of research done that has looked to centre the experiences of children who experience DVA and highlight the impact that it has on them (McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002) as well as work into the effect on adult survivors of DVA (Hague et al., 2012). In recent years there has been a shift in discourse around children, moving from framing them as exposed or witnesses to the DVA, and instead framing them as experiencing and affected by the DVA (Callaghan et al., 2015; Överlien & Hydén, 2009). This approach emphasises that children actively make sense of their experiences and do not passively reproduce
toxic masculine identities or violence, rather they act reflexively in response to their experiences. So, it is more than a terminological shift from witness to experience but also signifies a conceptual shift from passivity to reflexive agent.

Boys who have experienced DVA have occupied a space of tension within feminist organising around DVA. In the early days of the second-wave feminist movement boys were seen as peripheral to the woman-focused nature of the movement and its related interventions. This was reflected in the provision of ‘women-only spaces’ as well as the enduring age limit on refuge provision for sons of DVA survivors, which points to a neglect of the lived experiences, and the reflexive constructions, of men who lived with DVA as children. Although a few emerging texts, such as that by Gadd et al., (2015) and self-published narratives by male survivors in adulthood (Hart & Hart, 2018), there is still much work to be done to open up the conversation about men’s childhood experiences of DVA.

2.2 Literature on the Male Experience of Life On-road and Gang-Involved

As outlined in the thesis definitions (in the preface), the existence of gangs themselves, as well as definitions of them, has been fraught with scholarly disagreement. To understand the UK context, it is important to take a brief overview of the way the perceived gang problem has become popularised, which I will later frame within Cohen’s (2003 [1972]) notion of a moral panic.

2.2.1 Context to Perceived UK Gang Issues
The category of ‘gang’ has had a long social history. The first use of the term gang was in the 1800’s and referred to ‘outlaws’ (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). The first academic to look closely at gangs was Thrasher (1927). It has been argued that gangs in some form have existed since medieval times. Earle (2011) compared young male prisoners’ social structures to the strategies employed by the ‘mannerbund’ in early medieval Europe, who were small localized groups of ‘otherwise dislocated young men’ who joined to acquire power, protection and status (p. 137). This trajectory was also found in a long line of studies within the Chicago School of Sociology, who saw gangs as ‘interstitial social organizations that emerged as alternative sources of order in areas—such as urban slums—where the state’s authority was deficient’ (Hazen & Rodgers, 2014, p. 2).

There have been varying reports as to when gangs started to emerge in the UK. There is a long history to the demonization of youthful marginal groups (Pearson, 1983). Recent recorded UK gang reports are tied up with issues of gun crime. Gun crime first gained media attention after eight shootings and a murder in Manchester in 1988 (Oatley & Crick, 2015). After many more public shootings in the area the Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy was developed in 2002 to inform a multi-agency approach to dealing with the crime as well as preventing young people from joining the gun/gang culture (Oatley & Crick, 2015). This was in response to a Home Office Report (Bullock & Tilley, 2002) which noted that around 60 per cent of shooting are thought to be gang-related. This report framed young men’s involvement in gangs as a ‘credible lifestyle choice’, which supported the construction of gangs as populated by men who are exerting a degree of agency, framing there being an element of choice in deviance (Bullock & Tilley, 2002, p. iv).
The tendency for affluent societies to denote poor communities as constituting of *cultures of crime* is functional, in that it allows affluent majority to perceive the poor people as deserving of communities defined by criminality (McAuley, 2007). Dominant groups objectify poverty and gain from the inequality it creates, thus tolerate it. The gang through this lens is a group of young people who choose, ‘to live and survive together’ whilst being simultaneously stigmatised as a culture of crime by external agencies (McAuley, 2007, p. 20). The link between the existence of gangs and areas of deprivation is strong. Gangs have said to be most often found in areas dominated by social housing, particularly high rise and high density social housing (London Safeguarding Children Board, 2009, l. 12.3.1). In London in particular there is a strong correlation between ‘gang neighbourhoods’ and areas which are amongst the 20 per cent most deprived and poverty stricken areas (based on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007) (London Safeguarding Children Board, 2009, l. 12.3.1). In an ethnographic study in the North of England McAuley (2007) found perceptions that gangs had destroyed young people’s work ethic, thus providing a cultural explanation as opposed to focusing on the deep-seated structural factors which were disadvantaged the young people.

2.2.2 Social Anxiety about Gangs

There was an enhanced public panic around the existence of gangs in the UK since 2007, in which there was a particularly high rate of homicides labelled as gang-related in London (Pearce & Pitts, 2011). In the same year there were 28 young people under the age of 20 who were killed in so-called gang-related murders in London (ibid). In a Metropolitan Police survey, they identified 172 youth gangs in
London, who were estimated to be responsible for 20 per cent of all the youth crime in the capital (ibid). Following this, the former Metropolitan Police Service Commissioner Sir Ian Blair, labelled ‘gang-related’ youth violence as, ‘the biggest threat facing the capital after terrorism” (Densley, 2012, p. 2). A flurry of government initiatives were initiated at this time which focused on punitive rather than preventative measures (Pearce & Pitts, 2011). There was an additional governmental focus after the London riots, after which Teresa May, the then Home Secretary, noted it served to ‘bring home to the entire country just how serious a problem gang and youth violence has now become’ (HM Government, 2011, p. 3). This was despite the government’s own reports after the riots which actually found that only one in five of those arrested in connection with the riots were known to be gang-involved (HM Government, 2011b, p. 3; Newburn et al., 2011). This discredits the resulting policy approach, which used the riots to justify the development of increased surveillance and punitive measures to control the identified gangs (such as the Gangs Matrix, discussed later in section 2.2.5). This resulted in distracting the focus away from claims that socio-economic or structural factors influences the riots, instead framing it as a symptom of gang criminality (Newburn, Jones, & Blaustein, 2018).

Drawing on Cohen’s (2011 [1972]) principles of moral panic to the situation of UK gang context indicates that both the media and governmental responses to the gang crisis have exasperated wider anxieties about a perceived gang crisis (Newburn et al., 2011). Gangs have become a new folk devil (Alexander, 2000). The language of alarm has been integral to the societal construction of the gang problem. Gangs policy has an important role to play, because it gives credibility to societies’ wider fears youth masculinities (McAuley, 2007). They are constructed as
the ‘dangerous classes’ constructed as, ‘work shy yobs blind to common standards of decency and beyond the control of their parents’ (Gadd et al., 2015, p.151). This has also been used to create support for a punitive and discriminatory social services and policing approach (Crossley & Lambert, 2017).

2.2.3 Gangs and Masculinity Research

The connection between sex, gender, and gang-involvement is still relatively niche in mainstream gang research. Indeed in a recent text advocating for a critical realist approach to gangs (Andell, 2019) gender was only discussed in relation to women’s experience. This is a typical blind spot, whereby gang research has been androcentric and unfocussed on both the significance and complexities of masculine identities (Young, 2009). As research has often downplayed or overlooked the role of women in on-road and gang subcultures, it has led to a dearth of research that focuses on gender dynamics. In this section I explore research that has focused on gang-involvement, gender, and identity.

In terms of research around women’s experiences of gang-involvement, the literature seems to predominantly support the claim that gangs are mostly male dominated. Women have been found to play an ancillary, yet predominantly external, role in gangs. Tasks often assigned to women include acting as foot soldiers, whose role is to set up rival gangs, or to carry weapons and hide drugs (The Centre for Social Justice, 2009). Mullins (2006) found that in gangs few inter-gender interactions occur and where they do it is often on the terms that men dictate, with women occupying a peripheral space for the fulfilment of male objectives. Mullins noted that options for female gang interaction were limited to ‘whores to be
exploited; wives and girlfriends; and female blood relatives’ (2006, p. 105). Male gangs have been found to harbour attitudes which are damaging to relationships and reinforce hostile attitudes about women (Ehrensaft et al., 2003). However, the distinct way in which women experience gang-involvement has also been explored by Deuchar, Harding, McLean, & Densley (2018) who used Bourdieusian social fields analysis to explore the ways women have agency in gangs. They noted that women often operate both in the gang field and community field simultaneously and this can afford them greater freedom than their male counterparts.

The sexual objectification and abuse of gang-involved women has been found in research (Firmin, 2011; Pearce & Pitts, 2011). Rape can be used as a weapon of control, both of gang-involved women, as well as a threat to rape the female family members of gang-involved men as revenge (Firmin, 2011). Multi-perpetrator rape (aka ‘gang rape’) is also an activity which is known to be carried out as part of wider gang activity (Pearce & Pitts 2011). However, emerging research is putting into question that women do indeed stay on the periphery of gangs. Research by Choak (2018) focused directly on women’s experience put into question the reported trends, noting that part of the trend to frame women as auxiliaries is related to their wider invisibility, as well as drawing on stereotypes of women’s impeded agency in violent and criminal contexts. Choak noted that women’s lack of involvement in gangs is ‘one of the biggest misconceptions... this is not the case and the role that females’ play is significantly underplayed’ (2018, p. 135).

Existing research that looks into gang masculine identities has broadly developed with the use of two theoretical directions, although they often intertwine. These are the use of Bourdieu’s theory of habitus related to the existence of a masculinity
capital. The second is the use of Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity or a
derivative masculinity type. Although as I outline later in section 3.1 I prefer to
adopt Connell’s ‘Protest masculinity’ for this thesis over other variants.

Research into the role of masculinity and gang-involvement has been led by Ross
Deuchar (2009, 2013, 2018; Deuchar & Weide, 2019), who has focused on gender
performance among gang-involved men both during their active period and during
desistance. Deuchar’s (2018) study was an in-depth exploration of the ways in
which men in gangs do gender. In this he drew on the notion of a masculine
biography to focus on the ways in which men reinvent their gendered selves as they
desist from gang-involvement. He focused on the ways in which gang-affiliated men
disrupt their existing sense of gender performance, re-write their masculine
biographies and experiment with alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. In this way
Deuchar draws on Connell’s theorisation of masculinity to frame the dynamics
between multiple masculinities through the life course. Sandberg and Pederson
(2011) also utilised Connell’s concept of protest masculinity to frame the way in
which drug dealers gained street capital in Oslo. They focused on the collective
practice of protest masculinity by black men, examining the relationship between
gender, race, and identity.

A commonly used framework that has been used in contemporary influential gang
research has been Bourdieu’s framework of habitus and capital. I critique the use
of this, in particular the way in which it creates a gender-based-violence blind spot,
later in section 2.3.1. However, this framework has been used to create important
work on the interaction between masculinity and the gang context. Alistair Fraser’s
(2015) blended both Connell’s masculinity theory with Bourdieu’s work notion to
look in particular at masculinity capital. Fraser focused in particular on the patterns
of practice, and ‘ways of being’ men in urban Glasgow. Harding (2014) also focused on gang masculinity through the frame of capital. He noted that, ‘the imperative for men is further underpinned by concepts of fragile masculinity and the normative values of the social field’ (Harding, 2014). In this way Harding used the notion of the social field as a way to frame the wider societal pressures on men and the way in which these pressures interact with the wider social context.

Mullins (2006) focused on on-road masculinities born out of an experience of marginalisation. However, he termed this ‘street masculinity’, which he defined as an identity that occurs when the markers of hegemonic masculinity become, ‘refracted in the prism of streetlife’ (Mullins, 2006, p. 75). I particularly like the imagery of societal norms and values being ‘refracted’ through the different lens of the road. Mullins focused on economic disadvantage as a key driver for the development of street masculinity, drawing on Merton’s (1968) notion of Strain theory. I have distanced myself from this usage as the term ‘street’ appears to refer more to the physical public space, which although important for the men that I spoke to, does not capture the nuance of the subculture in the way that ‘on-road’ does. It refers to a way of being, with a visceral reality for those who inhabit both the real and headspace on-road.

Pitts asserted that gang-involvement offered young men a way to perform ‘hyper-masculinity’ as well as pursue a ‘plausible male identity’ which makes sense within the localised context (2008, p. 108). Pitts located an element of this is in the difficult socio-economic conditions of poorer communities, which produce, ‘socio-economically induced gender insecurity’, which plays into the idea that financial constraints deny poor men the opportunity to enact masculinity in traditional ways. Glynn (2014) followed Pitts’ trajectory and also used the term ‘hyper-masculinities’.
Glynn saw gang development as a product of men who experienced subordinated masculinities and then ‘connect to the streets’ (2014, p. 113). Through this act, Glynn constructs these men as creating alternative social structures which become hyper-masculine and nihilistic, but that serve as oppositional to the mainstream from which they are excluded. By being on-road, men are integrating into an alternative system which is governed by a code of the street, where the valued characteristics are fearlessness, toughness, respect and loyalty (Glynn, 2014, p. 113). Glynn noted how by participating in this alternative community men are able to accomplish ‘manhood’ in a way that was not otherwise available, although it is not sustainable long term and is often a short-lived experience, cut short through death or a prison sentence. I find the term ‘hyper-masculinity’ problematic, as it alludes to an essentialised masculinity which the ‘hyper’ state is amplifying. This somehow naturalises violence and nihilism as inherently masculine qualities, which are unleashed and unfettered in the street gang context. In some way this seems to glorify it as a state of being which does not reflect the nuances of masculinity performance that Connell’s approach offers.

Ultimately, this section has showcased a variety of contemporary research into gender, identity and gang-involvement in the UK context. As has been demonstrated both the work of Connell and Bourdieu feature heavily in the understanding of masculinity as a changeable and tangible aspect of identity which is negotiated from and through gang-involvement. This will be explored further in section 3.1.

2.2.4  Gangs as a Youth Issue
Gang definitions often use the terms *adolescent* or *youth* to describe the members (Ball & Curry, 1995). There have been varying reports of peak age groups for gang membership, broadly ranging from nine to thirty years old (Ball & Curry, 1995). In research by Hill et al, (1999) it was found that the peak age for gang membership is fifteen years old. Frosh et al. noted that the age that boys are most likely to exhibit ‘delinquent’ behaviour is seventeen years old (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002). However other research has estimated that as high as 80 per cent of gang members are over eighteen years old (Ball & Curry, 1995). In research carried out by Stelfox (1998) found that the majority of UK gangs identified in the study were mainly adult males between twenty-five and twenty-nine years old (with the occasional member under sixteen years). Overall, this can lead us to conclude that adolescence is not an intrinsic property of a gang. However, there does appear to be some consensus that gang-involvement rarely extends into old age (Young et al. 2013).

### 2.2.5 Race and Gangs

The labelling of men assumed to be in gangs is a highly racialised phenomena in the UK and has been recognised as such since the 1970s ‘mugging’ crisis analysed by Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 2013). Since the riots in England in 2011 the Metropolitan Police have been collecting a vast data set called The Gang Matrix, on young people who are perceived as being gang-involved, often despite no evidence or offending (Amnesty International, 2018). Amnesty International released a report on this in 2018, claiming that the matrix is a highly racialised process which infringes on the individual’s human rights, in particular the right to
non-discrimination. They noted that it was based on a ‘vague and ill-defined concept of ‘the gang’ that has little objective meaning and is applied inconsistently’ (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 3). Amnesty noted that many of the indicators that the Police use to define a gang member reflect more about urban youth culture rather than indication of serious crime. In fact, the vast majority (78 per cent) of people on the Gangs Matrix are black, which is vastly disproportionate to London’s black population (13 per cent of the whole), as well as those black people identified by the police as responsible for serious youth violence in London (27 per cent) (Amnesty International, 2018). This disproportionality means that many young people that are on the matrix have not committed a violent offence in the last two years (40 per cent) and some have never committed a serious offence at all (35 per cent) (ibid). In addition to the gang matrix, there is also a strong racial bias in the police’s use of stop and search (Irwin-Rogers, 2018). In 2016 black people were six times as likely to be stopped and searched and three times as likely to be arrested as white people (ibid). These statistics are not only a reflection of the intersections of race and ethnicity, but also of class, as there is a correlation between the young people identified on the gangs matrix and the most deprived areas (Williams, 2015).

2.2.6 Section Conclusion

An exploration of the literature that looks at the coexistence of gang involvement and childhood experiences of DVA shows that there is a significant gap in knowledge about the lived experiences of people who have gone through both. Existing literature both in policy and research tends to view DVA as one of a myriad of risk factors or adverse childhood experiences, which can lead to an increase in
problematic behaviours including criminal involvement. However, there has been limited work on the gendered implications of these two experiences outside of the ‘cycle of violence’ theories of DVA. These theories have been largely rejected by front-line support work due to their limiting and essentialising prognosis however is alluded to in the public health approach to violence. This approach seeks to use the ideas of violence as contagious to explain why some communities appear to have higher levels of all types of violence than others. From my perspective this appears to erase the structural issue of gender inequality in its theorising of violence. Although DVA and gang violence may be experienced by the same individuals, I assert in this thesis that it is important to focus on the gender performance within these two areas and see the links, rather than a reductionist approach that violence leads to more violence. The gaps in research and policy work in this area has led to an under-examination of the ways in which masculine identities are constructed by boys and young men who live with DVA. They are exposed to, and become complicit in, complex and ambiguous protest masculinities that correspond to the realities they inhabit – road-life, home-life and everything in-between.

2.3 Literature Connecting DVA and On-road/ Gang-Involvement

The third part of the literature review concentrates on the ways in which the distinct sectors of DVA and gangs research come together in both academic and policy work. The disjuncture between research around DVA and other forms of violence has been explored by Walby, Towers and Francis (2014). They focused on the theoretical disconnect between gender studies and criminology and how this
results in the nuances of gender being missed in mainstream sociological theories. Literature that has suggested or explored a connection between DVA and on-road/gang-involvement is critically analysed. There is an absence in research that has focused specifically on these two issues, however several sources discuss the two experiences as often being present as a broader range of multiple marginalities that on-road and gang-involved men may have faced. This serves to dilute the issues and does not give due attention to the impact of these on an individual. What becomes clear in this chapter, is that there is little existing literature which focuses on the lived experience of both DVA and on-road/gang-involvement as specific types of adversity.

2.3.1 The Separate Academic Fields of Gender-based Violence and Gang Research

Currently both academic work around DVA and gangs-work operate within distinct sectors or ‘planets’, as Hester (2011) puts it to underline their apparent unwillingness to relate, each with a distinct language, assumptions about the young people involved, and culture. Walby et al., (2014) focused on the way in which gender-based violence has historically been annexed within criminological studies of violence, as have explorations of gender. They noted that research into DVA and gendered violence has developed separately from mainstream disciplines which has impacted on the way in which the issue of gender in violence has been annexed from the main debates in sociology and criminology. Criminological investigations into violence often focuses on the criminality of acts, rather than analyse the underlying context, gender, and motivations, which leaves DVA unexamined. Walby
noted that gender is notable for its absence in mainstream criminological texts which is ill-integrated if present. Walby looked at existing social theories which attempt to address violence, in particular those of Bourdieu as well as other theorists. In critique, she noted that Bourdieu marginalised inter-personal violence through focusing on symbolic violence and power exertion as equivalent to physical violence which serves to downplay the nuance of gender-based violence and its effects. Bourdieu in particular shifts the focus away from physical violence and then equates symbolic violence with other forms of power. A further critique of Bourdieu’s focus on symbolic violence is that he also implies that victims are somehow complicit, as they have learned their position within the formation of their habitus. This is obviously problematic in the case of DVA, whereby constructing victims as consenting and complicit with violence does not clearly convey the situation within abusive relationships. The issue is not acceptance of DVA as a norm but rather that inequalities will create constrained choices. This critique contributed to my distance from Bourdieu’s theory in the thesis, despite other gang academics drawing on the concept of habitus and capital to explain gang-involvement (Harding, 2014; Irwin-Rogers & Harding, 2018).

Walby et al., (2014) urge that violence against women should not be side-lined as a marginal issue within criminology, one of the reasons being that it is a widespread issue that is nearly as common as male-on-male violence. However, despite the high prevalence, women are largely absent from criminological explorations of violence. This fits in with the historical research trajectory within criminology to associate violence and criminality with a reaction to disadvantage. Much has been written about the potentially damaging impact of single-mother families, or, ‘mother who failed to socialize her children into appropriate levels of self-control’,
however the focus on women’s experience, as well as the relationship between
gender and violence, has been sorely limited (Walby et al., 2014, p. 193). Omitting
gender as a structural inequality through which disadvantage can be created and
maintained has meant the focus has been on the other intersections of race,
ethnicity and class. In my analysis of the literature there is very little that has
crossed the conceptual divide between DVA experience as explained by gender
theory, and the issue of gangs which is explained through criminological theories.
Like Walby et al., (2014) as well as Hester (2011) I have found that these two areas
work on different ‘planets’ and use distinct languages, conceptualisations and
approaches. As will be outlined throughout this review, the separation into two
worlds means that although front-line services will be working with young men who
experienced DVA and gang involvement, there is a major conceptual gap in the
construction of these individuals across the two sectors.

2.3.2 The Victim/Perpetrator Dichotomy

Central to the tension among boys who both experience DVA as well as perpetrate
violence in the on-road and gang context is the notion of the *ideal victim*. Work
within the DVA practice community is predominantly approached from feminist
activist perspectives and in this context, the children who live with DVA (particularly
girls) are traditionally considered as victims or ‘survivors’. Whereas work with on-
road and/or gang-involved young people is located within the criminal justice risk
management perspective which places young people in the position of criminals,
offenders, or ‘at risk’. The conceptualisation of young people, which is expressed
through language, is significant in the construction of the victims and perpetrators in these cases.

An issue for front-line policy work on DVA and gangs is that the external categorisation of young people is that it promotes a one-dimensional view of them and their behaviours. As Yates usefully noted, ‘the ‘young offender’ could just as readily be conceptualised as the ‘child in need’ if child welfare assessments and provisions of the Children’s Act 1989 were applied’ (2010, p. 14). This is particularly important since many gang-involved individuals are children, who if positioned as children would traditionally be seen as vulnerable and in need of wider societal safeguarding (Motzkau, 2020). In gang discourse this rhetoric is often absent when referring to the problematic behaviours of the young people involved, as here they are positioned as offenders rather than children.

For the Norwegian criminologist Christie, an example of the ideal victim is a little old lady who, on her way home from caring for her sick sister, is hit on the head by a large man who robs her in order to buy alcohol or drugs. Christie focused on the five aspects of the ‘ideal’ victim:

(i) the victim is weak (female, elderly);
(ii) the victim was carrying out a respectable project (caring for her sister);
(iii) she could not be blamed for where she was (she was outside in the daytime);
(iv) the offender was ‘big and bad’; and
(v) the offender had no personal relationship with her.

(Christie, 1986)
Using this outline of the ‘ideal victim’ makes it clearer as to why the men that took part in my study have so seldom been seen as victims themselves. They are (and likely weren’t even in adolescence) weak, ‘respectable’, small. They were also victims of abuse from family members which mean that wider society are reluctant to see them as victimised without blame. Schwöbel-Patel (2018), who noted that the concept of the ideal victim amounts to a feminized, infantilized and racialized stereotype of victimhood (p. 703). As discussed earlier (chapter two, section 2.2.5), the racialised nature of gangs also fits into this reluctance to be constructed as victims; young black men are more likely to be at the centre of moral panics around youth-in-crisis than framed as victims. To add complexity to this discussion, what it means to be a ‘survivor’ is constructed differently between the DVA and gang sectors and I suspect, is very gendered. An ex-gang member is constructed as enacting a hyper-masculine role, while to be a DVA-Survivor may be more of a hyper-feminised role. By this I mean that both the gender positions available here almost caricature the typical male/female stereotype- females as passive victims, helpless, weak, in contrast to a male in a gang; powerful, violent, alpha males. This discussion highlights the limited empirical utility of mutually exclusive categories of perpetrator and victim when the evidence points so consistently to young people being both. In this way there is a fluidity and ambiguity between these two artificially polarized identities (Motzkau, 2020).

2.3.3 Links in Literature Between DVA and Gang Involvement

As outlined in the earlier part of the literature review, there is an academic disconnect between the two spheres of DVA research and gangs research. Despite
the existing link in research between DVA and later criminality, the area is undeveloped and existing research leans towards risk factor analyses rather than lived experience. This link was made in the policy report, *Dying to Belong: An In-depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain* by the Centre for Social Justice (2009). They used the statistical data that links DVA and criminality and then bolstered it with anecdotal reports from both offenders and practitioners who have experience with gangs. For instance, they interviewed Superintendent John Sutherland, who noted that he felt there was a high prevalence of DVA in the backgrounds of gang-involved young people. He stated that, ‘Much has been done [about DVA], but we still have an awful long way to go, and a huge proportion of our most troubled young people will have been victims or witnesses of abuse’ (The Centre for Social Justice, 2009, p. 96). Another young offender was reported to state that, ‘Once you get used to living in that environment, of expecting violence, you recreate it when it’s not there – because that’s what you’re used to’ (The Centre for Social Justice, 2009, p. 96). In this report, they frame the experience of DVA, as well as single parent families (in particular ‘fatherlessness’) due to what they term the, ‘breakdown of the family unit’ as a significant push factors for gang involvement. They posit that men then seek alternative father figures through their gang involvement. In the report DVA is associated with other negative family aspects such as, ‘poor parenting, particularly a lack of parental supervision’ that are factors which cause later gang involvement (2009, p. 27). It is important to consider however, that the Centre for Social Justice is a centre-right leaning political think-tank and therefore is grounded in a tendency to place responsibility for problems at an individual and family level rather than focus on structural inequality issues. Thus, the overall denigration of single parent families and the conflation of DVA with the relative term ‘family dysfunction’ raises warning signals about the way that this report is classifying the issues at hand.
Similarly, the Home Office’s own reports on gang issues in the UK, also mention DVA as a risk factor contributing to gang involvement going on-road. In their report ‘Ending gang and youth violence’ (2011), the Home Office provide explicit examples outlining the ‘lifecycle of a gang member’, which places DVA as a core experience (2011, p. 17). In a second example they trace the imagined life of ‘Boy X’, who experienced DVA at home (HM Government, 2011, p. 21). These example cases were used to promote the increased funding of DVA services as early intervention for later gang involvement but lack much in the way of an empirical foundation.

Harding (2014) used the concept of domestic abuse in gang research, through utilising the Duluth power and control wheel, as a tool to present the gang as an abusive context. Harding used the Duluth wheel as an interview tool with on-road and gang-involved individuals. He noted that it was used to, ‘conceptualise the differentiated spaces where various gang activities and behaviours took place and to tease out the differentiated tactics used by gangs in certain spaces, at different times’ (Harding, 2014, p. 11). Although he was not claiming a connection between personal experience of DVA and gang involvement, his conceptualisation of the experiences as somehow similar is intriguing. He noted that using this tool enabled him to conceptualise the different abusive tactics that gangs may use to control their members’ ‘social field’ (Harding, 2014, pp. 11–12). Harding did not evaluate the extent to which he found the participants identified the gang as an abusive context, so the validity of this premise is unclear.

2.3.4 The Risk Factor Paradigm
The notion of a ‘risk society’ was explored by both Beck (1992) and Giddens (1999). This is centred upon the premise that, with increased modernity has become a preoccupation both with the future, as well as safety, which together generate the notion of risk (Giddens, 1999). Risk is particularly tied up with a concern for controlling the future. Beck noted risk is a way of managing ‘hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernisation itself’ (Beck, 1992, p. 21). Since the 1960’s there has been a growing body of criminological research focusing on why some young people commit crime and whether this can be predicted (Arthur, 2007). West (1969), in a series of longitudinal studies in London from 1961 to 1977, asserted that there were particular factors which increased the likelihood of a young person offending.

This concept of identifying and thus managing risk factors became embedded in mainstream UK policy from the mid-1990s and throughout the New Labour years (Haines & Case, 2008; Kubiak & Hester, 2009). During this time risk assessment and management became prominent in youth justice work, as the focus shifted towards identifying young people at risk and managing the risk factors in a cost-effective way (Haines & Case, 2008). This has been pertinent to the youth justice sector, as research indicated that once a juvenile is apprehended by the police then intervention outcomes are reduced (Arthur, 2007). The focus thus shifted on identifying young people who have the potential to offend or were deemed to be at risk. Proponents of this approach assert that there are risk factors which are both static (historical) and dynamic (changeable) that are associated with delinquency, violence and serious offending (Farrington, 2002; Ferguson & Meehan, 2010; Howell, 2009). In this discourse there has not been a precise definition of risk or protective factors consistently used across research. They range
from referring to ‘explanatory variables (for example, poor parental supervision), a dichotomous variable (for example, poor/good parental supervision) or a continuous explanatory variable (for example, scale of parental supervision from poor to good)’ (Haines & Case, 2008, p. 7). The lack of concrete reference points has made the assessment and work with them ambiguous. A range of ‘tick-box’ risk assessments have been developed however critics such as Pitts (2003) asserted that these were rigid and inappropriate ways of assessing human social behaviours. As noted in the earlier section (2.2.4) there is also an inherent class bias in the external labelling of risk and deviance.

The Risk Factor Paradigm has been the dominant modern juvenile justice paradigm and exerts a powerful influence over policy and practice in the UK (O’Mahony, 2009). It is the favoured approach by the UK Government and its literature on gangs is steered with a risk factor focus (HM Government, 2011; Home Office, 2015a). In the existing literature on gangs which use the Risk Factor Paradigm, studies range from identifying seven risk factors to a list of twenty, which when concurrent can suggest that a young person is at a high risk for joining a gang. The research shows that the effect of risk factors is cumulative, as the more risk factors that are present in a young person’s life, the increased likelihood that they will join a gang (Craig, Vitaro, Gagnon, & Tremblay, 2002; Hill, Howell, Hawkins, Battin-pearson, 1999). Gang-involvement has been said to result from an amalgamation of factors which constitute ‘multiple marginalities’ (Young, Fitzgibbon, & Silverstone, 2013, p. 26). Existing research is dominated by a characterisation of family problems as related to delinquency including gang-involvement, ‘primarily in defects of family relationships, parental character, and early child-rearing practices’ (Spergel, 1995, p. 113). There is acknowledgement that other factors such as family income and
societal issues add to the strain on a family, however ultimately, ‘the youth’s needs are not met because of deficient parenting, supervision, and support and he or she turns to delinquent activity’ (ibid).

General risk-focused theories of crime focus on the effects of multiple marginality and which place the majority of explanations for behaviour onto the individual. Pyrooz and Densley (2015) argued that the shortcoming of existing risk factor literature is that it does not give enough weight to the factors that pull people into gangs as well as those circumstances that serve to push. Studies have asked people with records of criminal offending about their childhood histories and have found a high level of co-existence of DVA and offending behaviour. UK Ministry of Justice figures suggest that, of Adult prisoners, 41 per cent had ‘observed violence in the home’ as children (Williams, Papadopoulou, & Booth, 2012, p. 9). Women were more likely to report that they experienced violence at home (50 per cent) than men (40 per cent) (K. Williams et al., 2012). However, this does not necessarily mean that women are more likely to experience DVA, but it may instead indicate a reluctance to identify abuse, as well as disclose it. Williams et al., broke down these figures even more, to find that prisoners who had a family member with an alcohol problem (18 per cent of sample) were more likely to have experienced abuse (53 per cent compared to 23 per cent), and of those, they were more likely to have also had violence at home (65 per cent compared with 35 per cent). Similarly, there was a high co-prevalence of prisoners who had a family member with a current drug problem (14 per cent of sample), of whom 62 per cent had observed violence as a child (Williams et al., 2012, p. 10). This statistical work highlights trends which have proved useful in indicating the ways that diverse issues of DVA, substance abuse, and child abuse can converge in the lives of people who find themselves in prison.
This knowledge has been then applied in the ‘adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) model.

2.3.5 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACSs) Literature

The current prevailing discourse on the impacts of traumatic events in childhood is that of ‘Adverse Childhood Experiences’ (ACE’s). This approach was initiated by the CDC-Kasier ACE study which took place in the USA in the late 1990’s. The underlying motivation was after noticing that there was a high incidence of sexual abuse among patients being treated for obesity. Over 17,000 patients completed the survey between 1995 and 1997 which asked questions about the patients first eighteen years of life. Subsequent studies that focus on ACE prevalence have tended to divide the events into three broad types with ten categories of adversity (Boullier & Blair, 2018, p. 132). One way to conceptualise the ACEs notion is that, ‘Traumatic events of the earliest years of infancy and childhood are not lost but, like a child’s footprints in cement, are often preserved lifelong’ (Felitti 2010 cited in McGavock & Spratt, 2017, p. 1129). The premise of the ACE approach is that it is a number count of the types of adversity that a child experiences in childhood rather than frequency. Scores range from 0-10, which refer not to the number of incidences of an adversity, but rather the different types. All different types of adversity are weighted equally in the score system. In this way it is a simplistic model in which the premise is that it is not the severity of the individual experience, but rather is the experience of more categories of adversity which are seen as most important to the child’s later physical and mental health (World Health Organisation, 2018). The focus is on the cumulative effect. In simple terms, ‘more
is worse’ (McGavock & Spratt, 2017, p. 1130). People who have experienced in excess of four ACE’s are at a heightened risk of, ‘chronic disease such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes as well as mental illness and health risk behaviours’ (Boullier & Blair, 2018, p. 132). The ACEs literature has become very prevalent in UK child protection discourse in recent years. It has led to high profile public health campaigns in Wales. In 2016 Public Health Wales conducted the first nationwide survey of ACE experiences in Wales. ACEs were shown to be a common experience, with almost half the population in Wales experiencing one and 14 per cent experiencing four or more (Ford, 2017). In Scotland there are calls to become an, ‘ACE Aware Nation’ (ACE Aware Scotland, 2019). McGavock and Spratt (2017) questioned undergraduate students on their experiences of ACEs. They found that, of the forty-three who had experienced DVA where their mother was the victim, had all (bar one) also experienced additional childhood adversities. In fact, when they analysed the data further, they came to the conclusion that those who report DVA are most likely to have an ACE score of at least four, which has been linked to an increased risk of spending a night in custody or in prison, as well as being involved in violence (Bellis et al., 2014). Thus, the presence of DVA itself on an ACE score can be seen as a proxy indicator for a likely higher ACE score.

There are widely recognised limitations with the ACE literature, however (Lacey & Minnis, 2020). Firstly, it appears to be in many ways a formalised version of the risk-factor paradigm that has previously existed in Child Protection discourse. The difference is that the ACE model has now been globalised, through its adoption by the World Health Organisation, who have even developed a questionnaire that can be used anywhere (World Health Organisation, 2018). There is a great risk when adopting a check-list style approach that it seeks to pathologize the very people it
seeks to help. There is an air of adversity-as-destiny that is inherent with a checklist that seeks to generalise based on simplistic cumulative score. The reductionist way in which the approach can be applied risks, ‘over-simplistic communication of risk/causality, determinism and stigma’ (Lacey & Minnis, 2020, p. 1). It does not account for all those with high scores who do not experience negative effects or offer information on the nuances of how people recover. A further concern about the use of ACE scores is that, by viewing adversities as cumulative factors, it fails to account for differences between them, as well as wider environmental factors or internal factors, such as resilience (McLaughlin & Sheridan, 2016). As noted earlier in the literature on DVA, children experience and construct their understanding of adversity in different ways, which may not be reflected in its weighting on the ACEs checklist. It also re-focuses the issue back to the experiences of the nuclear family, whilst leaving wider structural inequalities unexamined. It is vital to consider the theoretical underpinnings and social history of DVA to understanding how it is situated within wider gender inequality. There is a risk of losing the understanding of the gendered aspect of DVA when you list it as equal weighting with many other complex and individual experiences. If a child experienced DVA, sexual abuse, and divorced parents (as an example of things that occur on the ACE checklist), then these are distinct issues that will have had different impacts, it is not enough to just list a child as scoring three. Based on these concerns, I approach ACE discourse with caution as I do not feel that it adequately deals with the distinctions between issues of adversity that are fundamental to understanding their impact.

2.3.6 The Child Protection Dimension
Children who witness DVA are considered under statutory guidelines to suffer emotional and psychological maltreatment, related to Section 31 of the Children Act 1989: impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another (LSCB, 2016). DVA has been a present factor in serious case reviews of two-thirds of families where a child has died (Radford et al., 2011). This, alongside other high profile deaths led to reviews of the Children’s Act 2004 and promoted a professional shift towards early intervention (Radford et al., 2011). Unfortunately this has not been matched with an increase in resource for child protection services (Radford et al., 2011). Child protection services have been accused of not taking the issue of DVA serious enough, instead focusing on other intersecting issues such as parental substance misuse or mental health issues, so DVA becomes invisible as a coexisting abuse in the background (Arthur, 2007). Where DVA is recognised there has been a strong tendency for social workers to focus on the mother’s failure to protect the child rather than the father’s abusive behaviour (Arthur, 2007). Male perpetrators also remain invisible in the child protection plans (Sharp-jeffs & Kelly, 2016). This is a trend which has been identified in social workers responses to DVA even in historical reviews from 1930s (Humphreys & Absler, 2011). In a transnational comparative analysis Humphreys et al. (2011) noted that although there have been some positive changes in social work practice around DVA, there has not been a discursive shift from holding women accountable for failure to protect their children whilst not holding perpetrators responsible (Humphreys & Absler, 2011).

The child protection sector also holds safeguarding responsibility for minors who are involved with serious youth violence and gangs. Interestingly, the policy on Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity
explicitly acknowledges that in this context ‘children who harm others are both victims and perpetrators’ (Department for Education and Home Office, 2010, p.6). In this document a reference is made to Cycle of Violence theories, as it outlines that ‘being exposed to violence, either as a witness or victim, increases a child’s propensity to violence later in life’ (Department for Education and Home Office, 2010, p.13). The policy relies heavily on the Risk Factor Paradigm to offer explanations for identification of children at risk of becoming involved with a gang. The following graph lists fifty-six potential risk factors which can lead to gang involvement. Both ‘conflict and violence in the home’, and ‘witness or victim of domestic violence’ are deemed risk factors;
Figure 1: Risk Factors for a person becoming involved in gangs (Department for Education and Home Office, 2010, p.19)
There is a lot of cross-over between children involved with serious youth violence and gangs and those who are involved in the Troubled Families Programme. In 2011 the UK Coalition Government developed this programme in response to the widespread riots that had occurred (Crossley & Lambert, 2017). Then Prime Minister David Cameron blamed the riots on, ‘behaviour: people showing indifference to right and wrong; people with a twisted moral code; people with a complete absence of self-restraint’ (Crossley & Lambert, 2017, p.81). The troubled families agenda was created in order to bring together a wider variety of interventions for the most high need families, however the discursive power of labelling has also placed blame on the shoulders on them, resonant of Murray’s ‘underclass’ (1990). Thus, child protection services have value based political agendas which underpin their work. This has contributed to the construction of young men involved in gangs/on-road as inheriting the legacy of problem families rather than being the victims of them.

There are several key issues related to the purpose and design of child protection provision that means that it does not adequately fill the support gaps, despite the dual issues being recognised by policy. Child protection services operate a threshold system for access. So even if there are safeguarding concerns around DVA or gang involvement, it does not mean support will be offered. In a 2016 review of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) by Sharp-Jeff and Kelly, the role of child protection was analysed. They found that in many cases children were not meeting the threshold to be considered a child-in-need upon assessment. The Child Protection sector technically holds responsibility for both children who experience DVA and those on-road and gang-involved. The link between the two is made both through
acknowledgement of risk factors. However, it appears that the work that is done with children who have been exposed to DVA lies predominantly with encouraging the mother to make her children safe, rather than direct intervention with children. This work is left with charities who are working in a distinct and siloed way. Children can fall into the gaps between using DVA services and then being considered at low risk of harm until later gang/on road involvement.

2.3.7 Societal Transmission of Violence

Social Learning Theories, the ‘Cycle of Violence’

A pervasive Social Learning theory about the effects of experiencing DVA as children has been the ‘cycle of violence’ or ‘cross-generational transmission of violence’. This theory indicates that violence is passed from one generation to the next through the family and that children who have experienced DVA will themselves engage in violent relationships, either as victims or perpetrators (Cummings, 1998; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990; Peled, Jaffe, & Edleson, 1995). This is often associated with gendered dynamics, suggesting that girls will more likely become the victims, with boys becoming perpetrators. Evidence of intergenerational transmission of violence comes from longitudinal and ethnographic research that observes the relationships between childhood influences and later adult behaviour (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Jewkes, 2002). Experiencing DVA as a child emerges as one of the strongest predictors of later perpetration (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Saunders, 2002). This theory however has received criticism mainly for the fact that it does
not account for a large proportion of exposed children who do not follow this pattern (Lapierre, 2008). It also gives a sense of violence or victimhood as destiny, which is a limiting prognosis for these children. A limitation of the cycle of violence theory and the reason why it has been rejected by the majority of front-line agencies is that it does not explain why most children who have been exposed to DVA do not go on to perpetrate abuse, as well as the fact that many DVA perpetrators have not experienced it in childhood (Cunningham et al., 1998; Dutton, 1999; Mullender, 1996). Perpetrator interventions based solely on social learning theories have raised concerns that they function in a way that does not sufficiently hold perpetrators to account, does not directly address the abuse, and ignores the power and control elements of the DVA (Hamberger & Hastings, 1993; Healey, Smith, & O’Sullivan, 1998; Mullender, 1996).

*The Public Health Approach to violence*

The public health approach to gangs and youth violence was a concept that originated in Chicago as the *CureViolence* model. Due to its success it has also been applied to the Scottish context, in Glasgow, and has also shown positive results in reducing youth violence. There are now calls for this approach to be adopted more widely across the UK where there are known gang issues (The Youth Violence Commission, 2018). The public health approach to youth violence was conceptualised by James Gilligan (1996) who started to use the language of epidemic applied to societal violence. The public health approach frames violence as a disease, to be treated as an epidemic; a health issue that spreads via contagion. It looks at similarities between other diseases and the way that they spread and
cluster and have compared it with the way that violence does the same. The key seems to be a very responsive support team which mobilise once an incident has occurred paired with a community response which responds negatively every time there is violence. Cure Violence is an initiative that aims to reduce violence through street-based practitioners who ‘interrupt’ violence by working with those on the cusp of committing violence, as well as through the utilization of public messaging (Gebo, 2016, p. 376). The results are impressive, they boast large reductions in violence in the areas that it has been trialled. In the first few years of its application in Glasgow, there was a 46 per cent reduction in violent offending by those gang members who engaged as well as a 34 per cent reduction in all other types of crimes (Violence Reduction Unit, 2011). Research also suggests that this model has resulted in a reduction in weapon carrying by young people (Williams, Currie, Linden, & Donnelly, 2014).

There are several tenets of the public health approach. The first is that it focuses on primary prevention, in particular reducing the likelihood of gang formation (Gebo, 2016). By likening the risk of later violence in the same way as risk of later illness, it frames the issues in the familiar discourse of health prevention. It is therefore argued that violence, ‘like a range of other environment-and behaviour-related health problems—including HIV/AIDS, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes—can largely be predicted and prevented’ (Neville, Goodall, Gavine, Williams, & Donnelly, 2015, p. 323). In the same way as other public health campaigns, it is population-based and seeks to ‘improve the health and safety of the population’ (Neville et al., 2015, p. 323). Unlike the individual-deficit focus of the ACE perspectives, the public health frames so called ‘gang violence’ as situated within the wider community and as a concern of the whole community. By
conceptualising it this way, it focuses more on collective responsibility than individual deficit. By framing youth violence as a health issue, proponents have found that the approach is more readily accepted by affected communities, as to use this framework rather than a punitive criminal justice approach emphasises ‘wellness rather than individual blame’ (Gebo, 2016, p. 376). The CureViolence Programme has worked on training around DVA as interconnected with other forms of violence in the community. They conceptualised DVA as part of the wider ‘culture of violence’ that they seek to mitigate (Cure Violence, 2019). They make the link between DVA as a form of violence and then wider gang violence, however more as a slippery slope. One worker testimony noted that they see that DVA can ‘turn into a shooting’ in a relatively short space of time (Cure Violence, 2013). My critique of this is similar to that of the ACE’s discourse. As even though it is good that the ongoing existence of violence within communities is an important issue to note, there is a risk that the violence is conflated without looking more specifically at the nuances of different types of violence and their effects. This is pertinent when specifically concerned with DVA, as a gender-based-violence issue which has very specific structural roots which is distinct from on-road or gang related violence. Although violence is the common thread, it is essential to look at the fundamental dynamics of the violence in order to understand the way it is reproduced within communities. Currently I feel that the necessary level of gender and equality awareness is lacking in the current discourse around the public health approach to violence.

2.3.8 Section Conclusion
What this section has shown is that, although existing research looks at childhood adversity in a range of forms, there has been a lack of focus on the specific ways these experiences may implicate and affect one another. This absence in plain sight of the two often co-existing issues is not helped by the way in which men who experienced both do not fit easily into the victim or perpetrator stereotypes. As shown in the first section of the literature review, boys are already complicated by DVA victimisation discourse which essentialised violent masculinity. On the other hand, the moral panic around gangs has focused on the dangerous and violence masculinities of young black men in particular. They are framed as potential criminals yet are still often children themselves. The prevalent risk factor paradigm has tried to close this gap but can be used to label and further exclude groups of young people as potentially violent, in similar ways that social learning theories have. This literature review has outlined the significant gap in both professional and academic work on the intersection of DVA and on-road and gang-involvement.
3 Theoretical Underpinning: Masculinities, Vulnerability, and Violence through a Lens of Intersectionality

The previous chapter focused on the academic literature which is concerned with the historical position of men who experience DVA in childhood as well as on-road/gang-involvement. This examination showed that the existing knowledge base is partial and does not connect all of the issues explored in the thesis. Chapter three focuses on the theoretical background which underlines the approach to research in the thesis. The three themes which form the backbone of the thesis are; masculinity; vulnerability; violence. In this chapter I outline these theoretical perspectives, which inform the rest of the thesis.

3.1 Theorising Masculinity

There has been a research trajectory since Connell’s (1987) significant book, Gender and Power to analyse gender as a performance which is affected by the underlying power structures beneath it. This was further explored in Connell’s (2005) book Masculinities, which further explored the notion of hegemonic masculinities in particular. This concept was then used by researchers who were interested in the potential links between hegemonic masculinity and crime (Collier, 1998; Messerschmidt, 2005). The notion of doing gender was discussed initially by West and Zimmerman (1987) who framed gender as a ‘powerful ideological device’ which is used to shape social practice (pg. 147). Butler focused on the aspect of
The performativity of gender (1988, 2014), focusing on the ‘patterns of practice’ of gender; ‘i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). It is enacted and performed, rather than being a static point of reference. The essential premise was that gender was distinct from sex, and that gender is a performance that is culturally specific. Doing gender successfully requires drawing on both social and cultural capital (Mullins, 2006, p. 69). An enduring notion of doing gender in relation to gang masculinities has been Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is not assumed to be performed by the majority of men, however it is the normative and ‘most honoured’ way of being a man, which, ‘ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). So, even if most men do not enact it, it is the masculine ideal which men position themselves in relation to.

3.1.1 Hegemonic and Multiple Masculinities

Connell was the first to emphasize that multiple masculinities exist and also to identify the function of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ among them (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). To conceptualise this Connell drew on Gramsci’s (1971) classic notion of hegemony, which outlines how one class views their own subordination by the dominant class as natural and thus tolerates it. Hegemonic masculinity is not a performance in itself, but an ideal that other masculinities are pitched against. Within the concept of the hierarchy of masculinities the importance of the local context has been emphasised as important. Structured relations amongst various local masculinities exist in all local settings, which all aim
to achieve a specific localised version of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 847). ‘Boys will be boys’ differently, depending upon their position in social structures and, therefore, upon their access to power and resources’ (Messerschmidt, 1994, p. 82). The other polar within the configuration of masculinity practice is marginalised masculinity. This masculinity conceptualisation is centred on the ways in which multiple inequalities such as race and class intersect, which mean that they continually occupy a marginalised position in relation to hegemonic versions.

A distinction that has been made in relation to multiple masculinities is one which moves away from the notion of hierarchy with hegemonic masculinity at the top, but instead urges the focus to be on the way that masculinities than men perform change through time during the life course. This is in response to a critique of the hierarchy of masculinities being structured as a liner hierarchy which presents the different performances as fitting neatly on top of each other. Goodey (1997) focused on the idea of a masculine biography, which was a way to open up the diversity of individual experiences across the life course. This allows a deeper understanding of how the personal project of being or becoming a man related to wider structural issues such as race and class. The nuanced idea of the performance of masculinities as shifting, adaptive and ever-changing was also explored by Wetherell and Edley (1999). Like Goodey, they critiqued the notion of hegemonic masculinity as being too one-dimensional and limiting, instead seeking to look at the ways in which the men position themselves distinctly in their narratives. This was echoed by Beasley (2008), who critiqued Connell’s approach to hegemonic masculinity, noting that there is a tendency for it to be used to explain gender domination with insufficient attention to the nuances between masculinities.
Hegemonic masculinity has also been critiqued by the existence of a ‘new man’ who presents a hybrid masculinity through performing previously subordinated types of masculinity, including emotional closeness and reduced homophobia (Anderson, 2009; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). However, although this is said to occur within the ‘Millennial generation’, it is predominantly found among White, privileged, heterosexual young men. The subcultures developed around young men who are involved on-road and gang-involved appear to be outside of these trends (Bengtsson, 2016).

Connell’s (1995) consideration of subordinate masculinities generally referenced the different masculinities that were positioned in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Connell uses the example of homosexual masculinities which are situated at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men Connell (1987) emphasised the continuum of masculinity, with feminised versions being further down the hierarchy. For instance, Connell’s typical subordinated masculinity is homosexual, which is policed through ‘direct interactions and a kind of ideological warfare’ (1987, p. 186). For Connell, sexuality and femininity are the defining features of the hierarchy of masculinity. This is distinct to the context widely mentioned in gang research, which is focused more on the way that race and ethnicity affects the hierarchy of masculinities.

Glynn (2014) focused on the way that men moved through gang-involvement and criminality to desistance. He focused on subordinated masculinity as symptomatic of historical and current racial inequality among men. Glynn focused on the racialisation of masculinities to explain why there has been an enduring separation between white and black masculinity, which he frames as placing black men continually in the subordinated position. When exploring in the lives of gang-
involved men in his study he then further focused on the creation of subordinated masculinity during the period of primary socialisation. He attributed this to ‘poor schooling, family disconnect, limited community connections, urban inequality’ (Glynn, 2014, p. 107). In emphasising the racial dynamics of subordinated masculinity, Glynn noted that black men face the additional barriers of racism that seek to place them as subordinated to white men. Thus there is not only a life course trajectory from boyhood to manhood, which has become more scrutinized in sociological research (James and Prout, 1990), but it is also essential to consider the racial basis of this trajectory. Research that has looked into black boyhood noted that it is both, ‘socially unimagined and unimaginable’ due to the devalued position of black boys within wider society (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p. 27). Discourse on black boyhood has centred on the perceived ‘crisis’ of young masculinity which has rendered the boys as considered only in terms of narrow constructions of masculinity which focus on the way others fear what they may become in adulthood (Alexander, 2000; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Frosh et al., 2002).

The above discussion about subordinate masculinity shows that the application of intersectionality is pertinent when analysing gender performance. Although Connell and Glynn both focus on different aspect of structural inequalities, they both agree that the function and effect of the subordination is implicated through masculinity. Gender both changes and reinforces the wider structural oppressions. This is why it is essential to consider Connell’s central point that the structure of gender power is relational, not fixed.
3.1.2 Protest Masculinity

Throughout the thesis I draw on Connell’s (2005) concept of protest masculinity. This draws on the particular experiences of men who assume a type of masculinity that arises from childhood experiences of powerlessness. Young men who have had that experience develop a gendered assertion of power which relates to their childhood powerlessness, and emerges as a ‘pressured exaggeration of masculine conventions’ (Connell, 2005, p. 111). Looking in particular at the practices of street gangs in America, Connell notes that this form of masculine identity appears to emerge from the ‘level of tension created by poverty and an ambience of violence’ (ibid). Through ‘interaction in this milieu, the growing boy puts together a tense, freaky façade, making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power’ (Connell, 2005, p. 111). The protest masculinity therefore is a marginalized masculinity performance, which, ‘picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in the a context of poverty’ (Connell, 2005, p. 114). The lack of cultural and economic resources to draw on to perform a classic hegemonic masculinity position, is central to protest masculinity. Men in this situation do not receive the same patriarchal dividend that is experienced in wider society, and so in light of this they create alternative masculinities to address this. Connell noted that youth-gang violence is a, ‘striking example of the assertion of marginalized masculinities against other men’ (Connell, 1995, p. 83). It is in this context that men build on a working-class masculine ethic of solidarity and sociality, however it is the collective solidarity in the form of gang-involvement which then divides the group from the wider working class.
Elements of protest masculinity have been drawn on by several academics who study life on-road and as gang-involved (as discussed in section 2.2.3). However, it is seldom referred to as drawing on Connell’s notion of protest masculinity, with the notable exception of Sveinung & Pedersen, (2011) who applied Connell’s idea but rather alternative terms have been adopted by different academics; hyper-masculinity (Glynn, 2014; Pitts, 2008); street masculinity (Harding, 2014; Mullins, 2006); toxic masculinity (Hart & Hart, 2018). These diversity in language has led to a difficulty in cross-comparison of studies in masculinity and has led to an overall dilution of the foundations of hegemonic masculinity theory. I have found Connell’s theorisation the most sophisticated version of masculinity for gang-involved men, as I feel the other incarnations are alluding to this original version.

3.1.3 Crime as Performative Protest Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity, ‘emphasizes practices toward authority, control, competitive individualism, independence, aggressiveness, and the capacity for violence’ (Bernard, 2013, p. 8). Crime can be seen as a way of doing gender or demonstrating masculinity, when legitimate means of doing this are stifled. Crime as a means of doing gender is a response to various structural inequalities in society which are related to class and race (ibid). Thus, ‘the pleasures of crime and the pleasures of ‘the masculine’, it appears, continue to be fused’ (Collier, 1998, p. 74). Adams and Coltrane (2005) link the typical problematic behaviours of adolescent boys (including school suspension, drinking, use of street drugs, police detainment, sexual activity, number of heterosexual partners, and forcing someone to have sex)
as being associated with a traditional, thus hegemonic, masculine ideology. Messerschmidt theorised that different crimes are utilised by different men in the construction of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In the context of looking at on-road and gang-involved masculinity, various authors have provided different explanations for the way in which men in gangs are doing gender, using the gang as an instrumental context for masculinity performance. Harding (2014) used the lens of Bourdieu’s concept of social capital and social fields to construct the street as a place which offers ‘fields of possibilities’ through which gender can be achieved, particularly for poor men who may not be able to achieve this masculinity status otherwise. Harding argued that the gang context offered an opportunity for its members to ‘do masculinity’, through enacting physical violence and material gang via drug dealing. Deuchar noted that the gang can provide a context where, ‘the very worst aspects of hegemonic masculinity often become reinforced’ (2018, p. 23).

3.1.4 Racism, Marginalisation and Protest Masculinity

The expectations of masculinity are altered for black men in UK society. As noted by Edley and Wetherell (1995) racism is not just a cultural experience but is also a ‘material phenomenon’ (p. 110). They noted that ‘consciousness of masculinity reflects men’s material circumstances’, thus racial differences directly affect gender experiences (Edley & Wetherell, 1995, p. 110). Construction of black masculinity has been shaped in a context of diverse racist practices. Jefferson noted, in the American context, that the combination of societal history of slavery and lynching, discrimination, the civil rights movement, created a situation where black men
were worn down by ‘the effects of both restricted opportunities and internalization’ (Jefferson, 1998, p. 86). The transition from boyhood to manhood has been imbued with racial tensions, particularly in the American slavery context. Frankenberg noted that the terms ‘girl’ and ‘boy’ were used as ‘racist appellations for Black people’ (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 141). These terms served to deliberately infantilise and humiliate them. This cultural history provides a backdrop whereby black young men occupied a space within which normal progression to manhood in adolescence was complicated. This left a legacy which meant that the only identity widely, ‘available to galvanize young, black men, in effect, was that of the “Buck” … the black man as sexual, virile, strong, tough, and dangerous’ (Jefferson, 1998, p. 86). The so called ‘Black Macho’ is typified in gang warfare, rap music, and prominent black sports stars, labelled the ‘black-aesthetic commodity’ (Singh cited in Jefferson, 1998, p. 86). Although Jefferson was drawing on the North American context, this is still pertinent as this black aesthetic is a significant source of popular culture references for UK based gang-involved men, as reflected in the music choices in this study. Flores asserted that, ‘Gangs are rooted in masculine resistance to institutionalized racism’ (2016, p. 591). Glynn noted that, ‘the narrative space black men do occupy is enabled by a system that supports and encourages notions of hyper-masculinity, and then criminalises it for asserting that position’ (2014, p. 25). The gang context typifies this contradiction, illustrated in part by the capitalist appropriation of forms of gang culture (particularly clothing brands and in the music industry) which are then sold as urban street culture products despite the criminalisation of men who are at the heart of it.
3.1.5 Vulnerable Masculinity

Collier (1998) critiqued Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity as he asserted that it is important to recognise there are more complexities to masculinities than just aspects of masculine toughness, and this nuance can get lost in dominant discourse. To illustrate this, Collier referenced men who have experienced abuse and violence themselves, prior to them adopting a tough masculine persona. This close relationship between vulnerability and toughness is a key theme in the thesis. Vulnerability, as a concept, has been explored fully by Gilson (2014). She noted that vulnerability is one of the fundamentals of human experience and is something that can never be truly avoided. In some way of a definition of vulnerability, I particularly appreciate the following passage where Gilson outlines some of the key features of why vulnerability is so ethically pertinent;

Vulnerability is of ethical importance and... poses ethical problems. Vulnerability is unsettling. The experience of vulnerability presents us with the reality of fallibility, mutability, unpredictability and uncontrollability. We are affected by forces outside our control, the effects of which we can neither fully know nor fully control. Thus, experiences of vulnerability can also prompt fear, defensiveness, avoidance, and disavowal (Gilson, 2014, pp. 3–4).

This definition of vulnerability shows the way that it is of integral importance to the human condition. Throughout the thesis I posit that vulnerable masculinity inherently co-exists when there is protest masculinity. There has been much less theoretical work done on the types of masculinities that men perform which are
centred on expressions of insecurity or vulnerability. In the narratives, where the participants were performing protest masculinity, there was always a shadow identity that was vulnerable and emotional, which the men discussed in retrospect. In a way, Connell’s conceptualisation of protest masculinity itself implies a fragile dominance, which is characterised by its marginalisation, thus insecurity is implied in the theorisation of protest masculinity itself. Yet outside of that, I found myself searching for a typology of masculinities which could speak to the vulnerabilities of the men, which co-existed with their dominant masculinity performances. The absence in existing research suggests that there is not a typical harm story around this type of vulnerable masculinity for men experiencing DVA, or on-road and gang-involved. In Glynn’s research into masculinities of on-road and gang-involved men, he constructed a six stage pathway of masculinity performances which are broadly; subordinated masculinity> hyper-masculinity> prison masculinity> confused masculinity> grounded masculinity> positive masculinity (2014, p. 107). Although there is scope for insecurities and vulnerabilities to be expressed within these different masculinities, they do not capture the dual identity of dominant masculinity (which speaks to the hegemonic model even if somewhat frustrated), with a shadow self that is emotional and vulnerable. Indeed, in Connell’s work, there is reference to marginalised masculinities, as well as protest masculinities, which are both fundamentally about social exclusion and thus insecurity, yet again this still does not capture what I heard from the men in their masculine biographies, about their sense of vulnerability. Vulnerable masculinity as a concept has also been worked on by Maguire (2019), who researched the way men in prison deal with subordinated masculinities in the wider gender order. Thus, there is traction in exploring vulnerable masculinity, it is just focused on less than the hegemonic forms, which perpetuate the invisibility of men’s vulnerabilities.
3.1.6 ‘The Moment of Separation’

When exploring the life-stories of men, Connell (2005) wrote about the *moment of separation* where individuals chose to separate with the markers of hegemonic masculinity and instead sought to choose to enact a more passive complicit masculinity. At that point they give up on a masculine performance that was defined by assertiveness and dominance, instead choosing to remake their masculine selves, using both willpower and commitment, despite derision from their peers. Connell was clear that this process of separation was often not a linear process, with many men finding it hard to let go of the aggressive and domineering tendencies of their past selves, a difficulty that was also shared by men in this study.

Men in this situation have to work with the resources that they have, and, ‘in these relationships and emotions are motives that support the new emotional work, and some reasons for its shape and limits’ (Connell, 2005, p. 135). This was found in the narratives in this study, which referred to the process of letting go of their previous protest masculinity identity, with the hidden vulnerable masculinity. Through their process of separation, they navigated the process of foregrounding their previous vulnerable masculinity and foregrounding it as a strength in their character. This was particularly the case for those who chose to go into consultancy or charity sector, where they routinely shared aspects of their stories from the road, which ultimately revealed the disillusionment and danger that they felt at the time, advocating for a cessation of gangs and youth violence. These narratives mirrored Deuchar’s (2018) account of the ways in which ex-gang involved men reconfigured their experiences in light of their own mortality. He noted that the process of aging
and related significant events such as becoming a parent, are driving forces in loosening the bonds to old relationships, beliefs and activities.

Leaving a gang adds complications to the moment of separation from old masculine identities. Physical markers of previous on-road and gang-involvement can remain, through tattoos, scars, or a personal style, that can result in men continuing to experience the consequences of their marginality through gangs long after they left (Flores, 2016). This is in addition to the stain of a criminal conviction that endures on a personal criminal record. In their current lives all of the men described a desire to ‘make good’ from their past crimes by somehow paying back to their communities for the harms that had been done (Maruna, 2004). As they reconfigured their sense of positioning in the wider moral universes they sought to re-explore and define themselves in light of the past (Flores, 2016).

Most of the men expressed a desire to share their experiences as a way to offer reparations and to help young people who may find themselves in similar quandaries as they had lived through. These attempts to represent their masculine biographies in light of their gang exit and survival also contain some risks for the men involved. As Flores noted, ‘reformed gang embodiment risked being interpreted as a failed masculine performance.’ (2016, p. 597). Each of the men had a different point at which their gang involvement ended. For some this was presented as a significant event in their lives which changed their course, such as a significant prison sentence, whereas for others it was more mundane, getting older and growing out of it, or the life change of becoming a parent. Denzin (1989) noted that life-stories tend to be situated around turning-point moments in an individual’s life, which could be insignificant or profoundly moving. At this point formerly on-
road and gang-involved men move from inhabiting protest masculinity to complicit masculinity.

3.1.7 Complicit or Marginalised Masculinities in Recovery

In a similar way to there being disparate language around protest masculinity, there are also a range of concepts around the types of masculinities that men adopt in the period post-protest masculinity. Due to the nature of protest masculinity, as shown in the prior discussion, it is defined by its active resistance against wider marginalisation and the pressures of looming hegemonic masculinity as an aspirational model. The two models that Connell puts forward that are of concern to the data are that of ‘complicit masculinity’ and ‘marginalised masculinity’. As with the other forms of masculinity as theorised by Connell both of these masculinities are co-ordinate through their relationship to the hegemonic form. However, the distinction between them comes in terms of the power that is available in these two identities. With complicit masculinity, the focus is on the way in which men benefit from the patriarchal dividend, which is the advantage men gain from gender inequality and domination over women (Connell, 2005). This dividend can manifest in subtle ways and its dormant presence can mean that men who otherwise appear invested in inequality at the everyday level yet enjoy the patriarchal dividend in their wider lives. According to Connell, the majority of men would be in this situation, being reconciled to their place in the gender order, if not benefiting completely and always from its potential.
Marginalised masculinity is distinct, as it is an identity position that men who do not receive the full patriarchal dividend occupy. This is not a fixed character type, but rather is a state of being in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Connell (2005) noted that this term refers to the relationship between dominant masculinities and subordinated classes or ethnic groups. This applies to the dynamics of race between men; ‘hegemonic masculinity among whites sustains the institutional oppression and physical terror that have framed the making of masculinities in black communities’ (Connell, 2005, p. 80). The concept of marginalized masculinity became relevant in the thesis when thinking about the options for diverse masculinities that the participants faced once they ceased to be on-road and gang-involved. As noted in the previous section, the participants had to find ways to navigate their lives in recovery whilst maintaining some stigmatizing features, such as criminal records, which contributed to their ongoing marginalisation.

3.1.8 Feminist Critiques of Connell’s Masculinity Theory

Historically, feminist theory has not delved much into the study of masculinities. Indeed Connell herself noted, in a retrospective interview about her work, that it had not influenced gender theory as much as she would have hoped, as masculinity studies are broadly annexed within wider gender scholarship (Wedgwood, 2009). Work on masculinity has emerged and evolved in a parallel realm, analysed (as in section 3.1.3) as implicated with offending and criminal pursuits, whereas feminists have been more broadly concerned with victimology. This has meant that there is a dearth of engagement from feminist scholars with Connell’s work. Connell is clear that the study of masculinity is a ‘strategic part of feminist research, the moment
of “studying up”, looking at the privileged’ (Connell, 2014, p. 6). This aim is still pertinent. Connell’s research is considered to be from an explicitly pro-feminist perspective (Beasley, 2015). However, in this section I will consider three main feminist critiques of Connell’s work and explain how I will address these issues in this thesis.

The first area which has come to be critiqued is the sex/gender essentialism which is an inherent aspect of Connell’s approach to masculinities. Although Connell emphasises diversity of sexualities in the hierarchy of masculinities, it is still framed around a strong association of masculinity and male sex. Patriarchy is the structural oppression that Connell focuses on which is a power structure organised around gender identity distinctions between women and men. This approach is somewhat at odds with contemporary feminist theorizing. Judith Butler (1990, 2004) focused on an exploration of gender as aspects of identity which are performed related not to innate personhood but rather from social norms. For Butler, gender is not a stable identity but rather, ‘it is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts’ (Butler, 1988, p. 519). However these acts themselves are policed, meaning that for Butler, ‘gender as a norm is exercised coercively’ (Dunn & Thompson, 2009, p. 158). Butler’s approach is quite a different approach to Connell’s, which although focuses on gender identity as a performance in some ways, it is still tied to sex. Beasley (2015) noted that feminist scholarship has adopted an approach which acknowledges non-binary and diverse gender identities in a way that has not happened in masculinity studies.

Despite this critique of Connell’s work, she noted herself that, ‘the way in which gender issues were played out in my experience made it impossible to adopt an essentialist position that simply equated men and masculinity’ (Wedgwood, 2009,
p. 338). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) gave a response to major critique and offered reformulation of certain aspects. They emphasised that the notion of hegemonic masculinity is concerned with patterns of practice rather than identity and that it is practiced in locally relevant ways. My own appraisal of the accusation of essentialism in Connell’s work is that by associating gender with sex does help us understand the material reality of patriarchy. This provides an apt lens as a framework for this thesis, as it is centred on two distinct gendered trends, that of DVA and gang-involvement which are male-dominated violent contexts. Thus, to understand the gender identity of individuals in these contexts, Connell’s gender theory offers more than Butler’s, as understanding the gendered power within these circumstances alongside the macro power structures is what I seek to achieve.

Another significant way in which Connell’s work has been somewhat eclipsed by contemporary feminist theory is in the way in which it held a partial acknowledgement of intersectionality. However, in Connell’s original work on masculinity there was an acknowledgement of the way in which race and poverty could exasperate marginalisation, resulting in protest masculinity. Despite this, it did not go as far as theories of intersectionality did to really examine how the interlocking oppressions both change and compound the experience of marginalisation. In Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) paper they acknowledged the contributions of scholars such as Angela Davis and Bell Hooks who, ‘criticized the race bias that occurs when power is solely conceptualized in terms of sex difference, thus laying the groundwork for questioning any universalizing claims about the category of men’ (2005, p. 831). Thus, the focus on gender as a performance which intersects with race was present in Connell’s work, however it
lacks the depth of exploration of the way in which intersecting and multiple marginalisations affect and shape individual identity in the way in which intersectionality does as framed by Crenshaw (1991; 2012). To strengthen this area, I have added intersectionality as an addition analytic focus, in order to enhance the analysis on the ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, and class all are implicated in the ultimate experience of masculinity. This is explored fully in section 3.2. It is important however to note that Connell (2014b; 2007) has made significant contributions to Southern Theory, which is an anti-colonial perspective the focuses on knowledge production and shares much academic territory with intersectionality, however this focuses more on wider structures than individual identity.

A further area of feminist critique of Connell’s work, in particular on hegemonic masculinity, is the lack of focus on men’s subjectivity. This was a critique outlined by Gadd (2003) as well as later by Gadd and Jefferson (2007), who noted that adopting the psychoanalytic notion of a defended subject enables an understanding of the individual nuances between men’s motivations and behaviour. Connell utilises the notion of cathexis as a way to integrate psychodynamic understanding into gender analysis. However Gadd advocates the approach outlined by Hollway and Jefferson (1998) to focus in particular on a psychosocial approach to unite individual’s internal and external realities. For Gadd, the assumption which underpins his approach is that the psychic and social levels operate separately, and the researcher is placed to understand this irreducibility in a way that the individuals themselves cannot (Gadd, 2003). This approach is one which I engaged with in Gadd et al’s (2015) significant study into the experiences of young men who experience and perpetrate DVA (see section 2.1.4). However, it
is the psychosocial aspect that left me most unconvinced. As I outlined in my published book review of this text (Levell, 2017) I found that the ways in which the psychosocial approach attempts to both individualise and personalise men’s behaviour, intended to resist simplistic condensation of masculine complexity, however from my perspective it has the effect of dispersing a sense of collective gender power. This is where I think Connell’s work achieves over a purely a psychosocial approach as it connects individual gender performance with wider structural power and oppression.

Waling has also questioned the lack of subjectivity in Connell’s work. Her point of departure was that masculinity studies and in particular Connell’s work, has been focused on sex as a binary, within which masculinity is a static entity which operates is too rigid and structuralist. Waling argues that this needs to be combined more with ‘feminist accounts of agency and emotional reflexivity’ (2019, p. 89). Although Connell’s work emphasises the multiplicity of masculine identities, Waling argues that integrating feminist theorizing into work on masculinities would allow a move beyond an understanding of men being victims of masculine practices and instead focus on the reflexive and agentic ways they engage with this aspect of their identity. To engage with this critique in my own use of Connell’s work I have blended the work of Gilson, who looked at vulnerability and its relationship to both identity and to violence (discussed in depth in sections 3.1.5 and 3.3.2 respectively).

In this section I have considered some of the major feminist critiques of Connell’s masculinity theory and have answered them. In some cases, I have rejected the critique in relation to this thesis and explained my approach (for instance Butler, and Gadd). With other critiques I have acknowledged them and have integrated
other theories to strengthen Connell’s framework in the thesis (using intersectionality and Gilson’s work on vulnerability).

3.1.9 Section Summary

As I have outlined in the preceding sections, I have drawn heavily on Connell’s theorisation of masculinity as a gender performance in the thesis. Connell’s masculinity theory offers a framework through which to understand both the microgendered patterns of practice that individual’s make, in relation to the wider macro political and structural contexts. As Connell’s (1987) original conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity and an associated hierarchy of masculinities was developed over thirty years ago there have been numerous critiques which I have outlined throughout this chapter. However, there has also been opportunity within this period for Connell to respond to these critiques and reformulate and refine the theory along with Messerschmidt (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2019).

The concept of protest masculinity has been of particular interest in this thesis and in section 3.1.4 I looked to other masculinity scholars who worked to shift the focus firmly onto the ways in which racism and marginalisation complicate the concept of protest masculinity. As outlined in section 3.1.8 I note that the development of intersectionality provides a challenge to the way that Connell’s theory in some ways lacks the depth to explore fully interlocking oppressions. To address this in the thesis I have made an active combination of Connell’s work and intersectionality (outlined later in section 3.2). Likewise I acknowledged the critique outlined by Waling (2019) that urged for a greater understanding of emotional worlds and
reflexivity. To address this I have integrated Gilson’s (2014) work on vulnerability into the analysis.

Ultimately, I have demonstrated in this section that despite critique Connell’s framework offers the most comprehensive way to understand both micro and macro gendered power structures. Where I identified weaknesses exposed by scholarly critique, I have strengthened these areas by integrating other approaches. However, the core tenets of Connell’s work enable a full exploration of both the individual gender performance on an interpersonal level and the way this interacts and is affected by wider gendered power play.

3.2 Intersectionality

As an underlying perspective throughout the thesis I have utilised intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw et al., 2012; Ware, 2015). Collins (2000) described intersectionality as a lens through which to view the ways in which individuals navigate matrices of domination that work through amalgamations of both micro- and macro-level power structures and interrelated systems of oppression. Individuals experience different forms of interlocking inequalities (De Coster & Heimer, 2017) such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, which are structures that, ‘weave together to create a complex tapestry of opportunities and motivations that shape variation in crime and violence across groups and situations’ (De Coster & Heimer, 2017, p. 11). The different forms of oppression and subjugation that individuals experience is shaped by ingrained racism, sexism, economic disadvantage, abuse and exploitation that limits an individual’s agency
at different points (Bernard, 2013). The effects of these are overlapping and cumulative, as individuals’ experiences changing and at times simultaneous intersections of systems of oppressions.

The intersection of race and gender has been explored by Vron Ware (2015), who asserted that both gender and race are socially constructed in relation to one another. Due to this it is imperative to explore the meanings behind these constructions; for example she insists ‘It is not about being a white woman, it is about being thought of as a white woman’ (Ware, 2015, p.xviii). This has been also highlighted in the case of black masculinity, which has been constructed out of an amalgam of white people’s fears and projections which rarely contain truth about black men’s existence (Henry 2013). Masculinity needs to be examined through the lens of sexism as well as racism, classism and other forms of oppression (Chen, 2012). The intersection of masculinity and ethnicity in the gang context was explored by Claire Alexander (2000). She noted that the intersection of race and youth placed marginalized black young men, ‘doubly disadvantaged, inescapably alienated and between two cultures’ (p.126). Black males are framed by the dominant society as victimisers, resulting in a cycle of poverty, racial discrimination, denied opportunities and subversive behaviour (Gibbs & Merighi, 1994). Therein lies the origin of the reactionary, ‘culturalist’ and ‘blaming-the-victim perspective’ evidenced in media portrayals of black masculinity (Alexander 2000, p.19). In Glynn’s study of masculinities among black men involved on-road, he urged that an intersectional lens is used in order to understand the ways in which race, class, and gender intersect and change the social realities for the young men. He noted that traditionally race, class, and gender have been separated in criminological research and that, ‘as race is socially constructed, it seems to be a stronger proposition to
expand racialisation, which involved an intersection of class and gender’ (Glynn, 2014, p. 19).

3.2.1 Intersectionality and DVA

In the context of DVA, applying intersectionality allows us to see that for many families domestic violence can be one of many abuses shaping family life (Bograd, 2005). Through using an intersectional analysis, it shows that the experience of DVA can be amplified by further structural victimisation including racism and sexism (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Dasgupta (2005) developed the below diagram, which shows not only the individual ways that DVA operates (represented by the inner circle) but also illustrates the impact of wider contexts that can be used in the process of DVA to enforce power and control over an individual.
Dasgupta noted that, in a DVA situation the victims and their children are also victims of this nexus of the individual abuser, culture and institutions (2005). This model allows one to examine the way that wider communities can be involved in legitimising and contributing to control being used over the individual. Intersectionality requires the development of multi-faceted descriptions of DVA, as shown in the wheel above.
3.2.2 Intersectionality, On-road and Gang-Involvement

The sociological literature tells us that masculinities are produced from the available cultural resources, ‘which includes ideologies, social structures, and boy’s and men’s particular experiences and social positions’ (Phoenix, 2004, p. 146). Some of the intersections of masculinity and ethnicity are explored by Claire Alexander. She noted that the equation of black masculine identities being defined and associated mainly with race has resulted in, ‘inscribing a hyper-visibility of black masculinity, which disguises a more profound invisibility’ (Alexander 2000, p.17). In this way black masculinities are always positioned as subordinated to hegemonic ideals, which are implicit in their whiteness. When viewed through this lens, the aspirational notion of hegemonic masculinity becomes another way to denigrate those who are not eligible for the contest. Thus, violence and criminality become alternatives for the men to pursue in lieu of the hegemonic masculinity. This draws back to the notion of a hierarchy of masculinities discussed earlier through Connell’s conceptualisation of hegemony. In the hierarchy, where working-class and poor males are seen as at the bottom of the hierarchy, black working-class boys occupy an even lower space than their white counterparts. White male youth identities are thus a product of a ‘culture of poverty’ (Alexander, 2000, p.19). There is also an inherent class bias around who is classified as gang-involved. Young people who congregate in disadvantaged areas are more likely to have their behaviours criminalised because their areas are more heavily policed (Hine, 2010). The historic definition of the term gang has been said to be ‘veiled expressions of bourgeois disapproval’ (Ball & Curry, 1995, p.227). Some academics have
downplayed a connection between race and gang-involvement, rather attributing it to the demographics of the local area (Harding, 2014; Pitts, 2008). However, Gunter (2017) focused on the ‘ethnic penalty’ and focus on why there are disproportionate numbers of young black men in gangs and in prison. He emphasised the difficult task of highlighting this issue, whilst avoiding essentialising the experience of young black men and reducing their experiences to macro-structural constraints. Indeed, the culture of poverty has become synonymous with the stereotype of gangs, which is linked in popular culture to black boys;

The intersection of ‘race’ and youth, in articulation with notions of masculinity-in-crisis has additionally marginalized black young men from their parental communities and placed them – doubly disadvantaged, inescapably alienated and ‘between two cultures’- in the frontline of the popular and academic fascination with dangerous difference, somewhere between apocalyptic vision of post-millennial social doom and rebels with, or without, a cause.

(Alexander, 2000, p. 126).

In this passage Alexander is outlining the way in which black young men are inherently marginalized by the wider societal messages that are portrayed. They are viewed as victimisers and then this is used as a way to alienate them further. They then are forced into a self-fulfilling cycle of deprivation which is predicated by their exclusion (Gibbs & Merighi, 1994).
3.2.3 Limits and Critiques of Intersectionality

There are risks to applying Intersectionality to issues too broadly. Focusing only on pluralistic notions of difference can make it difficult to generalise any oppression or recognise any hierarchies (Grillo, 1995; Maynard, 2001). Serving to overlook the experiences people have in common and overemphasising divisions which can result in the existence of oppressions themselves being overlooked (Maynard, 2001). Therein lies the risk of intersectional analysis and over-deconstructing issues surrounding DVA. ‘If each woman, if each black, has a different experience, how can one say that women as women, or blacks as blacks, are oppressed?’ (Grillo, 1995, p. 21). There has also been a growing literature which has critiqued intersectionality, in particular the way in which it has been popularised and its core meaning diluted. This has in part been due to the rise of ‘intersectional feminism’, which although has admirable aims, is still a movement which centres white voices and erases difference within the feminist movement (Phipps, 2020). May noted, that, ‘power asymmetries and dominant imaginaries converge in the act of interpretation of intersectionality’ (2014, p. 70). This is because even though intersectional feminism has argued for recognition and inclusion of diversity, it has still prioritised white voices and has rested on Western individualism (Silvestri & Crowther-Dowley, 2014).

3.3 Theorising Violence

3.3.1 Connell’s (1987, 2005) Theorisation of Violence
In Connell’s (2005) work on masculinity, the existence of violence is viewed as a key element of a system of domination, within the wider gender order, which seeks to exert power over others. Connell viewed male perpetrated violence as on a continuum which includes sexual violence against women, to gang violence, to global wars. By drawing on diverse instances such as these, Connell focused on the ways in which these reveal aspects of the wider gender order, in particular the way in which, ‘the scale of contemporary violence points to crisis tendencies ... in the modern gender order’ (2005, p. 84). These crisis tendencies have occurred throughout history, when dominant masculinities are going through processes of disruption or transformation. This focus is pertinent as it provides a link between male perpetrated DVA, as an expression of frustrated masculinity, and gang-violence, which Connell frames as an expression of the assertion of marginalized masculinities between men. Thus, the key lens is that of masculinity and power within the wider gender order. The existence of violence is a revealing aspect of the systems’ imperfection and dynamic instability. The existence of violence draws attention to there being a struggle for power, which the violence attempts to address. This has been seen in heterosexual violence against gay men for instance, whereby the violence reveals an inherent insecurity around masculinities and seeks to draw boundaries and exclude groups. The interconnectedness of masculinity, power and violence, in the context of the wider gender order is a thread that runs throughout the thesis and is inherent in Connell’s analytic framework which I am using (see chapter four, section 4.5.1).

3.3.2 Gilson’s (2014) Work on Vulnerability and Violence
Connell’s (2005) work on gender and violence as noted above focuses on the wider gender order and takes a structural perspective. To assist me to conceptualise the individualised aspects of enacting violence I have found Gilson’s (2014) work on vulnerability resonant. In particular, because where Connell looks at the insecurities of masculinity on a societal scale, Gilson’s lens exposes the individual vulnerabilities of men in a nuanced way. Although overall, they are talking to the same issue of violence being produced from a position of marginalisation and insecurity, I find blending the approaches together adds a richness to the analysis, which is particularly pertinent in the construction of protest masculinity and vulnerable masculinity (as discussed in section 3.3).

In this exploration of vulnerability, Gilson looks at the close relationship between vulnerability and violence. Specifically, she argues that ‘violence is premised on vulnerability’, as without vulnerability, violence would not be possible (2014, p. 48). In that way, vulnerability could be seen as a condition which precipitates violence itself. Violence and vulnerability thus have a circular relationship, as once violence is perpetrated it then reveals the vulnerabilities of both the body and the mind. Violence viewed through the lens of vulnerability, can show how violence is often perpetuated through the, ‘historical relay of violence’ (Gilson, 2014, p. 49). These theoretical conceptions of vulnerability and violence can illuminate the context of the men’s lives. As this study was focusing on the ways in which men experienced violence in childhood and then became involved in violence itself, it is clear that vulnerability is a constant aspect of their being, characterised as being inherently interrelated with violence.
3.3.3 Anderson’s (1999) Code of the Street

In terms of a theory of violence which would aid an explanation of the ways in which the violence changed from home to on-road, I have found a useful frame to be Elijah Anderson’s (1999) concept of the ‘code of the street’. The premise of this theory is that community violence is governed by an unwritten etiquette, through which its members become aware of their role and the wider morality at stake. I propose that this code does exist within the road context as reflected in the data however is complicated by the lack of a knowable code when DVA is occurring at home. This is therefore the fundamental difference between the violence of the home and the road. In Anderson’s research into the ‘code of the street’ in inner city America, he found that there was a ‘natural continuum’ of violence, with, ‘a code of civility at one end and a code of conduct regulated by the threat of violence- the code of the street-at the other’ (1999, pp. 15–16). The code of the street offers a widely understood arrangement of etiquette for the wider community who are involved. In this way, ‘the code of the street provides an element of social organization and actually lessens the probability of random violence’ (Anderson, 1999, p. 27).

Considering this, there were clear elements of the code of the street that were discussed in all of the men’s narratives and were tied up heavily with discourses of masculinity, power, respect. Children who grow up in neighbourhoods which are operating with such a code of the street are made aware of it from a young age. Anderson notes that the ‘first lesson of the streets’ that children learn, is that, ‘you cannot take survival itself, let alone respect, for granted; you have to fight for your place in the world.’ (Anderson, 1999, p. 49). It is this fight, both metaphorical and physical that appears to be ingrained in children who live both with violence within
the home and their estates. Anderson noted that children who live in what he terms a ‘street-oriented home’, ‘may be fraught with anger, verbal disputes, physical aggression, even mayhem. The children are victimized by these goings-on and quickly learn to hit those who cross them’ (Anderson, 1999, p. 49). Here Anderson is grouping DVA at home, or general violence at home, in a way that conflates it with the larger context of street violence. Children brought up in this context have the notion of ‘physical engagement’, or the importance of violence, central in their sense of how the world works. Social identity becomes based on physicality and propensity to commit violence. Individuals have to send the public message that they are willing and able to commit violence if deemed necessary. They learn to ‘resolve disputes mainly through physical contests that settle- at least for the time being- the question of who is the toughest and who will take, or tolerate, what from whom under what circumstances’ (Anderson, 1999, p. 69). This is what the concept of respect is founded upon, which was both an achievement and currency as mentioned by the men in my study. Anderson discussed the perceived importance of respect and the need to be in ‘physical control’ (violently exerted) of their environment, this creates the ‘germ’ of the code of the street (ibid).

Anderson’s work on the code of the street is compelling. However, as with other criminologists, gender dynamics in violence were not examined, but rather violence was taken for granted as a gender-neutral experience. Anderson notes that often young people experience physical altercations at home, discuss it with peers and perceive it that in these situations the wider community respects the person who won the fight (Anderson, 1999, p. 70). This shows a lack of understanding of the nuanced ways in which young people experience DVA, as outlined in chapter two. In this way Anderson’s work has a blind spot. However, I find the utility in
Anderson’s theory on the ‘code of violence’ is that it gives a framework for which to understand the way that the intelligibility of the violence changes from the home to the on-road context.

### 3.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have taken a broad look at the diverse theoretical approaches which underpin the later analysis. These can be considered in four key areas; masculinity; vulnerability; violence; intersectionality. These are the thematic areas which emerged as of major importance through the design and delivery of this study. Central to this is Connell’s (1987, 2005) approach to gender theory, in particular the way in which multiple masculinities are organised around an ideal hegemonic form. To understand these multiple masculinities makes visible the corresponding issues of marginalisation and of vulnerability which are problematised within mainstream masculinity discourse.

Violence was a thread throughout the lives of the participants, who experienced DVA in childhood and then became on-road and gang-involved. To understand violence as a broad concept, I have drawn on a combination of three approaches which help to gain an understanding of the narratives. These are Connell’s exploration of violence in the context of protest masculinity, whereby violence is instrumentalised as a way to respond to marginalisation. The second approach was Gilson’s focus on violence as an expression of vulnerability, which again fits with the idea of insecurity and violence going hand-in-hand. Lastly, I have used Anderson’s notion of the *code of the street*, to look at the moral code which dictate
violence in different contexts. All of these theories help me to explore the way in which violence changed as the participants moved through the life course, from living with DVA to being on-road and gang-involved.

Intersectionality functioned as an overarching frame through which to see both structural inequality and differences in race, ethnicity, and class. The intersection of race and ethnicity is pertinent to this thesis, as the issue of gangs is heavily racialised in UK debate. Although the research participants came from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, the men’s marginalisation was affected by their cultural status in terms of class and race and thus analysis of how this intersected with other marginalities such as gender and class are discussed throughout the thesis.
Chapter two outlined how research has historically tended to treat children and young people as *witnesses* rather than *victims* of DVA and therefore are framed on the periphery. We know very little about the lived experience of DVA in childhood for this reason. There has historically been a lack of research into the individual life stories of men involved in both gangs and experiencing DVA, in particular about individual narratives. The methodologies and analytic frames that I have woven throughout the thesis are therefore aiming to contribute towards filling that gap. The first part of the methodology chapter explains the epistemological approach of social-constructionism which is based on feminist principles. I then go on to discuss my rationale for using narrative research methodology.

4.1 Epistemology

This research aimed to generate rich representation of the lived experience of men with a focus on participants’ sense of gender identity. The focus on individual subjective experiences is positioned within a broadly social constructionist perspective (Stainton-Rogers, 2006). There are three key tenets to this perspective. The first is that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. This puts into question the existence of an objective truth and allows us to critically examine claims made about the existence of such objective truth and what power structures
and discourses support them and at what cost. This perspective then places emphasis on the way knowledge is constructed within context. The second tenet is that knowledge of the social world is multiple and fluid rather than singular and fixed. It is made through the process of human meaning-making. The third tenet is that knowledge is the means by which power is exercised. This emphasises the power imbalance that occurs when knowledge is made and the responsibility that this then places on the researcher to fully consider conveying ‘truths’ in a way that expose the agendas behind them. It is this tenet which supports the importance of reflexivity in the research.

Underlying all of the research methodology is also a feminist epistemology. Feminist research has traditionally focused on lived experience as at the heart of knowledge (Newburn & Stanko 1994). Partly because women’s lived experience was largely excluded from conventional methodologies and epistemologies. Feminist standpoint epistemologies and their investments in biography, autobiography and narrative have developed as a way of redressing the erasures of androcentric social science (Woodiwiss, Smith, & Lockwood, 2017). This approach informed a feminist paradigm for interviewing, whereby interviewing is viewed as a reciprocal process where the interviewer invests their own personal identity into the research relationship. Oakley (1981) first urged feminists to recognize and avoid emphasis hierarchical research dynamics where possible. Conducting feminist narrative research means linking the personal and political and approaching social issues in ways that, ‘do not hyper-individualize, denigrate, and/or pathologize the people who experience them’ (Fraser & Macdougall, 2017, p. 244).
4.2 Participatory Research

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic being discussed, as well as the underrepresentation of adults who experienced DVA in childhood in research, it was important to make the research as an empowering experience as possible. This is not to say I was able to remove the power dynamic between researcher and participant. Hydén noted that, ‘the relation between the teller and listener in narrative research is a power relation’, particularly when researching sensitive topics (2012, p. 237). This power differential is inherent in the way that a researcher holds the power and takes the narratives without necessarily giving much of themselves in return. The methods were chosen to mitigate this as much as possible. Historically, people who experience DVA as children have seldom been heard in research, or in policy and practice. Notable studies which began asking individuals about their own experiences of DVA have paved the way for this to change (McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002). Recently there has been work done to focus on people who experience DVA as children as both victims in their own right (Callaghan, Alexander, Sixsmith, & Fellin, 2015) as well active agents in their own and mother’s recovery (Katz, 2015).

Concerns around an empowering research design were noted by Houghton (2015) in her study with individuals who had experienced DVA. They noted that people who experience DVA in childhood are silenced by DVA, so to counter this and ease anxieties they were helped when, ‘creative, empowering, cooperative, respectful methods were used’ (Houghton, 2015, p. 243). It is not just the elicitation that provides this function, but narrative interviews are also recognised as promoting more active engagement from participants when carried out in an unstructured
way. Gausman et al. (2019) noted that open-ended narrative interviews give participants’, ‘the power to direct and focus on the discussion on the situations, contexts, and experiences that they consider to be influential to their lives’ (Gausman et al., 2019, p. 2). In this way they give participants’ more control and agency to decide the topics discussed and the narrative thread of the interview (Gausman et al., 2019; Mmari et al., 2017). To target people who have experienced the disempowering effects of DVA needs to be handled sensitively in order not to exacerbate their vulnerability. One way in which my approach counters some of the concerns of power inequality in traditional methods is that music elicitation as a method promotes a fuller story-telling response in a less intimidating way than a traditional interview.

### 4.3 Narrative Research

Narrative research has been described as the telling and conveying of details of an event to an audience (Woodiwiss et al., 2017). A narrative is not an object or thing, but instead is a communicative event, where stories are told and received. Telling is a situational event which involves more than one person. Narrative research methods have been important in lived experience research. McAdams (2005) as well as Maruna (2004) both have looked at the narratives of people who are desisting from previous lives of crime. Through focusing on the self-stories, or narratives, they found that it enables a greater understanding of the way that individuals make sense of their own lives. As noted in my earlier discussion around race and marginalisation among gang-involved men (see chapter two, section 2.2.5), as well as intersectionality (chapter three, section 3.2), there is a need for
academic discourse to give space for individuals who are often silenced, due to structural issues, an opportunity to speak about their lives. Glynn (2014) noted in his book, that ‘many black men have traditionally been denied a voice, so the need to create a ‘counter-narrative’ as an act of political transformation and defiance is important here’ (p. 125). So, for them to tell their story publicly is a political act, to show a personal triumph but also to speak wider for black men and desistance. To facilitate research that offers an opportunity then becomes a positive act for marginalised men to engage in, as they facilitate and construct their counter narratives. Glynn asserted that there is a great need to ‘validate criminological data within “lived experiences” and embrace notions of black men’s subjectivity using interpretive methodologies’ (2014, p. 131). He advocates using narratives and storytelling as a way to challenge the maintenance of white privilege in which most of the criminologists are white and many of the research subjects are from black or minority ethnic groups. It centres the individual experiences of black people’s stories in order to fully listen to what they say and work with their truths rather than fitting them into dominant discourses. Underpinning this is the premise that, ‘when black men do speak, they are constantly pushed to the margins of society and in doing so are not seen and remain invisible in the consciousness of society’ (Glynn, 2014, p. 22). There is a definite need within criminology to centre the full stories of black men’s lived experience. This was reflected by some participants who saw themselves as unseen and unheard and explicitly fashioned their narratives around experience of invisibility and being silenced.
4.3.1 Narrative Research and Identity

The telling of narratives can be seen as a type of identity work in action. Instead of seeing a person as ‘having’ various categorical identities for instance as a wife or mother, it becomes important to focus on how individuals perceive and value these roles and ultimately what they mean to them (Presser, 2010b). Through this process identity is being harnessed as a resource. Narratives about identity can be utilised as a resource to construct a world view and the individuals place within it (Phoenix, 2013). An appealing aspect to the study of narratives is the fact that it encourages the investigation of the lives of people told through their own stories, in their own words. Focus is placed on encouraging an individual to story their own versions of events and thus places the power in the participant’s hands in the interview space. Narrative research seeks to place marginalized voices at the centre of any explanation of an issue (Fraser & Macdougall, 2017).

4.3.2 Narrative Criminology

Narrative study is inter-disciplinary and has touched all social science disciplines, most recently criminology, where a strand of ‘narrative criminology’ has been developing (Presser, 2016). The study of narratives within criminological research is not a new concept, however one that is still emerging as a distinctive, self-declared perspective within the discipline (see Fleetwood, Lois, Sveinung, & Thomas, 2019). The first classic study was from the Chicago School, ‘The Jack Roller’ by Shaw (1930), where one life-history was studied in order to seek to understand the lived experiences of a young man involved in various forms of illicit behaviour.
This was followed much later by a special issue in *Theoretical Criminology* which sought to revisit the Jack Roller and used to explore the concept of N=1 and the way in which a full exploration of one case can be satisfactory for in-depth qualitative research (Maruna & Matravers, 2007). Narrative criminologists focus on the way in which self-narratives influence both harmful and criminal behaviour. Presser (2016) noted that narratives have been historically neglected by criminologists because mainstream and positivist criminology has marginalized culture and largely ignored the acculturated self. The narrative turn in criminology has widened the focus of stories of crime and encouraged a focus on the way individuals respond to, as well as interpret their cultural framework, always acting within their own story of themselves.

4.3.3 The Issue of ‘Gang Talk’

In some academic literature there has been a suggestion that gangs are politicised and stigmatised groups constructed as much by academics, policy and police communities as they are by young people themselves. This culminates in an accusation that researchers and policy makers are guilty of generating a self-serving, self-reproducing echo-chamber of ‘gang talk’ that bears little resemblance and even less relevance to young people’s lives. Hallsworth and Young (2008) sought to disconnect the issue of youth violence with the reductionist approach to relate it to gangs. Instead they took a sceptical approach to gang talk, asking other academics and researchers to look, ‘beyond and behind mystifications like gang culture ... [and] ... being very wary about imposing misleading labels” (Hallsworth & Young, 2008, p. 192). The concept of ‘gang talk’ refers to the wider public discourse
around gangs, which could be anything from journalists, academics, government. For some academics, ‘gang talk’ is what has caused the current moral panic about gangs (Gunter, 2017; Hallsworth, 2013).

In recognising the accusation of gang talk however it is also important to consider that the controversy around accusations of gang talk come from wider tensions. Andell noted that UK policy formations have come from ‘both gang denial and gang blame’ (Andell, 2019, p. xxvii). Andell critiqued Hallsworth’s summation of gang talk by accusing it of being more to do with a ‘language game’ than rooted in material reality. It is essential to acknowledge the ‘gang talk’ tension exposes longstanding and underlying ‘academic beefs… between ‘Left Idealists’ and ‘Left Realists’’ which has been accused of being, ‘internecine bickering back-and-forth … to the detriment of knowledge production’ (Densley, Deuchar, & Harding, 2020, p. 3). This reveals the way that the research sector is fraught with contestation, not only about the way to construct gangs as an issue, but also who has the right to speak about it. Key to this tension is the question of who is allowed to speak, or given voice in the process of consultation about gangs (Shute, Aldridge, & Medina, 2012).

The use of unstructured narrative interviews, aided by music elicitation, mitigate against gang talk in several ways. Firstly, the methods aim to give the participants’ significant choice and control over the interview direction and content. As there were no pre-planned questions around key areas of interest in gang talk discourse such as criminality, was not the area of focus. This also gave space to the participants to describe the aspects of their lives that they wished to foreground. In the process of analysis there has been no input from the participants, however I have aimed to draw out their lived experience and counter-narratives, in order to
humanise their stories and create empathy with them. I hope that this approach has firmly distanced this study from engaging in gang talk.

4.4 Approach to analysis

4.4.1 Connell’s (2005) Approach to Analysis

The analytic framework that I chose to structure each chapter around, is Connell’s (1987, 2005) method for analysing masculinities in relation to the wider social structures of ‘power relations’, ‘production relations’ and ‘cathexis’. Connell noted that these together form the major structures of gender relations. Here she meant that they are ‘(a) discoverable in current gender research and sexual politics, and (b) account for most of the structural dynamics currently understood’ (Connell, 1987, p. 97). Connell applied this framework for analysis to life-history interviews in the text, ‘Masculinities’ (Connell 1995) and proved its utility to explore the relationship between structure and agency. Connell sought to understand the ‘narrative sequence of events’, a structural analysis of gender relations; and a systematic analysis ‘tracing the making and unmaking of masculinity’ (Connell, 1995: 89–91). When considering these three distinct areas of analysis however, it is important to note that the structures are inherently connected;

The structure of cathexis in some respects reflects inequalities of power; the division of labour partly reflects patterns of cathexis, and so on. In none there is an ultimate determinant.... From which the rest of the pattern of gender relations springs (R. W. Connell, 1987, p. 116).
The chapters in this thesis are arranged chronologically around the life-histories of the participants, however in each I distinguish the three analytic areas of power relations, production relations, and cathexis, however as noted above, they are all inextricably interconnected.

4.4.2 Power Relations

The analytic frame of power relations is particularly focused on the ways in which power is exchanged and transacted in ways which support the wider gender order. As Connell noted, ‘the main axis of power in the contemporary European/American gender order is the overall subordination of women and dominance of men’ (Connell, 2005, p. 74). As outlined here, patriarchy is the acknowledgement of the fundamental structural inequality which has defined the way in which power has been displaced along gender lines. Connell conceptualised this structure of power as, ‘both an object of practice as well as a condition’ (Connell, 1987, p. 108). Here Connell is referring to the way in which power is exercised among people through the intense mobilization of resources, as well as energy to maintain it. Connell used the example of the church as such an institution, which seeks to exert power and control over the gender order through practice; from enforcing the biblical approach to life (inherent with gendered rules), to more practical aspects of control such as not permitting divorce, contraception or abortion. Thus the power structures of the gender order are maintained through the ‘policing of families’ by institutions such as the church and state, as well as marriage and the family (Connell, 1987, p. 108).
In Connell’s focus on power relations, it is not solely concerned with patriarchy and the effects on men and women, but also among the hierarchy of masculinities (see chapter three, section 3.1) in which there is a hegemonic masculinity which then subordinates lesser masculinities (e.g. gay identities) as beneath it. This was pertinent in my thesis, as the hierarchy between hegemonic, subordinated and marginalised masculinities became clear when using an intersectional analysis of race, ethnicity, class and gender. Focusing on the power relations between people as told in the life-histories enabled me to discern which types of power in the gender order are most revered at any one time. Fundamental to the understanding of power relations is the ways in which they relate to, define, and police the sexual politics of the given society.

4.4.3 Production Relations

Production relations are focused on the allocation of tasks according to both gender divisions, the economic consequences, as well as the dividend that accrues as a result of the division. This is about looking at where the power divides between men and women, through the allocation of resources. In the UK context gender inequality has been defined by an unequal access to wealth, resources, and property. This has then trickled down through the hierarchy of masculinities (as discussed in depth in chapter three, section 3.1), which have been organised through the intersectional marginalization of race, ethnicity, and class, as well as a hierarchy of perceived feminization. I used a focus on production relations, to look at the different ways in which the participants’ sought to gain capital, on a
continuum from financial capital, to other forms of capital, which became evident in the narratives.

Connell noted that production relations are defined by the way in which gender is a feature of production, in a greater sense than just due to a sexual division of labour. For Connell, ‘gender divisions are as fundamental to the essential feature of the capitalist system; arguably as fundamental as class divisions’ (1987, p. 104). This distinction between gender identity as being more central to the production relations that sexual division is fundamental to Connell’s approach to gender hierarchy. The hierarchy exists between men as much as it does between men and women, on a continuum with hegemonic masculinity at the pinnacle and all others beneath. The interrogation of production relations reveals much about the ways in which poverty and class intersect in the development of masculinities. In particular, the production relations were heavily shaped by the pressure that the men felt at different times to both provide (the breadwinner role) as well as to accumulate personal wealth. To find a space in the gender order, the participants mentioned pressure to provide resources for their mothers (to thus position themselves in the dominant protector/provider role) yet simultaneously being held back by their marginalised position. Several participants described this tension as motivating their entry into drug dealing as a way to navigate these competing positions (see chapter six, section 6.4.3).

4.4.4 Cathexis

The last area of focus is cathexis, which looks at how both sexual and platonic relationships are constructed in the narratives, focusing on what they reveal about
the wider gender order. Connell borrowed the concept of cathexis from Freud’s psychodynamic theory. Connell outlined their interpretation of cathexis as meaning; ‘the construction of emotionally charged social relations with ‘objects’ (i.e. other people) in the real world’ (Connell, 1987, p. 112). In practice this means a focus on interpersonal relationships reveal dynamics of the wider gender order. In Connell’s later work cathexis was framed wider, as ‘emotional energy attached to an object’ (Connell, 2005, p. 74). When referring to emotional energy, Connell worked with the co-existence of contradictory feelings that are present in close relationships, pointing out that hostility and affection can (and often do) co-exist. One example Connell uses is the way in which parents of young children can feel ‘love and hostility on both sides and to a strong degree’ (1987, p. 114). It is the tension between the complex and contradictory feelings that come to pass within interpersonal relationships that Connell focuses upon as revealing about the wider gender order.

Connell viewed the relationship between the body and the outside world as a two-way process, which is essentially embodied through sexual desire (Wedgwood, 2009). Thus to, ‘recognize a social structure in sexuality it is necessary first to see sexuality as social’ (Connell, 1987, p. 111). Sexual attraction and interpersonal relations are revealing as they convey the way in which the personal is political. Cathexis accounts for the energy and vitality of people’s commitments to patterns of practice in the gender order. As is outlined here;

All that is clear is that the structure of cathexis must be regarded as multileveled, and major relationships as ambivalent, in the general case. The old clichés about how easily love and hatred turn into each other, and the power of fables on this
theme... make better sense if sexual practices are generally based on structural relationships in which both love and hatred are present (Connell, 1987, pp. 114–115).

Thus, using cathexis as an analytic lens enables a focus on the personal meanings attached to relationships which expose the way that power works in relationships, as well as how individuals think of the wider gender order. By way of an example, sexual objectification of women is both an articulation of power inequality, as well as revealing of the wider patriarchal gender order, using the focus of sexuality to make it visible. Cathexis was revealed through participants references to relationships with peers, friends, and family members, revealing the way that they constructed their masculinities in relation to them. I focused on the ways in which the men constructed themselves within other close family relationships, such as their own children, when they became fathers. I found this a revealing point in the life-histories where the participants’ priority relationships changed.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This study is grounded in the epistemological roots of social constructionism, which is defined by a sense of truth being both personal and relative. This is an important background to a study using narrative interviews, as the participants were regarded as being experts of their own lives. A feminist epistemology was constantly referred to throughout the design and delivery of the study, with the aim to promote an egalitarian and reflexive methodology. This has been shown to be particularly
important in the process of reflexivity as a researcher. Using feminist epistemology focuses on the benefits of the researcher both recognising and being upfront about personal bias through the processes of reflexivity. As this is a study of identity and individuals’ lived experience, the most appropriate methods were narrative interviews. Using music as an elicitation tool was included as a way to make a more participatory model and enable the participants to have more of an agentic control of the interview space.
5 Chapter Five. Methods and Research Process

In this chapter I begin by describing the participants in the study, through the use of pen portraits. This is supported by tables outlining their demographics and music choices. The aim of including is to give a fuller sense of the individuals who took part in the study. I then describe the procedures that were undertaken in order to recruit the participants, conduct the interviews, and code the data. The ethical considerations are outlined, with reference to addressing the different intersectional dynamics that existed in the research context between myself and the participants. I then engage in a discussion around my use of reflexivity and the impact of my positionality during the research.

5.1 Participants

Eight men took part in the study, who ranged from twenty-one years to fifty years old. The participants came from three large cities in England, one in the north (A), one south (B), and one in the Midlands (C). This geographical diversity was due to the use of the internet for recruitment, as it widened the reach of the advert. As can be seen in the table below, the interviews were lengthy, and they closed only when the participant indicated they had finished.

The participants were relatively diverse. Two white British, one black African, two mixed-race and three black British men took part. Half of the cohort had been previously imprisoned, several for significant terms, mainly for firearm related offences. At the time of our meeting three were in regular employment which
ranged from a professional role in a media company to a builder’s labourer. Two of the participants had University level education. Two of the men described themselves as self-employed which mainly was around consultancy and charity work related to their previous identity as ex-gang-involved men. Two of the men were currently unemployed, with one discussing how their enduring mental health issues were a barrier to his employment.

5.1.1 Participant Demographics

All of the names referenced below and throughout the thesis are pseudonyms to ensure the participants’ anonymity.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>No. of interviews/Length</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age (range)</th>
<th>Previously Imprisoned?</th>
<th>Current situation</th>
<th>Employed/student etc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1 1:44:24</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1 00:37:42</td>
<td>Black British</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1 01:46:54</td>
<td>Black British</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Due to the use of unstructured narrative interviews, the data was often diverse and sometimes incomparable. The interviews each ended up focusing on the aspects of their life-histories that they wished to share. As a result, some individual’s data appears more fully in different parts of the thesis. Confidentiality was a great concern for some of the participants and one particularly asked me not to present or describe his whole life story in one piece, but rather to pick out relevant quotes. This has meant that it has been a challenge to convey a sense of the whole individual’s in the thesis, whilst respecting these concerns.
5.1.2 Participant Music Choices

In the table below I have outlined the music tracks that the participants’ brought to the interview, as well as an indication of the narrative theme that they used the track for in the interview.

Table 2: Participants’ Interview Track List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Music Track 1 + narrative theme</th>
<th>Music Track 2 + narrative theme</th>
<th>Music Track 3 + narrative theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current day</strong></td>
<td>Inspiration, positivity</td>
<td><strong>Adolescence</strong></td>
<td>Gang-involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conveys entire life story</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Conveys entire life story</strong></td>
<td><strong>Realities of gang life</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childhood</strong></td>
<td>Grief over death of mother</td>
<td><strong>Adolescence</strong></td>
<td>Gang-involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society Inequality, racism</td>
<td>Power, politics</td>
<td>Concerns for youths in gangs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Current day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gang-involvement</td>
<td>Inspiration, positivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood/Adolescence</td>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Current day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gang-involvement</td>
<td>Recovery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Shaun’</td>
<td>Participant F: Music titles not shared to protect anonymity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knife crime</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Child Sexual Abuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVA and child abuse</td>
<td>Knife Crime</td>
<td>DVA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.3 Participant Pen Portraits

I have chosen to include the pen portraits of the participants at the outset of the thesis so as they can be presented in some way as whole individuals with their stories intact. For this small yet in-depth study I met with a relatively diverse group of men. There was a lot of common ground, mainly in that they had all been brought up in gang-affected areas within low-income households. All of them had experienced violence or abuse at home, however for some (Travis, Shaun) this was more on the periphery of their home lives, whereas for others they were experiencing DVA and family violence as well as being violently abused themselves (Sam, Eric). Many of the participants’ referred to enacting violence at primary school as the first context for them exhibiting their anger. Those who went on-road all seemed to start getting involved by low-level drug dealing in order to make money, initially to make up for the pocket money they weren’t getting at home, which then escalated to gang-involvement. This didn’t mean that they all disengaged with school. Two of the participants had been to university. Two of the participants’ made rap music as a side-line. Some of the men (Sam, Lester, Dylan, Shaun) had started their journey of exiting the gang through long prison sentences. Whereas others had significant events within the gang that made them disentangle themselves, from bereavement, to escalating mental health problems. In their current lives, Eric worked in the creative industries, Jordan was at university completing a second degree, Shaun was working on a building site. Lester, Dylan, Jordan, Dave, Sam, were all working (or trying to) in the anti-youth-violence sector as campaigners and consultants. Overall, I managed to speak to a broad range of
experiences from gang-affected men of varying ages. They also were from three large cities in England, spanning the south, midlands and north of the country.

*Dylan*

Dylan was a mixed-race man in his early forties. He had lived with both of his parents whilst young and experienced DVA at home. It was Dylan’s sense that DVA was somehow normal both within his family (his grandfather had also perpetrated DVA to his grandmother and disabled her) as well as within his wider community. Dylan said that he used to go to on-road to avoid being at home. He and a group of peers, who were mostly experiencing similar at home, spent time together and eventually became the gang. Dylan started selling drugs from primary school age. He noted that it was the grievances of the gang elders that they acted on, which then escalated to a constant war, where different groups took revenge on the other. Eventually he was imprisoned for a significant period and this is when his turning point happened. He referred to a specific incident when his child was a victim of violence and, upon disclosing it to him, asked him not to seek retribution. This plea signified a change in behaviour for Dylan and he started to make a life outside the gang. Dylan now spends much of his time in anti-gang campaigning and awareness raising.

*Sam*

Sam was a Black British man in his thirties. Sam experienced a wide range of violence at home in childhood, including DVA, family violence and co-existing child abuse. He cites the start of his journey on-road as though drug dealing in childhood.
He was gang-involved for many years and has spent several years in prison for crimes related to his involvement. The crux of his turning point from the gang was a crescendo of his own violent behaviour and a mental health episode. These served as a wakeup call which prompted him to get help and began a turning point in his narrative. He then found religion as a way to find a new identity.

**Eric**

Eric was a Black Rwandan refugee in his late twenties. Eric’s birth mother died before he left East Africa and his father began a relationship with one of his mother’s friends in the refugee camp. When Eric’s family came to the UK they were initially housed in a rural area where they experienced racism. It was not long before his family moved to a large city and settled there. At home he experienced DVA among his parents and experienced severe co-occurring child abuse perpetrated by both his father and step-mother. Eric used participation in extra-curricular activities in school to be out of the house. He was involved in a wide range of activities, from connexions, to choir, to sports. Eric discussed the identity conflict that he experienced in living this school achieving and gang-involved duality.

Eric engaged in fighting at school, which led him to be noticed by gang-involved older boys who the put opportunities his way to be more involved on-road. He started working in a paper round and then dealt marijuana, which then escalated to be involved in robberies with the gang. Eric achieved at school and college, then went onto university study. However, at the same time he became gang-involved and was made homeless at college, so lived in a homeless hostel whilst continuing his education. He disclosed that he had perpetrated DVA against female partners
at this time. He had a significant experience which was a turning point for him as a young man, where in close succession he saw a friend murdered on the street and was also involved on the periphery in a shop robbery which saw several peers go to prison. These experiences were his wake-up call and signified the end of his gang-involvement in some senses, although he continued to be involved in minor crimes whilst living in the homeless hostel (including stealing laptops at University) until he was able to organise a student loan and cease criminality. Eric now works in a professional sector and keeps his past hidden.

**Jordan**

Jordan was a black British man in his mid-twenties. Jordan has grown up in poverty, he experienced DVA and neglect in childhood. He became homeless in his adolescence. He went on-road and became gang-involved until his early twenties. Jordan is currently a university student, studying for a degree. Jordan was very positive, almost dogmatically so. It appeared like his coping strategy, to look for the upside of each situation. Jordan discussed his experience of DVA very briefly, noting that he had been exposed. Jordan spoke about his childhood and on-road experience but focused on his own journey out of it to where he is today.

**Lester**

Lester was a Black British man in his fifties. Lester had been brought up by his grandmother, after his mother’s murder when he was a young child. Lester’s father had left and started a new family. Lester started to be gang-involved from a young age, starting by selling drugs on the street and then working up the hierarchy to
become a prominent gang leader and included trans-national operations. Lester had a long career of gang-involvement, which was punctuated by several long spells in prison. The main theme that ran throughout Lester’s narrative was his concern with structural inequality in society.

**Shaun**

Shaun was a White British man in his late twenties. Shaun had experienced violence at home in childhood as well as being involved on-road and in a gang. The violence that he experienced at home was within the family (some of whom were also on-road). Shaun brought his own written and produced music to the interview. Shaun used music that he had written to tell his story. For Shaun it was the experience of community violence, whilst living in a gang affected area, that was a source of trauma and fear in his childhood. Shaun became gang-involved, as well as involved in on-road culture including drug dealing and joy riding cars. Shaun ended up spending a significant stretch in prison for firearm related offences. Shaun shaped his narrative around the experience in the gang and particularly in his journey out of it, which he attributed to getting older and having enough of it. Shaun is now working on a building site as a labourer.

**Dave**

Dave was a white man in his thirties. He lived with DVA and abuse that was perpetrated by his mothers’ partner. In his younger years he was also badly bullied by peers, to the extent that at a point he couldn’t go out. He then became gang-involved and developed a tough persona to protect himself on-road. After the
deaths of close friends and having children himself Dave is now no longer gang-involved. He was open about the mental health problems that he has faced during and since. He is looking to campaign against youth violence in his own time, although asked for a second interview to talk through the struggles that he is facing living his own anti-violence mantra after so long living with anger.

Travis

Travis was a mixed-race man in his early twenties. The DVA that Travis referred to was being aware of his sister being victimised. The perpetrator also carried out abuse on their child (his nephew) which resulted in his death. At the time of the interview Travis still lived at home in a gang affected area. He writes and records rap music at home, which he shared with me in advance of the interview. He referred to life on-road and in particular the pressures on men to have to live up to aspects of masculinities, as well as his own mental health struggles.

5.2 Recruitment

5.2.1 Publicity: The Road Home Study

As I was designing the publicity materials for the study which included an advert to be distributed via email and social media, I also decided to adopt a shorthand title for the project; The Road Home Study. The reason that this was chosen was because it highlights the two conflicting areas that the research aimed to understand, both
the experience of on-road as well as the experience of home. Put together, I also enjoyed the way in which ‘the road home’ signified a journey inward, to return home to explore the past self. I used this strap line on the project advert (see appendix 1) as well as on twitter updates on the project; #TheRoadHomeStudy.

5.2.2 Sampling Strategy

The main sampling strategy I used was convenience sampling as I sourced participants from those who approached me, generally via social media, in response to my publicity materials. In a convenience sample, anyone who volunteers or is accessible to the researcher can be included (Cohen, 2018). This was then followed in one case with snowball sampling, where one participant suggested another person who also met the criteria. Participants were included in the research based on their self-defined fulfilment of the research criteria, in this case DVA and involvement in gangs and/or on-road. The study gained ethical clearance to recruit participants aged from sixteen years old upwards.

5.2.3 Recruitment

To promote the call for participants I built relationships with gatekeeping organisations (such as The St. Giles Trust). I made email contact with over one hundred front line organisations, many of whom I had connections with from my previous professional work. I conversed on the phone with seven organisations and
met four in person to try and negotiate access to young men through them as gatekeepers. However, this did not result in referrals to the research.

I also placed online adverts which I distributed through social media and professional networks (‘LinkedIn,’; ‘Twitter,’). I used my own existing user accounts to disseminate the adverts, after reflecting on Sikkens et al. (2017) work which promoted the use of named social media accounts, to promote transparency and engagement. I shared the research advert regularly on the different social media networks as well as on my personal blog site\(^1\) which I set up as another form of research advertising. All of the participants came through these online networks. See appendices for copies of the participant advert, information sheet, and consent form.

5.2.4 Interview Locations

I met with most of the participants at offices owned by The Open University, both at the Milton Keynes campus as well as the London campus. These were my preferred options due to the security that this offered in terms of having a reception service and other staff on site. However, at times this was not possible, so I also met in private offices near to where participants wanted to meet and that were available through a private hire company. I conducted one first interview by phone at the participant’s request (Travis), as well as two second interviews by phone (Dylan and Dave). One interview was carried out in a coffee shop, which was not pre-planned, but as a result of the participant not making our original time and

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\(^1\) To access my blog website, visit www.jadelevell.com
organised location, however I told him I would wait in a nearby coffee shop and he came to meet me later in the day. Although this was not my preference as it was a public place and lacked privacy, he noted it has been an incentive as was cosier and less formal than an office meeting.

### 5.3 Interview Procedures

Qualitative research was conducted in the form of interviews. The interviews were unstructured interviews which were centred upon the question; ‘pick three music tracks which help you tell parts of your life story’. Although there was no mention at the outset of the interview of DVA and on-road and/or gang-involvement narratives being the focus, these topics were clearly foregrounded on the study advertisement (see appendix one). The music was accessed via YouTube on an internet connected laptop in the interview and so nearly always included a stylised music video accompanying the track, which we then watched together. YouTube is a popular tool through which to access music and it has been estimated that 80 per cent of adults between the ages of 18 to 49 watch YouTube at least once a month (Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2019), so this is a media which has contemporary relevance and all of the participants were familiar with using it.

### 5.4 Narrative Interviews

To conduct this research, I used narrative interviews inspired by a life-history approach. To gather narratives with a focus on the life-course have been shown to
be a good method of eliciting personal accounts of the performance of masculinities. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) noted that using life-history research enables an exploration of how masculinities are, ‘configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time’ (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 852). Thus, careful analysis of narratives can enable an exploration of identity through the life course. Previous studies which used life-history narrative interviews with gang-involved men have provided inspiration for this method choice (Baird, 2012; Balsera, 2014). To think theoretically about narrative interviews I drew on Plummer’s (2001) work in which he asked people to talk about their lives in chapters, which I used the music for.

In delivering the interviews it was essential to be sensitive to the potential of negativity around interviews for the participants, due to past experiences of more formal and punitive interviewing situations. Glynn (2014) found, in his own research with on-road black men, sensitivities around the notion of an interview, which could seem similar to those which some of the participants had experienced with the police. Negating this was a key motivation in my choice of music elicitation as a tool to construct the interviews. This approach complemented unstructured interviews with no pre-set questions. This meant it was distinctly different from formal police interviews. Glynn noted that he attempted to create a ‘safe space’ which served, ‘an important function where black men do not have to defend their racial existence or humanity’ (Glynn, 2014, p. 41). Being acknowledged as ‘just men’ throughout the research process, not tied to issues of their ‘racial and cultural’ identities were seen as important by the participants, as they felt ‘humanised’ by the process (Glynn, 2014, p. 42).
Inspired by the approach outlined above, I used the creative and innovative technique of music elicitation (see section 5.5 for full outline) as a means to organise the interviews. Participants were asked to bring three music tracks and decided when to play and discuss these. Due to this method of organising the interviews they were largely unstructured. I used no pre-set question list format or proforma. In unstructured interviews the interviewer’s role is to introduce the research topic and then to be as non-directive as possible; ‘The idea is to let interviewee’s develop their own ideas and pursue their own train of thought rather than have the discussion shaped by questions which the researcher already has in mind’ (Denscombe, 2017, p. 204). In the case of this study I let the research advertisement (Appendix one) set the theme for the interview, as all of the participants had self-referred to the study from this. Then in the interview I asked them to structure their time around the music tracks they brought. In this way, the task of structuring the interview was largely in the hands of the participants.

5.5 Music elicitation

The movement towards more creative research methods to complement traditional interviews came from concerns that interviews alone can produce, ‘rational, sanitized, and self-conscious responses within the confines of language which, in and of itself, filters and limits expression of meaning’ (Porr, Mayan, Graffigna, Wall, & Vieira, 2011, p. 31). Using creative methods in interviews, as forms of arts-based inquiry aims to enable participants’ to, ‘express meaning embedded in the historical, cultural, and biographical contexts of their lives’ (ibid). Using music as an elicitation tool is powerful when used with a topic where music
has played a role in the coping and recovery. In the case of DVA, listening to music is a tool that some children and young people who live with DVA use as a coping strategy, both as a ‘form of self-expression, and self-soothing’ (Callaghan et al., 2017, p. 339). It offers a mechanism for comfort and enables young people to get ‘lost in the music’ which helps them stop thinking about their difficulties (ibid). It is worth considering that, if music has been used by a child as a coping mechanism to deal with their home life, then using it as an elicitation tool could be a very powerful way to enable the participant to locate their memories. DeNora noted that music is used by people as a ‘device for on-going identity work and for spinning a biographical thread of self-remembrance’ (DeNora, 1999, p. 31).

5.5.1 Music Elicitation as Promoting Active Interview Participation

*It’s heavy going back over it, back to the past? (Jade)*

*Yea it is, it is, but those songs were the ones that made me, nobody ever asked me this question before, it got me excited in a sense like ooh yea, I actually had to think about this (Eric)*

Music elicitation when combined with an unstructured interview space gave the control to the participant to dictate the pace, length and structure of the sessions. It enabled the participant to offer up different information than they would have in a words-only interview, as some complex concepts or feelings were communicated through the music or video format. By offering an alternative way for the participants to convey or illustrate their experiences they can instead bring the
music track and say, *that was what happened to me*. This was reflected in Sam’s comment below;

> Ok erm (sigh) so both of these songs (cough) literally word for word, just everything, that I lived, 100 per cent (Sam).

In this sentence it clearly shows how Sam is using the lyrics as a tool himself in the interview to express himself vicariously. By pre-selecting the music tracks due to the lyrics, Sam avoided having to articulate all of the difficult issues that he wanted to share.

The participants all curated the way music featured in the interviews in different ways. One way this was done was to choose three songs to represent childhood years, then the teenage years or the gang-involvement years and then a song that represented their current lives. By choosing songs in this way some participants dictated a chronological structure to the interview, although they didn’t necessarily start with the younger years first. The second way that songs were chosen to offer structure was to use the songs to highlight three distinct key messages that the participant wanted to share. One participant chose *Bob Marley, One Love* and then straight after it played said;

> The One love. That’s the way I feel right about now. I feel like everyone should spread love and positivity and everybody can live together (Dylan).
This opened up the opportunity for him to talk about the youth outreach work he is currently doing. When he had said what he wanted to in this section, he signified this by concluding, ‘So that’s why I chose that one love song’, which then prompted me to put on his next song.

5.5.2 Music and Popular Culture

For many young black people music and popular culture is one of the few contexts where they are positively acknowledged and have social presence and cultural capital. Drawing on role models from music icons can give young people a sense of pride and capital. By choosing music generated by black artists they can claim voice, collective presence and cultural value otherwise denied to them. Music track selection is personal and can be connected to wider cultural issues. Black rap music stars were noted by some participants as offering role-models for diverse masculinities.

Despite there being much positive associations with music, it is also a politically motivated topic at present for on-road young people. Music associated with on-road subculture such as grime and drill music, has tended to be both marginalised and pathologized. Indeed, in some cases young men who have been developing street-based rap music have even been criminalised. Analysis of the state’s response to grime music has been presented by Fatsis, who gave a damning critique of the policing of black music subcultures as indicative of wider racial discrimination of black young people. Fatsis (2019) noted that the policing of drill music is an, ‘expression of the discriminatory politics that neoliberal economics facilitates in order to exclude those who the state deems undesirable or undeserving of its
protection’ (p. 1). This analysis highlights the complex relationship on-road young men have with the music they are constructing and consuming. Music as art and the musicians as role models is heavily complicated by the wider politics of race, equality and voice.

5.5.3 Music as an Aid to Memory

The choice of music as an elicitation tool was motivated by a desire to enable participants to express their own meanings, whilst using music to embed their stories in the cultural contexts of their lives (Porr et al., 2011). As Dos Santos and Wagner (2018) found in their use of music elicitation, it put participants at ease and acted as a springboard for discussion. Keightley and Pickering noted how popular music can connect a person in a very direct way to their own past. They found that music can, ‘recreate for us the texture of a specific experience [which is then] … felt in a quality that we never quite put into words’ (2006, p. 153). In this way music becomes an aid to memory. Music is particularly emotive when used in this way, as it captures both a personal memory and a wider sense of popular culture and trends of the past. Music is often a product of its time, therefore it becomes an anchor to the time in which it was produced and can help memory recall (Laughey, 2006). This was highlighted in the interview by Eric, who noted that:

*I’ve stayed away from listening to this song because … I tend to not listen to it because … I feel sad, I hear that song and there’s just so much, it’s like I actually feel like crying that’s the weird thing, but then people don’t know that about you, you wouldn’t want them to know that. Because then you wasn’t crying, you felt it,*
you felt sad yes, but now when I hear it, it it yea, it takes you to a different place, so yea (Eric).

This passage clearly shows that, for Eric, the music brought back varied emotions about his past and took him back to memories. This point is illustrated by him noting he has avoided listening to certain music tracks in his own life due to this.

Using music as an elicitation tool is powerful when used with a topic where music has played a role in the coping and recovery. In the case of DVA, listening to music is a tool that some children and young people who live with DVA use as a coping strategy, both as a ‘form of self-expression, and self-soothing’ (Callaghan et al. 2017, p. 339). It offers a mechanism for comfort and enables young people to get ‘lost in the music’ which helps them stop thinking about their difficulties (Callaghan et al., 2017, p. 340). I argue that, if music has been used by a child or young person as a coping mechanism to deal with their home life, then using it as an elicitation tool could be a very powerful way to enable the participant to locate their memories. DeNora noted that music is used by people as a ‘device for on-going identity work and for spinning a biographical thread of self-remembrance’ (1999, p. 31). In this way it provides participants with a ‘scaffolding for self-constitution’ (DeNora, 1999, p. 31). So, through bringing in music to the interview I asked the participant to expose some of the scaffolding and locate and express different parts of their identity through their music choices.

5.5.4 Music as a Coping Mechanism
One of the reasons that music was such a powerful elicitation tool is that it helped the participants locate their past memories, as discussed in the previous section. It became clear that for many the music had provided a supportive function in the past, both as a supportive voice, providing inspiration, making them feel less alone. In this way music was, for many, a fundamental coping mechanism.

_I Miss You_

**DMX** (2002)

Grandma, I really miss you and it ain't been the same

I drop a tear when I, hear yo' name

Mariella Holloway, why you gotta be so far away?

Used to say, "Don't worry, it's gon' be okay"

But it ain't it's like when you left, you took the Lord with you

Why couldn't I come when he came to get you?

Damn I really miss you I had to say it again

What I wouldn't give for one more hug, from grandma

Baby it's gon' be okay (she used to tell me that)

Baby it's gon' be okay (I really miss hearin')

_Music track selected by Eric_

The above music track was selected by Eric as a way to talk about his grief around the death of his mother, in his childhood. With this song - an ode to the rapper’s late grandmother - Eric would listen to the lyrics and imagine his late mother saying the words to him. In this way the function of the music was to help articulate his
memories of his mother. It also conveyed an empathic and supportive voice from a distance and from within, laden with the personal affect the music carried and aroused:

When my mum died we never really mourned her, and then when we grew up we grew up with a step mum who was getting beaten up every day so she never showed us some sort of love and there was never anyone to talk to. So literally whatever your gunna go through your gunna be fine its gunna be ok, so literally as sad as it may sound I play that to hear its gunna be ok, you listen to it imagining someone is saying it to you, someone who cares for you (Eric).

Eric constructed his step mum’s beating and her lack of love in a matter of fact way, as inevitable, displaying a sad and pragmatic sense of what happened. Framing it using a passive construction ‘who was beaten up every day’ serves to erase the perpetrator from the description, does not name him, and implies his step-mum was suffering from an inevitable mishap. Crucially what the music provided was the reassurance of a mother. Eric was introduced to music by a teacher at school, through becoming a member of the choir. Eric used the words as conveying a voice of guidance. He noted that he would play music to be able to;

... see beyond my situation ... I needed it, this music I need, it literally was a part of my life because I needed something to make me think you’re great, you can do this (Eric).
Using the lyrics as a way to garner advice from an alternative source is an element that was mentioned here by Eric. He used lyrics from R.Kelly’s ‘The Greatest’ as an inspirational message as displayed below:

**The World’s Greatest**

**R. Kelly** (2002)

I'm that star up in the sky
I'm that mountain peak up high
Hey, I made it
I'm the world's greatest
And I'm that little bit of hope
When my backs against the ropes
I can feel it
I'm the world's greatest

As shown here the lyrics to this particular music track are centered upon empowerment and self-belief. Eric noted that he used this track as a way to inspire himself, that he could also be great and could achieve things, even though his friends might think he ‘made some crazy decisions’. There was also the element in the song that it was significant as introduced to him by the school music teacher who he built a positive relationship with through his engagement in the school choir. Using the song lyrics as a substitute for a reassuring voice was also used by Dylan. He chose a song that his mother used to play to him and her former advice was woven in the lyrics. He noted that he chose *Bob Marley- Three Little Birds*, because;
As a kid growing up my mum used to always play it and she always used to say we shouldn’t be worrying about things (Dylan).

The main chorus line in the song is ‘Don’t worry about a thing, coz every little things gunna be alright’. So in a similar way to the others playing the music served as a mantra, repeating with affect, the advice of his mother who had passed away and was no longer there to give it. This example also shows how the participants were using the music elicitation as a tool, which enabled them to get to the heart of a story which may not have surfaced in a traditonal interview setting.

These excerpts not only show the way in which music was used as a coping strategy in the past by the participants, but also that music was a vehicle through which they were able to express different aspects of their former lives, which indicated a presence of vulnerable masculinity, as distinct from the foregrounded subordinate masculinity constructed in relation to the perpetrator or the emergent protest masculinity as expressed in relation to on-road activity or school. The way they conveyed their music choices during the interview indicated it helped them express and reflect about their emotions from childhood.

5.5.5 My Reflections on Music Elicitation in Practice

The music elicitation worked well from an interviewer’s perspective. The participants all sent me their music in advance of the interviews, which showed an investment in the process prior to meeting and arguably made it more likely that
they would turn up. Asking participants to bring music along to the interview also added a dimension of preparedness as it inspired them to think through what they wanted to share in advance of the interview in specific ways. If they hadn’t been asked to pre-prepare in this way before the interview, then this thought process may not have happened. Being able to listen to the tracks in advance myself also meant I could have some idea of the direction they were steering the interview in prior to us meeting. A further benefit of using music elicitation in the interview is that it has become a vivid way to recall the participants and their messages when carrying out the analysis. I have found myself listening back to the music many times when writing and it brings me closer to the data than the transcripts alone. It has become an anchor to my own memory of the interviews.

5.6 Ethical Issues

5.6.1 Ethical Approval

There was an acknowledgement throughout the research design that the topics dealt with in this study were sensitive. Hydén (2012) noted that domestic violence is a sensitive topic to research because it ‘(a) is research that intrudes into the private sphere and delves into deeply personal experience and (b) could be concerned with deviance and social control’ (p. 227). DVA was also only half of the topic, the other being life on-road and in gangs, where the participants’ also went through traumatic experiences. Due to this, research ethics were of utmost importance in the research design and methods chosen. Careful consideration was
given to ensure that the research would not be carried out in a way that would re-
traumatisé participants. Through the use of unstructured interviews as a method,
participants were not compelled to share any more than they chose to. There were
no scripted questions asked, which was a technique used in DVA research by Hydén,
who noted in interviews about DVA much of the material will be ‘untold stories’,
and so it is not appropriate to use a pre-prepared question format (2012. p. 227).
However, the participants were aware of the research topic and therefore had been
primed that there would be an expectation that these sensitive topics would be
discussed. Prior to any research being able to be carried out I had to receive a
favourable opinion from the Open University’s Human Research Ethical Committee
process (HREC).

5.6.2 Remuneration

The Open University Remuneration Policy states that payment to adequately
compensate participants for their time is acceptable, as long as it does not
constitute an inducement. I remunerated participants for their time and travel
expenses to attend the interview. This decision to remunerate was grounded in an
underlying political point - I feel that it is unethical for large organisations to expect
experts-by-experience to share their knowledge and experiences for free, on the
motivation of ‘giving back’. I saw this frequently in my professional work and so it
was a strong conviction of mine to be able to compensate participants as
consultants. Participants were offered ‘lovetoshop’ vouchers which could be used
in a range of high-street shops, as well as reimbursement of travel expenses.
5.6.3 Anonymity

All of the participants were guaranteed anonymity in the writing up of this thesis. As outlined in the ‘Participant Information Sheet’ (see appendix two), they were given pseudonyms in the writing up of the thesis and, when transcribing the interviews, any identifying information was removed. In addition to this I have not disclosed the cities in which the participants’ lived. I met with men from three large cities in the North, Central, and South of England.

5.6.4 Provision of Transcripts

The participants were offered copies of their interview transcripts within 4 weeks of the interview. They were then offered the chance to review the transcript and be part of a second interview after this point. Two of the participants’ (Dylan and Dave) took this opportunity, which was carried out by phone in both cases.

5.6.5 Safety Planning

I needed to consider my own safety planning as a lone woman researcher interviewing men who were statistically likely to have had a violent past. Presser (2005) posed the question herself of how feminist researchers deal with this lack of ease when researching violent men. I ensured that I met participants in public
places, or ideally University buildings with reception areas, and checked in on the phone with a friend after the session. In terms of emotional safety, I dealt with my own emotional reactions at hearing stories of the men’s violence as well as their victimisation, and I utilised my skills from previous support work to do this safely and appropriately.

5.7 Positionality and Reflexivity

As noted by Dean (2017), ‘autobiographical reflexivity is a vital part of the production of qualitative research’ (p. 114). He noted that it is essential to examine ones’ own presence in the research, the intellectual realities that shape it and how this in turn shapes the researchers interpretation of the data (Dean, 2017). Researchers concerned with reflexive practice have been keen to explore and unravel the way that their biographies intersect with their interpretation of fieldwork experiences. As part of this, the authors reveal their position and perceptions of the issue they are researching. Gabriel et al., (2017) noted that it is not necessary to bracket one’s personal history and diverse approaches to the research, but rather, to embody critical reflexivity, by ‘being hyperaware of our inner wounded healer’, which is particularly significant for practitioner–researchers engaging with vulnerable populations (2017, p. 162). I approach my research topic from a feminist activist position which will eschew neutral objectivity and embrace the impact of personal experience on the development and application of my work. A theoretical understanding of emotions in research has underpinned my approach to reflexivity and was informed by Campbell’s (2002) work. She aimed to counter traditional views that the social scientific observer
ought to separate out, neutralize, or control their inner lives in order to make objective social research. This process led researchers to become, ‘invisible authors’ who did not call attention to their own subjectivity (Campbell, 2002, p. 16). Campbell approached this issue from a broadly constructionist position, however central to the concept is that reflexivity is imperative for research as it alerts us to issues of power. Discussion around the importance of this is the foundation of genuine engagement in reflexivity.

5.7.1 Reflexivity and my Professional Career

Prior to my research in this area I had worked in a range of front-line support services and had gained skills to work with vulnerable people on sensitive issues. I have worked in a range of settings, including in a domestic violence refuge, in rape crisis, and in support services for street-sex-working women. In these roles I have carried out a range of training in risk management and supporting vulnerable people (see appendix five for a sample list), showing the breadth of my knowledge in professional practice as a foundation of my academic understanding of these issues. These courses, as well as my experience in support work, gave me a confidence in meeting research participants and talking to them about their lives, as well as a confidence that I could recognise a safeguarding issue and refer them to the correct support agency if required. In addition, it shows that I am aware of the complexities of working with people who have had chaotic lives. Not only did these qualifications give me the personal confidence to manage a sensitive research project with potentially vulnerable and marginalised people, but it also signalled to both the professional agencies that I contacted, as well as the research
participants themselves, that I was qualified and experienced enough to take seriously. My background in professional practice, both in support and policy work, may have had an impact on the way in which the participants approached me in the interview. For instance, though my professional experience I am aware how to appear to be actively listening and reassuring when some of the participants (Travis in particular) became upset during the interview. However, this background experience may have also meant that I reverted to ‘support worker’ mode and will have presented differently to a typical researcher.

5.7.2 Reflexivity and my Personal DVA Experience

**Family Portrait**

*Pink (2002)*

Momma please stop crying, I can't stand the sound
Your pain is painful and it’s tearin’ me down
I hear glasses breaking as I sit up in my bed
I told dad you didn’t mean those nasty things you said

You fight about money, ’bout me and my brother
And this I come home to, this is my shelter
It ain’t easy growing up in World War three
Never knowing what love could be, you’ll see
I don't want love to destroy me like it has done my family
At the root of my professional experience, as well as my personal interest in this field of work, lies my own personal experience of DVA in childhood. This has been the motivating factor in my entire career in gender-based-violence, the study of gender theory, as well as this thesis. To share this so openly is something I have seldom done in my professional career to date. Completing this PhD has been a process of working with my own vulnerability and resilience, finding a way to make peace with my past through the research journey (Novais, 2018).

In the design of this study I have reflected a lot on the way that music played a role in my own experience of DVA in childhood. In the design process I reflected on how much comfort I got from listening to music that spoke out about DVA, at a time in my life when no one had ever explicitly talked to me about what was going on. Therein lies one of the stranger aspects of DVA, being that as it is often a hidden (sometimes in plain sight) and taboo issue; it is seldom named for what it is. The first song that I remember having this impact on me was Eminem- Stan. In this track he articulated something that I had never spoken about, and it made an impression on a thirteen-year-old me in a significant way.

Stan

Eminem (2000)

See I'm just like you in a way

I never knew my father neither

He used to always cheat on my mom and beat her

I can relate to what you're saying in your songs

So when I have a shitty day, I drift away and put 'em on

'Cause I don't really got shit else so that shit helps when I'm depressed
I even got a tattoo of your name across the chest...
See everything you say is real, and I respect you 'cause you tell it
My girlfriend's jealous 'cause I talk about you 24/7
But she don't know you like I know you Slim, no one does
She don't know what it was like for people like us growin' up, you gotta call me man
I'll be the biggest fan you'll ever lose
Sincerely yours, Stan
P.S. we should be together too

The format of the track is compelling as it is set up as a recorded conversation between Eminem and a fan who is talking about Eminem’s music offering him comfort as he felt understood by him through listening to his songs. So, there is a fascinating projection of a fan’s perspective within the song itself. This mirroring in the song, as well as my own experience, was the inspiration for the use of music elicitation in the study, highlighted in particular with the phrase, ‘She don’t know what it was like for people like us growin’ up’, where there is a sense of intimacy within the lyrics between the listener, the fictional fan, and the artist.

The other two songs I would have chosen if I had been engaged in a study like this about my own experiences were Pink- Family Portrait (lyrics at outset of section), as well as Tracey Chapman- Behind the Wall. I have chosen to end the thesis with the lyrics of this track. I have not been on-road or gang-involved and so would not have met the criteria of this study and I am not claiming commonality with the participants in many ways, yet there is no doubt that my personal journey through my own childhood has defined my professional career. I am fully aware that my desire to make a change and work to end DVA is directly linked to me trying to make...
use of my past pain. The personal is political. This path has led me here, to hear these men’s experiences as part of a wider project to make positive change to children who experience DVA in childhood, and many of the men participated for the same reason. So perhaps this study has helped us all move forward in the healing journey somehow.

5.7.3 Motherhood

Another aspect which was at the forefront of my mind throughout the research was my dual role of mother to three young children at the time of research. In fact, this was not a static process, as I started the PhD with a one-year old daughter, and then fell pregnant and had twins at the end of the first year. This punctuated the time between going through ethical clearance and beginning fieldwork. As these were both new and emerging identities at the time of research, there was an inherent vulnerability that I felt about my knowledge of both. As Guyotte wrote about her similar experience, ‘I was multiple subjects in multiple time zones-coexisting in them simultaneously- as I navigated the spaces of becoming-mother, becoming-Ph.D’ (2018, p. 42).

At times my motherhood status had a visible presence, as when I met with the external agencies to explore carrying out my research whilst I was visibly pregnant. I cannot be sure whether this impacted on their keenness to refer gang-involved men to meet with me for research (I didn’t receive any referrals) or whether it was overlooked. Looking after young children throughout had ramifications at times on the logistics and my mobility (On one occasion for a participant interview I travelled
4 hours by train to meet, and at the same time one of my children was hospitalised so I had to rush back, feeling the competing ties of home and work acutely).

My position as a mother also influenced on how I thought about the interview data when I was working with it. I remember this being pertinent when listening to Dylan’s first song choice;

**My Old Lady**

OMI (2013)

Conceived in your womb like a flower I bloomed

How you do what you do, you’re a super woman...

Momma, your love gives me comfort

It's like the sweetest music every time you sing your lullabies

I feel no cuts and bruises, for all the sleepless nights

I thank you for your patience, for the times you fed me, clothed me

Wiped my nose and tied my laces

At this point both in the interview as well as listening back this song had such an effect on me. Both because it wasn’t the sort of song, I had expected a participant to choose, and I hadn’t heard such a track which described mother-love from an adult male perspective before. This connected with my personal life and brought forth feelings of my own children and my new role as mother. My motherhood was at times made visible in the interview, as several of the participants asked me questions about my personal life, including my children, and so this information was at times present before or after the interview. As shown in this example, the
music functioned in a variety of ways which seemed to lubricate the interview process in a non-traditional way which made it an engaging process and felt that I was being led on a journey in the interview, with the participants more in the driving seat. In the interview context there was often a nervous energy at the start and for several of the participants this was dispelled by them choosing to play their first music track. Similarly, if there were points in the interview where things felt emotional or intense and this awkwardness was often broken by them choosing to play another track. Listening to music together was at times an intense experience, but the provision of the music video via a video streaming website (YouTube.com) gave us something to focus our eyes on which made the experience less awkward. When a song was chosen that I recognised then it brought up my own memories of the time period that I heard the song myself originally.

5.7.4 Reflexivity and Gender

All researchers bring ‘considerable social, historical, and cultural baggage’ to the interview context (Arendell, 1997, p. 342). The intersectional dynamics of an individual’s identity are no less active for the participant than they are for the researcher, and in the interview space these different aspects are at times foregrounded and at other times recede situationally. In the interviews that I carried out there were many distinct differences between myself and the participants, with the most obvious being gender, and at times, race and ethnicity. Presser (2005) has written insightfully on gender disparity among researcher/participant relationship. She noted that cross-gender studies (where there is a disparity between researcher and researched), ‘simply bring the
processes of gender accomplishment into plain view’ (Presser, 2005, p. 2071). Presser emphasised the way in which stories in interviews are constructed situationally, and Presser urges feminist researchers to explicitly consider the impact of the inter-gender interactions on the research process. Ultimately, Presser argues, ‘the researcher’s goal is not to emancipate the authentic story of the narrator—none exists—but rather to expose as much as she can of the relations that influence the construction of the story that is told’ (2005, p. 2087). In this way, the stories are co-produced in the process of the interviewer acting as audience in the moment. As such, it is reasonable to assume that I will have heard certain stories in the interview which would have been revealed differently with an interviewer of a different intersectional identity.

My sense of the dynamics was that the participants brought forward lots of stories of their feelings of vulnerability, which may have been aided by me being outside of the masculinity matrix myself, as a woman. Several participants positioned women on the periphery of their inner circles. However, this may have meant that there were elements that the participants did not foreground, for instance only two men talked openly about their experiences of perpetrating violence against women, whereas some research (Firmin, 2011) has previously suggested that there may be high levels of violence-against-women in gangs. In general, I felt aware of the gender differences between us, however didn’t feel it had great repercussions, with the exception of one participant who had a flirtatious demeanour which I remember made me feel slightly uncomfortable and starkly aware of our differences. The fact that he was similar to my age as well may have exacerbated my self-consciousness.
5.7.5 Reflexivity and Race

The racial differences between myself and most of the research participants was also a feature of the intersectional interview dynamics. To explore this theoretically I have found McIntosh’s (1989) discussion helpful, on the way that whiteness functions like an ‘invisible knapsack’ of tools which function as white privilege. This became apparent in the interview context, with some participants talking explicitly about the comparable ease of my life as a white woman to theirs as a black man.

When Lester was conveying his own experiences of structural inequality, what he termed as the fact that ‘everything’s stacked’. This is a theme he refers to throughout his narrative. By ‘stacked’, Lester is referring to the inherent unfairness in society, which results in some people getting the ‘good spots…good jobs… good money’, whilst others do not. Lester refers to the privilege of people who utilise their wider networks, so ‘their cousins their friends’ share in these good spots and limit wider access. Lester explicitly referred to the racial and gender differences between us. To illustrate to me what he meant Lester noted that,

*The rudeness like, you wouldn’t really experience it as a lady whose erm, a (.) Caucasian or a white lady yea, you wouldn’t experience it, coz you’ve got what they call a white cloak, so say if I was walking and I walked with you, the chance of me getting stopped or harassed or anything is reduced because I’m with you. And you wouldn’t experience what a lot of people of colour experience every day in every direction coz that’s how it’s stacked* (Lester).
Lester stated that I would not understand this in the same way as I have a ‘white cloak’. This white cloak notion is reminiscent of Du Bois’s concept of the ‘veil of blackness’ (Lemert, 1994). For Du Bois, the veil of blackness was a way of constructing the discreet boundary that existed between races. In this passage Lester is using his notion of the white cloak similarly, to refer to a shrouding that makes life in public space easier. He outlines, that if he were with me his chance of having certain forms of harassment drastically reduces in his eyes. He also stated that this white cloak also means that I am not privy to the experiences of abuse that black people face ‘everyday’, because ‘that’s how it’s stacked’. Here is where it becomes clearer that Lester’s notion of society being stacked is focused on racism above other forms of structural inequality, despite him talking about wealth and power differentials as well. Lester conveyed a socialist value system in his comment that if everyone cannot have wealth, then no one should have it. Lester utilised this ‘white cloak’ as after the interview he thought he had lost his keys and asked me to go nearby to a business building where he had gone after to ask at reception. He felt that me accompanying him would make him seem more legitimate to the staff there. This felt odd for me, in a way I was glad to be able to offer some practical help, but also knowing the reasons why he was asking me was uncomfortable as he is much older than me and far more streetwise. I felt a bit ridiculous having this advantage and it reminded me of my previous work as a support worker. ‘Hand holding’ and offering that support in official meetings and appointments was a large part of the work, however now I wonder how that drew on cultural capital in the way this situation did.

Eric also framed me in the interview space as representing the naturalised UK identity. He framed me occupying the role of representing that UK in the room. He
did this by saying, ‘**you welcome someone in this country…. but if you do not socialise him…’.** Here the dynamic between us is more exposed, as in this exchange he is positioning me as a representative of the British society. In terms of my actions as a researcher, there was little I could do to mitigate the at times sharply felt racial distinction between myself and the men I spoke to. However, though my use of my own picture on my social media accounts and in my blog, I made my own identity as a white woman as freely knowable before the interview, so that they were able to assess this before committing to participate.

5.7.6 Reflexive Journal

I tried to manage this aspect of my personal involvement with the subject matter in engaging with a reflexive journal. This type of critical reflexivity has been noted as important to feminist standpoint research (Gabriel et al., 2017). When I carried out this task it enabled the opportunity for more expressive and unstructured writing within which I could centre the more emotional aspects of my feelings around the research (Dean, 2017). This has been therefore an emotionally charged process at times, although the participants’ lives in the study were otherwise vastly different to my own. These enabled me to focus on the impact on myself of the difficult stories I had heard and the ways in which I can maintain a degree of separation from the work.

5.8 Approach to Analysis
5.8.1 Transcription

I transcribed each interview verbatim and read through each narrative. Alongside this I wrote an expansive summary for each participant to keep their whole selves in my mind through the analysis. The transcripts were then sent out to participants who were offered the opportunity to review the transcript and have a second phone interview to talk it through, or to offer amendments. Two of the participants (Dylan and Dave) took up the second interview option after seeing the transcript. Dave in particular said that he wanted to add things that he felt he missed the first time. None of the participants amended their transcripts.

5.8.2 Coding

The transcripts were coded using NVivo software. Through reviewing the transcripts in detail, codes were created that drew on key themes and reoccurring topics that the participants mentioned. I then developed specific codes which were referential to the key analytic themes and discourses of masculinities and intersectional identities. I have included a coding map in appendix four to give a broad overview. To explore these aspects thematically I engaged in the ‘hermeneutic circle’, which involved moving back and forth between the interviews and existing literature, using a blend of top-down and bottom-up interpretative procedures’ (Squire, 2013).
5.8.3 Analysis

I started with an exploratory thematic analysis on the narratives to identify themes and key issues within each and recurring across all of them, which I used to make a coding frame using NVIVO software. I then used Connell’s (2005) framework (described fully in Chapter four), to explore the different structures of gender relations. Specifically, I created thematic headings to look at power relations; production relations; cathexis. I also used the lens of intersectionality (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Ware, 2015) threaded through this in order to deepen the focus on the ways in which other intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, and class into the exploration of gender performance.

5.9 Chapter Summary

As shown in this chapter, the research design was intended to be as participatory and non-hierarchical as possible. This has been reflected in the recruitment, the narrative method as well as the inclusion of music elicitation as a tool, and the open way the interviews were conducted. It was the aim that the research was to be both a positive and egalitarian process for the participants and the choices of methods attempted to support this. As this research is on very personal issues which are often stigmatised in wider society, enabling the participants to set their own agenda and share what they selected was of utmost importance. Reflexivity has been an ongoing and central concern in the study, as outlined the personal precautions made, as well as considering the live aspect of narratives; that they are
unfolding in the present in the interview, which is affected by our own gender and power dynamics in the moment. I have aimed to use reflexive practice throughout to consider the way I have interacted and affected the research.
6 Chapter Six: Narratives of Childhood

In this chapter I consider the narratives of the respondents that centred on the early years of their lives, in particular between birth to the end of their pre-teens. In these parts of their stories, the participants described their circumstances at home, experiencing DVA, alongside their emerging engagement with violence in school and on-road. Central to the discussion a contrast between the way they performed masculinity at home, (defined by subordinated masculinities), and the ones the participants’ performed at school, (as emerging protest masculinities). It became clear through the analysis that the different spaces of home, at school, and on-road afforded different masculinity performances.

The data illustrated how the participants’ performance of masculinity changed as they made the transition from home to on-road. That is, they moved from their subordinated masculinity at home by the DVA perpetrator (father or step-father), to being able to express a type of on-road protest masculinity. However, the participants’ identities were not as clear cut as might appear when expressed through these two most constraining types of performance. When DVA was occurring, they described their home lives as both a dangerous and confusing environment. As shown in the narratives, there were diverse memories and experiences of DVA brought up, at times what they were seeing, or hearing was hard to make sense of. Both home and on-road were spaces that centred around violence and protest-masculinity but the context on the street was more
understandable, the rules (or code) more intelligible, and the prizes of power and respect more achievable.

6.1 Power Relations

6.1.1 Experiencing DVA

In this section I work through the analysis of the disclosures around DVA and child abuse. There were several interrelated thematic areas which arose in many of the narratives. These were that DVA was hidden, incomprehensible, and unpredictable. All of these dimensions of DVA point to a wider experience of powerlessness, which I explore throughout this chapter. The participants discussed the wider ranging effects this had both on internal and external coping strategies.

**Hidden DVA**

The first aspect of power relations that arose in the narratives was the way in which DVA was a partly hidden issue in childhood. In several cases this meant that the knowledge of the extent of the DVA has been revealed to the participants in retrospect as they got older. However, as is shown in Dylan’s quote below, his mother used to make ‘excuses’ for her injuries:

* Mums and people used to make up them excuses, I walked into the door and things like that... on the outside it looks like everything’s rosy but really and truly you don’t
know what anybody’s going through. Nobody knew what I was going through and I was going through a lot, do you know (Dylan).

This quote also indicates that there was a contradiction occurring at that point, where both him and his mum were trying to hide the DVA in parallel, highlighted by Dylan saying no-one was aware what he was going through (he later told me that school nor social workers were aware) and so both him and his mother were hiding the DVA from the outside. But what was also striking about Dylan’s passage is that his mother was also trying to hide the DVA from him when they were living together (although as discussed later in this chapter Dylan still experienced the DVA directly). Travis also focused on the DVA that his sister experienced when he was a child. Travis felt as he noted that he blamed himself for not recognising the extent of the DVA, as well as co-occurring child abuse against his nephew, which tragically resulted in his death as an infant:

You kinda like blame yourself, coz he [his sister’s ex-partner] was like violent towards her as well and I regret not [crying] I regret not noticing it coz I could have been able to do something and now I can’t [crying] … looking back there was things I didn’t realise (Travis).

Travis’s sense of regret was palpable in the interview and this passage above shows the despair that he conveyed about not realising that DVA was happening. This links back to Dylan’s excerpt above where he discussed excuses that his mother used to make. DVA is an issue often hidden by those who are experiencing it. Compounding the hidden nature of the DVA in some of the narratives was at times the lack of
classification of violence between adults as a form of DVA. This was pertinent in Lester’s case, whose mother was murdered by her ex-partner when he was very young:

*My mother got murdered when I was two [years old]... it was her ex-partner and what happened, he made her got drunk and strangled her... Basically she wanted to leave him and he didn’t want her to and he said just come out one more time with me, that’s what’s a bad signal straight away, why are you coming out one more time with me for? What for? If I and you is done why do we need to come out one more time for? But some people are gullible. No one coulda told me that coz it’s the first thing I’m gunna ask them and they are not gunna have an answer for that so that’s what happened (Lester).*

In the above passage it is clear that Lester views the tragic incident of his mother’s murder more through an understanding of violence informed by the ‘code of the street’, rather than violence in an DVA context. By this I mean that he focuses on his mother’s lack of street-wise knowledge to interpret the violence, as outlined in suggesting she was ‘gullible’, rather than focusing on the abusive nature of the violence. Viewing the violence in this way enables Lester to strategize about how he would avoid the same fate. Lester related how the untimely and violent death of his mother had negative repercussions on his life; ‘it sends you on the wrong trajectory’. Lester located this early experience as being influential on his later involvement on-road and in gangs.
As outlined in the prior section, DVA was at times a hidden issue. Yet when the participants (as boys) were aware of DVA occurring, it was clear in some of the narratives that the participants at a young age did not understand the full dynamics and reasoning behind it. Some participants described hearing the various forms of violence and abuse but said they either were not aware of the full extent of what was going on, as Sam noted;

*At a young age you don’t know how to decipher what’s going on around you.* (Sam)

The notion of DVA being difficult to *‘decipher’* is important here, as this word itself means to ‘decode’ (Collins, 1988). Sam’s comment thus suggests that there is an unknowable code to the DVA (in contrast to the ‘code of the street’). For the participants’, living with DVA was defined by its unintelligibility. The inability to explain or make sense of the circumstances was also spoken about by Dylan, who described hearing his mother being beaten in the bath and hearing the violence yet not being able to make sense of it:

*He tried to throw an iron in the bath when she was in the bath, do you know, that’s what he would do, I could hear as a kid the water splashing and all that, because he’d put her in the bath and then he’d beat her while she was in the bath.* (Dylan)
This passage really illustrates the bizarre ways that violence in the DVA context was carried out. It is this bizarreness which is what makes the code of DVA both unknowable and unpredictable, which amplifies children’s sense of powerlessness. It also conveys the alarming ways that Dylan was experiencing DVA in childhood.

*The unpredictability of DVA*

In DVA situations, it is not always the case that physical violence is ongoing, but rather is sporadic and thus can appear unpredictable to outsiders. Dylan associated his father’s abusive behaviour with him being inebriated:

> He was the nicest man ever when he hadn’t had a drink and I’m not saying it coz, I don’t call him dad no more because of what I’d found out, but honestly you wouldn’t meet a nicer man, and my mum would say the same thing, its once he had a drink he would turn into a devil, he’d turn into a monster (Dylan).

The disjuncture between his father’s persona when sober being ‘the nicest man ever’ is a complete contrast to him being the ‘devil’ when drunk. Framing the abusive behaviour serves not only to add some degree of predictability to it (i.e. it happens only when the perpetrator is drunk), but also enables Dylan to place boundaries around the violence in order to identify some positive elements about his father. The unpredictability of DVA perpetration was also highlighted by Sam and Dave, who drew on the powerful imagery of terrorism as a way to describe their experiences of childhood violence. This image is a powerful one, as it is rich
imagery. To terrorize is to, ‘force, oppress by fear, violence’ (Collins, 1988). A defining feature of terrorism is that it is unexpected and unavoidable. Sam noted that;

\[\text{You feel the way they are treating you and that’s the way you explain it. It felt like terrorizing or bullying or control (Sam).}\]

In this passage he outlines that he experienced the DVA on an emotional level. This image, when coupled with the images of bullying and control conveys a sense of fear induced domination that the perpetrator sought in the home. What these quotes show is the close relationship between experiencing DVA and feeling powerlessness, as well as a lack of knowledge about the whole picture. This was echoed in McGee’s study, where she noted that, ‘what was evident from these children’s accounts was that by hearing violence but not knowing what was actually happening, their own feelings of powerlessness increased’ (McGee, 2000, p. 64).

For several of the participants’ in this study DVA was associated with a core sense of powerlessness. This sense of powerlessness was linked by Eric to the way that he then engaged with his peers at school, as he sought to regain a sense of power.

\textit{Intervention and DVA}

The experience the participants had as children, watching their mother being victimised through DVA and not being in a position to stop it presented them with conflicts and tensions they struggled to resolve. It conflicts with wider societal messages that take a paternal view of gender relations that suggest the participants
should protect women and in turn, sons should protect their mothers. The participants understood this pressure in different ways. Some participants noted that it was not just the powerlessness of being in a home dominated by a DVA perpetrator, but more specifically the feeling of not being able to protect one’s own mother in that situation that was so difficult. Dylan noted that;

*When I used to hear my mum scream and I couldn’t do nothing for her, so I’d go onto the estate … [and] … escape to the streets (Dylan).*

Sam also mentioned experiencing the DVA and feeling that he was not able to prevent it or intervene:

*All you’d hear was big crashing and smashing and stuff and like sat listening to it and I’m so young and I can’t do anything about it (Sam).*

In this passage Sam is foregrounding the issue of his young age at the time as central to the ineptitude that he felt when faced with the DVA. Central to this is also the issue of fear, which is implied in the way that Sam mentions hearing the ‘crashing and smashing’ which must have been an unsettling experience. Whereas Eric noted that he felt he should have wanted to do something, but actually developed a safety strategy for himself which was to feel safer when the DVA was going on, as it meant he was not the primary target for abuse at those times:
When they’re not fighting each other, sounds wrong, but when they’re not fighting each other I didn’t like it because instead they inflicted the pain on us now... I wouldn’t be able to sleep, I’m going to sleep because once they stop doing that, we could be next... so the longer they are still doing it, its ok, it got to the point when it was sad but yea it was cool, I can live with that... Most guys... they’d be like yea if I see my mum getting hit, I would get involved, I swear to God I never got involved, I just always left it. My sister would be unhappy about it, but it didn’t bother me in the sense that they were fighting ... because once they stopped it would definitely change now it was me (Eric).

Here Eric noted that he thinks how he dealt with the DVA at home was different to ‘most guys’ who would have ‘got involved’, which signifies the pressure he felt to intervene. Instead Eric focused his role of protector towards his sister, as he talked about the lengths he would go to stop her being victimised herself, noting that he would even kill or ‘go to prison’ if someone abused her. Through this he is navigating the negated and now lost opportunities to protect his mother, an act which he now firmly feels would be in his role as a patriarch in their family.

Dave described the feeling that he had in childhood that he ‘couldn’t do anything’ about the DVA which left him with an enduring sense of anger that he still carries around with him now (see section 6.4.1 for more on this). Dave recalled one occasion though when he was a teenager and did decide to act against the DVA perpetrator in an attempt to protect his mother from further abuse:

There’s a lot of men walking around who are now super angry and full of like rage and quick to snap on someone and punch someone because of they felt for years
that they couldn’t do anything, so that’s what happened with me anyway it’s like I got sick of being a victim so I remember my mum’s boyfriend hearing them downstairs fighting and whatever and I got to probably about thirteen (years old) and I confronted him the one time, he came round after he moved out, I don’t know exactly how old I was but he was moved out at that point and they were like on and off and I heard from friends that they’d seen my mum and [Boyfriend] down at the park and he had put a knife at my mum’s throat and I was pissed off and I couldn’t, I didn’t know what to do, I remember one time picking up a Heinz ketchup bottle like a glass bottle and I remember walking out to him and saying fuck off, leave my mum alone and if he would have physically attacked me he probably would have battered me, but he walked past and other people got involved, neighbours like, and he got in the car and went off (Dave).

This passage expresses so much in the way of the tension that Dave felt between being afraid and feeling victimised, whilst trying to assert his power in young adolescence. There is an underlying thread in the passage of naivety and powerlessness, as Dave noted he ‘didn’t know what to do’ and felt he ‘couldn’t do anything’. The poignant image of Dave clutching a glass ketchup bottle as a weapon to defend himself from a man who he was clearly afraid of presents the tension between a childhood naivety and a desire to enact a tough persona. Dave acted at the point at which the DVA ceased to be purely a hidden and private phenomenon solely within the domestic sphere and instead became a public form of violence. Through Dave being told by peers and friends that his mother had been threatened by the perpetrator wielding a knife in the park, he then had an assumed responsibility to be seen to act. This links in with the discussion later in the chapter around emerging protest masculinity (see section 6.4), which focuses on the way in
which the participants’ alluded to an emerging sense of powerful masculinity through enacting violence themselves outside of the home environment. Indeed, in the situation Dave described, it was the public nature of the confrontation that made Dave act, yet was also protective, as the perpetrator decided not to react violently to Dave’s provocation due to the presence of neighbours and passers-by. The shift between DVA in private to the public realm of the park completely changed the way the violence existed in the community; it became visible.

**Witnessing versus experiencing DVA**

The varied responses to the DVA in childhood by some of the participants, as outlined in the preceding sections, outline the tension between a sense of powerlessness, pressure to protect, and fear that they had to navigate in childhood. As shown in the analysis in the preceding sections, the way that participants’ experienced DVA, as well as their lack of resources to make it cease, was defined by their lack of power, both as children and as victims themselves. They were subordinated from the intimate partner relationship within which the DVA was centred. This left them trying to make sense of their experiences which were often hidden, unpredictable and overall were incomprehensible when the participants were boys. As shown in the varied ways that they referred to experiencing and responding to DVA in the preceding sections it is clear that the presence of the DVA in their lives was far greater than acting as witnesses or being exposed to it. Instead they internalised it, manifesting DVA emotionally and relationally to the extent that it reshaped their relationship with family, school and friends. If we accept that
children experience it viscerally, then we have to acknowledge that it has the potential to be as damaging as for the intimate partner of the perpetrator.

Experiencing the DVA was characterised by a sense of powerlessness, both to understand and to stop the abuse. Children who live with DVA are ‘experiencing it’ (Callaghan et al., 2015), yet are not always privy to the rules of the game. They experience different aspects of the DVA, but that may vary from being visibly seeing, hearing, sensing, as well as living with the aftermath of it. As the nature of their experience varied the boys were not likely to be privy to the underlying justifications, rules or dynamics at play within the abusive adult relationship (McGee, 2000). This is not to say that there is not a pattern to the abuse for the victim, but that the children will, most likely, not be privy to it. This then follows that for many children, the DVA they experience is a somewhat unknown quantity and that they will be unaware of the justifications (however flawed). This means that they lack an awareness about the nature of and underlying basis of the violence. McGee noted that children often developed a ‘fear of the unknown’ (2000, p. 107) surrounding the DVA. For many children, the DVA they experience is a somewhat unknown quantity. By this I mean that, although children can clearly see and hear the material reality of DVA (as outlined in Dylan’s quote about hearing his mother beaten in the bath), what is unknown is the relationship rules. The participants tried to make sense of the DVA in order to predict the violence, for instance in Eric noting his own abuse came when the DVA ceased, or Dylan attributing his father’s abuse with alcohol use. However ultimately, the children found the DVA both unpredictable and incomprehensible. Children have an emerging sense of the world and how interpersonal relationships work and DVA disrupts any sense of regularity or fairness as anyone can get victimised at any time.
This leads to a code of random domination and abuse. McGee noted that children often developed a ‘fear of the unknown’ (2000, p. 107) surrounding the DVA:

> What the children appeared to be highlighting was how they were being further traumatised by their absolute loss of control over the situation. They did not know what was happening to the mother, they did not know how to stop it, they did not know what to do, and they did not know how far the man would go (McGee, 2000, p. 107).

This suggests that there is another level of trauma by proxy, where it is not only the direct experience of the abuse which causes harm, but the lack of control or ability to intervene which causes further distress. I have outlined evidence that concurs with McGee’s assertion above in the preceding findings sections which showed the ways in which the participants referred to the incomprehensibility of the DVA, the anxieties around intervening, and the general fear and unease that living with the DVA provoked. The only clear choice for survival in that context was to both surrender to the random violence, leading to a sense of both resignation (as hinted at in the preceding sections) or rebellion (which is explored in the forthcoming section 6.4).

6.1.2 Subordinate Masculinity

It is important to consider that the participants’ sense of powerlessness as boys living in their parents’ homes would not have necessarily only been due to the
abuse, but also partly down to the patriarchal way of life within which the father maintained power over the home. This element was discussed by Anderson (1999) in his analysis of inner-city black American families. Anderson noted that the role of the ‘man of the house’ was significant, and that to publicly portray an ‘intact family’, the male head of the household must show he was, ‘in complete control - with the women and the children following his lead’ (Anderson, 1999, pp. 38–39).

A similar situation was conveyed by Eric, who compared his experience of his father’s violence to other peers who he knew were physically disciplined:

“This guy used to beat me to the point that I used to faint. He’s beating me, it was just so, I mean now it’s like wow, my sisters like yea that was some abusive stuff [laughs] but you just thought that was life (Eric).”

This passage is revealing, particularly about the way that a retrospective focus has enabled Eric to position himself differently to the abuse he experienced. At the time he thought it was normal, just part of ‘life’, but he told me in interview subsequently both he and his sister have reframed the experience as ‘abusive stuff’. The fact that it was taken for granted by him at the time emphasises the relative lack of power they felt to do anything about it.

The music track below was chosen by Sam as a way for him to talk about the abuse and resulting powerlessness that he experienced. I have included a sample of the lyrics and the way that Sam used them, to illustrate the way that the music elicitation worked in practice.
Slippin’

DMX (1998)

This life shit, this life shit is like
Is like bugged the fuck out, son, for real
See, to live is to suffer
But to survive
Well, that’s to find meaning in the suffering...
Ayo I'm slippin', I'm fallin', I can't get up
Ayo I'm slippin', I'm fallin', I gots to get up
Get me back on my feet so I can tear shit up

Music track selected by Sam

Sam explained his choice of song:

I chose that because it relates to me to a T literally everything erm... it said at the start 'to live is to suffer and to survive is the ending of suffering' and I think that’s how it felt for a long time. Erm it just felt like the pain was eternal it was just, I never knew life without it. And there are so many bits in there that I can relate to, at home with my mum and she kept sending me to my dad’s and my dad kept beating me and I kept telling my mum not to, but she kept sending me there anyway. And I can relate to like obviously how he [DMX, in the music track] said he started to get angry and was an angry child (Sam).

This excerpt by Sam shows how he used the music track and lyrics to express himself in the interview. Sam used it to open up about his own experience of violent abuse by his father. Not only is the powerlessness of the abuse indicated here, as he discussed his father beating him. The other layer of powerlessness was through
him being ‘sent’ to his father’s house despite asking not to be. This emphasises a specific type of powerlessness that occurs in childhood, when parents are able to make decisions such as where a child lives and can arrange child contact outside of the wishes of the child.

The link between DVA and child abuse has been explored widely in research. Among children who experience child abuse, forty per cent also report DVA at home as well (United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF), 2006). In a North American study it has been found that children who have experienced severe violence at home were fifteen times more likely to be physically or sexually abused themselves than the national average (Volpe, 1996). This research illustrates that indeed what Eric describes is a common experience for other young people who live with DVA.

6.1.3 DVA, Race and Ethnicity

In this section I explore how the participants’ experienced a minority racial and ethnic identity, and how this was conveyed as heightening their desire for acceptance, as well as reflected heavily in how they tried to understand their father’s masculinity. As they enacted violence of their own, they framed it as a strategy both for coping with the anger and powerlessness they felt at home, as well as a way to harness masculine power and to claim the markers of masculinity that their fathers had shown at home: respect, power and to provoke fear. The intersection of race was foregrounded by several of the participants in relation to their experience of DVA at home. Dylan emphasised that as far as he was
concerned, it was normal for DVA to be in the homes of black families. He asserted that:

*If you've got a black parent or parent from the Caribbean, back in the days like it's acceptable for them to beat their partner (Dylan).*

Dylan then went on to explain how he felt violence had been passed down through the generations in his family (intergenerational transmission of violence), recalling that his grandmother was blinded through violence from his grandfather:

*My dad learned that [DVA] from his dad because my gran, she's still alive now, she's nearly 100 and my granddad used to beat her, and my dad used to see it, and my gran, she were blind from when she was like in her 40s through the beatings she got from my granddad (Dylan).*

Dylan immediately racialised his family’s wider historical experience of DVA, by noting that in the wider black community in the past it has been seen as ‘acceptable’ for them to commit DVA. Although Dylan conveyed this sense of acceptance and normality about DVA and race, this was complicated within his own sense of self identity, as a mixed-race man. Dylan firmly located his identity as mixed race, despite him being recognised within wider society as black, as a political decision based on the way that he wishes to acknowledge his parents:
If I was to say I am black that would be to deny my mum’s heritage. I would rather accept my mum’s heritage that my rapist dad’s heritage ... Everybody looks at me being black but I’m mixed race (Dylan).

Dylan was clear to note that he was a mixed-race man with a white mother, however when he conceptualised the racial dynamics of DVA, he conceived it within an all-black wider community. A key feature here though is that all of the perpetrators that Dylan described were black men, and so he is distancing himself from that identity in the above passage, which serves to distance himself from the DVA perpetration. For Dylan this sense of a cultural normality stemmed both from the fact that most of his peer group were experiencing similar violence at home, but also because there was an intergenerational aspect of abuse being present in his family. He observed the inter-generational aspect of DVA, when he noted that his father had also experienced DVA at home, with the long-term injury being a visible example of the consequences of it.

The participants’ experiences of their racial identities were often closely linked with their conceptions of their own masculinities. This was highlighted in Eric’s comments on his own family experiences, where he was taught ‘African ways’ at home:

My dad used to say it was African ways or whatever, he would just inflict pain on you as a way to teach you a lesson. Again, I’m coming from Africa, you’re already harder than these kids here (Eric).

Eric was managing the intersection of his African racial identity, his masculine identity, which were both embedded in the context of his identity as a refugee in
the UK. Eric connected the ongoing DVA to the difficulties that his father had in adjusting to the loss of role and pride that he had in coming over to the UK to start a new life. Using cultural context as a way to justify abusive behaviour was also experienced by Eric, whose father had used his ethnic background (Rwandan refugee heritage) to explain his violence both to his partner (Eric’s step-mother) and Eric himself. Eric then himself explained the DVA at home as very much related to his father’s disempowerment through the refugee experience, added on to his presumption that it was just ‘African Ways’. In addition to cultural explanations for the DVA, some participants had individual explanations for why the abuse occurred.

The ‘trope of the black family’ has been explored heavily by Gilroy in his book, Small Acts (1993). He problematised the ways in which the ‘symbolic projection of race as kinship’ is a form of nationalism which is often externally defined for black families (Gilroy, 1993, p. 195). In saying this, Gilroy is problematising the ways in which normal family conduct and management become heavily entwined with wider racial politics which seek to pathologize racial groups. Gilroy noted that, ‘Today we are told that the boys, and the girls, are ‘from the hood - not from the race, and certainly not from the nation’ (Gilroy, 1993, p. 198). Through this discourse, community issues become separated from the wider structural and political issues that shape them. He asked, ‘If the ‘hood is the special urban space in which the essence of the new familial blackness can be now found, which ‘hood are we talking about?’ (ibid). Gilroy noted that to see race in this way, as an accumulation of families, is a response to the crisis of black masculinity. By locating the problem of masculinity as a family issue, means that it can ‘be repaired by intervening in the family to compensate and rebuild the race by instituting appropriate forms of masculinity and male authority’ (Gilroy, 1993, p. 204). It
personalises the issue, viewing it on a micro level, keeping the issues behind closed doors. This is reflected in the ways in which the participants’ pathologized their family and community cultures as somehow maintaining and reproducing DVA, and locating it as a black cultural issue, rather than a wider issue of masculinities-in-crisis. This reflects a constructed by white society/whiteness as a power structure which has sought to denigrate black masculinity and experience. This shows how the intersections of race, ethnicity, and societal norms all conflate to a wider acceptance of DVA as a normal part of society.

6.1.4 Managing Anger, Coping with DVA

Below is an example of how the music elicitation method assisted the sharing of emotions and memories around coping with DVA and managing anger.

**The Saga**

*Cormega (2007)*

The saga begins

It’s a reflection of the drama within

The ghetto I live in, nigga’s Moms on crack, Pops just disappeared

The first time you get locked up who really cares?

I see a little snotty nosed kid with his sneakers on backwards

Sleep on a mattress. When I go to make a sale

At times I wonder, are we goin’ straight to hell? ...

... Mothers watch sons walk through the door

For the last time ‘till they go view at the morgue
Life is deep, we all just tryin’ to eat

Rap’s a mental narcotic, I supply the streets

Music track selected by Sam

Sam explained his choice of song:

The lyrics [of the song above] said, ‘the saga begins on a reflection of the drama within’. And that’s what you’re seeing now in the streets, the knife crime, people being killed, it’s an external thing, it’s a reflection of the drama within and now you’re seeing it poured out in this anger, in these killings (Sam).

As shown in this quote above, Sam used the music track to help him talk about his feelings that issues generally labelled as related to youth violence were due to the outward expression of internal emotional issues. The sense of carrying around an internal anger was a theme that several participants referred to when describing the enduring effects of DVA experience. To talk about this, he referred to as an, ‘external reflection of the drama within’ (quoting the lyrics in his first music choice, The Saga- Cormega). This example shows how music elicitation worked in practice, as some participants drew on the lyrics as a way to help them express their views. The way that the original song track (displayed above) refers to rap music as a ‘mental narcotic’, resonates with the way that several participants’ referred to using music as a catharsis and a coping mechanism in their past as well as in their current lives (explored more in Chapter nine, section 9.5).

The connection between DVA, internal pain, and committing violence was a common theme in the data. The emotion of anger is one which is relatively safe for men to express without damaging their masculine personas, as it is widely
considered more ‘masculine’ (Gough, 2018). Eric described not knowing how to deal with his feelings that the DVA brought up:

*You keep seeing it [DVA] at home, and you don’t know how to deal with those emotions (Eric).*

Eric then described his response to these emotions, which included engaging in violence in school as a coping strategy to manage difficult feelings. Engagement in public violence was a way to react against the way that he had experienced ‘invisible’ violence in private at home. Engaging in public violence made him feel visible and provided an audience to the violence, which is the role that he had been placed in at home. Here in this extended extract, he describes his predicament:

*I had to see child psychologists from eight [years old] onwards because someone was arguing with me one day in primary school and I picked up a chair and whacked him around the head about five times with it, coz it was learnt behaviour, I thought it was alright to do that and then the next minute I was under child welfare and child psychology, but it was all because of what I seen from a young age that, I thought it was acceptable you know, even though it wasn’t, me and the guy ended up becoming dead good friends later on in life, but what eight year old attacks somebody? And not only that, hits then around the head with a chair? Not on the legs or their arms but in the head? So, from then on I knew that I could do anything (Dylan).*
There are several points to note within this passage. Firstly, he directly relates carrying out the act of violence to the violence he had been experiencing at home. He notes that it was ‘learnt behaviour’ and he normalises the violent response was a way to deal with someone he disagrees. Looking back in retrospect he asks, ‘what eight-year-old attacks somebody?’ highlighting his perception that this behaviour was not consistent with his peer group at that age. He stated, ‘from then on I knew I could do anything’; he had crossed a boundary, or learned something he could use, both by gaining a sense of power from realising he could be violent and also the realisation that he didn’t feel an emotional response to it, that he was desensitised from it. What is clear from Eric and Dylan’s stories of emerging school violence is that engaging in violence was perceived as an outlet for his anger and as a way to seek markers of a type of masculinity that was denied to them at home. In particular, respect and power.

Eric mentioned a similar experience of perpetrating violence in school at a young age. He noted that he was both desensitised to violence due to experiencing it at home, as well as having an increased tolerance for violence when with peers. In this way Eric sought out people to fight at school as a way to reclaim his sense of power and dignity that he lost when he was being abused at home by his parents. Eric found himself searching for a place to let out the anger that he was carrying. For him, the place he found was the gang context, what he calls here in the initial stages as a ‘set’:

So then now you go to school and you your good at school and yea everything was good for my, everything except somehow, you want more. It’s like you want a place
to let out the anger and you don’t know how. And once you find an avenue, you
don’t know it, but you start going back, you know it’s dangerous (Eric).

So here Eric is situating the motivation for joining a gang as initially being as an
outlet for the underlying anger. The concept of carrying around residual anger was
a common theme that emerged from the narratives. The way in which it was spoken
about was as if, through experiencing violence at home but not being able to act,
due the protest masculinity position and dominance of the perpetrator, the
participants then carried around vengeful anger that needed an outlet elsewhere.
This anger then in turn transferred a sense of gaining the power and respect among
peers that was not available at home. A type of protest masculinity transference,
where the power relations that were vastly unequal at home were rebalanced
among peers - the angry child finds that they are feared by others. By noticing that
even the bigger boys were afraid of him it gave him a sense of power:

I can relate to like obviously how he said [referring to DMX in the music track
‘Slippin’] he started to get angry and was an angry child and he was growing up
and he just, he became feared by others, even the bigger boys like they was actually
scared of me and I was always angry and then I remember like getting a dog and
the dog was like my best friend but my dog was vicious as well at the same time
(Sam).

This conveys the sense of being an angry child who then finds they are feared by
others. The rap artist provides the words for feelings or rationalisations for feelings,
that Sam could not find for himself. By noticing that even the bigger boys were
afraid of him it gave him a sense of power. This was reflected in the way he spoke about his dog as being vicious as a mirroring of his own developing violent behaviour. The way he positioned his dog as being his best friend at the time who could be seen as another type of metaphor. Sam shared the way in which his dog was rejected by his mother, which mirrored the way he also felt rejected by her, so together they went to live on the streets as homeless companions. Using Connell’s analytic lens to focus on the way in which masculinity performance is implicated by power relations and the way in which the participants sought to enact violence in public highlights that they were seeking a sense of power, which was unavailable to them at home.

6.1.5 Emerging Protest Masculinity through Violence Perpetration

As the participants described their development into on-road life, it was common in all their stories to describe a point at which they sought to engage in violence themselves in order to assert a distinct type of masculinity unachievable at home. Although this masculinity was not an achieved hegemonic masculinity, it certainly was a nascent projection of one, with an enactment of power, toughness, independence, and dominance. This manifested in different ways in the narratives, some participants more explicitly contrasted their emerging violence to the powerlessness at home more than others. Using Connell’s frame, these narratives can be seen as a way to redress the power relations both with other men as well as redefining themselves away from the position of their victimised mother.
This sense of taking back power, and of being able to perform a different type of masculinity away from the home was clearly described in the narratives of Eric and Dave. In Eric’s narrative he referred to his engagement in fighting at school as a way to perform a type of masculinity inaccessible to him at home. He discussed how regaining some respect that had been lost at home was also part of the motivation for fighting:

A lot of my friends we would grow up, because parents would beat you to put you in your place, he’s the man of the house, he can get away with that, so now when you go outside there is no way I think, there is no way you allow anyone to disrespect you, it’s like you can’t do that because it’s been done to you at home, it’s been done to you at home, you can’t let another person (Eric).

This passage starts to show how the development of a sense of self-respect was beginning to be founded on gaining ‘respect’ from others outside the home through fighting. The notion of being ‘the man of the house’ as modelled by his father evokes concepts both of a patriarchal family structure and of a male privileged within the house which was reinforced by the unequal gender relations in the house enacted and reinforced through DVA. A further aspect of Eric’s juxtaposition of being victimised at home and perpetrating violence at school, was that he also referred to how he had benefitted from being made ‘hard’ and ‘tough’ as a refugee from war, as well as the violence that his father had inflicted on him, which his father had called, ‘African ways’. Eric was managing the intersection of his African racial identity and his masculine identity, both of which were embedded in the context of his identity as a refugee in the UK. There is a wider cultural tendency to gender the
oppositional discourse of hard/soft. This was discussed by one academic who looked at the gendered use of these terms and found that hard was used to refer to masculinized qualities placed in opposition to soft which functions to feminize (Hong, 2016). This language, which is used to demarcate different groups, was used by Eric to infantilise the soft people, who he refers to as being ‘babied’, and as ‘kids’ that ‘don’t know nothing’. In the passage below Eric mentioned he then became ‘cool’ due to his propensity for violence and the way he enacted a ‘hard’ persona. He noted that:

*It’s working to your advantage in the weirdest way ever and that continues coz now there’s this attention, so now you’re looking more for this attention because so now you’re picking fights for no reason (Eric).*

Jefferson, in his exploration of embodied masculinity among boxers, took a closer look at the notion of ‘hardness’. He used Feldman’s definition as a starting point, which is “hardness is an interiorized quality extracted from risking the body in performance” (cited in Jefferson, 1998, p. 81). Jefferson extends this by including, ‘an indifference to the body’s (often painful) fate’ as well as, ‘courage or bravery, qualities of mental toughness which have nothing necessarily to do with muscle’ (emphasis in original, Jefferson, 1998, p. 81). With this way of approaching it, it becomes clear that masculine embodiment cannot be centred on one element, physical or emotional, but is rather concentrated on the body as a whole. Jefferson notes that this idea is illustrated both in schoolboy sport or physical labour, that ideal masculinity incorporates both strength and skill, embodied by the whole body.

Not all of the participants described a seamless journey into school and on-road which capitalised on being ‘hard’. Dave had experienced extreme bullying in his younger years, noting that it got so bad that he was not able to go outside at times. He said he had been;

‘bullied bad when I was little by local kids to the point when I’ve had piss thrown on me, made to crawl around and stuff. I’ve had my windows smashed, I didn’t feel safe at home’ (Dave).

After several years of this he finally reached ‘breaking point’ and decided not to be a ‘victim’ anymore:

I was perfect for bullying, I was chubby erm, so I got terrorised but when I got older I went the opposite, no one can say anything to me and for years then no one would try and lay a finger on me coz I got to that point where I was like no one is fucking with me now, someone hits me I’m gunna knock them out. I just got to that breaking point and then I think people sensed that. They sense a victim don’t they, if they look at you and your like head down, they’ll think he’s a pussy I could bully him and when they know you’re a bit dodgy [they leave you alone] (Dave).

Dave transformed himself to enact a toughness that acted as a strategy for protection. He stated, ‘I got sick of being a victim’ and so started to act in a
defensive way as a protective strategy. Through this redefinition of his own personal boundaries he emerged embracing the markers of protest masculinity, literally in protest to the conditions of his previous victimisation.

6.2 Cathexis

During these performances of masculinity in private (at home) and in public (in school and on-road), there were different aspects of cathexis. For Connell, exploring cathexis centred on how intimate relationships and emotional attachments were involved through different masculine performances. In particular, Connell focused on ‘love’ relationships, generally organized through the lens of a heterosexual couple. In the main, Connell centres cathexis on the politics of sexual attraction and relationships. However, I am expanding it as a lens in order to consider the relationship dynamics in the participants’ description of their relationship with their mothers and how they constructed a gender identity distinct from women.

6.2.1 Mother/Son Relationships

*My Old Lady*

*OMI* (2013)

Conceived in your womb like a flower I bloomed

How you do what you do, you’re a super woman
Felt the love in your touch although we had it so rough

Even if I gave you the moon it would not be enough...

The mother who fathered me, being fatherless bothered me

But your love protected me and kept me from harm’s way

The street sides that tempted me, the roads you prevented me

From walking along and now I'm glad that you parented me

Music track selected by Dylan

The song above was chosen by Dylan as an ode to the love of his mother. He used this track as a way to dedicate a significant portion of the interview to acknowledging her. To introduce the track (and again, to demonstrate the effectiveness of music elicitation as a research method), he noted;

This song kinda like sums up my mum to a T, I don't know if you have listened to the lyrics, so you know, this is my mum because my mum mothered and fathered me, do you know, my mum done everything she could for us (Dylan).

Dylan spent a significant portion of the interview talking about the importance of his mother. So much so, that I left thinking that the reason he had taken part in the research was in itself a tribute to his mother’s suffering through DVA and sexual violence (discussed in section 6.3.2) and the guilt that Dylan felt about it. Dylan framed his mother as a central figure in comparison to his father:
Women shouldn’t be harmed because they’re queens that brought you into this world. It’s alright my mum used to say you can have 1000 fathers, but you only have one mum, your mum brings you into this world, your father just plants the seed (Dylan).

As can be seen in the above passage, often in Dylan’s narratives, women were reified to the point of being framed as iconic, as he referred to them as ‘queens that brought you into this world’. The way in which Dylan idealised his mother was consistent with what Rutherford termed a, ‘maternal fantasy’ (1992, p. 20). He noted that unconsciously, the development of masculinity is constructed in relation to a fantasy of the mother, which men position themselves in relation to (whether that be through idealisation or hate) (Rutherford, 1992, p. 21). Rutherford draws on psychoanalytic approaches to the construction of gender identity, which has similarities with the way in which Connell conceptualises cathexis. In the following excerpt Dylan conveyed how he perceived the role and importance of mothers and women in general:

The word mum is a really powerful word innit, it’s the most lovely do you know, none of us could have been here without our mum, do you know, some of our mums might not keep us, some of us might go into care or whatever, but without our mum we wouldn’t be here, so it’s the most important thing. I think women are the most important thing in the world to be honest. To have to go through all that pain and heartache and then get treated how they get treated (Dylan).
As shown in the above passage, Dylan almost placed women on such a pedestal that it served to almost de-personalise them, to take for granted their suffering as taken for granted. Women were reified and revered from a distance. In the phrase, ‘then get treated how they get treated’ it removes the perpetrators of violence and abuse from the equation, framing it instead as an inevitability of being a woman. In this way he de-politicised the violence, and instead of blaming someone he would frame it neutrally. What Dylan’s narratives suggest to me in terms of cathexis, is that women were reified by him to such an extent that they were peripheral from his usual life. The on-road and gang environment, within which Dylan attained senior status (see chapter seven, section 7.2.1) was conveyed as a man’s world, within which women were commodified. In both the private and public sphere there represented a split, likened to the trope of the Madonna and whore, representing the two extremes of female sexuality (Welldon, 2004).

Not all of the participants had such a positive regard for their mothers. Both Sam and Jordan made references to their mothers being largely absent and also chose songs which indicated this in the videos. As noted earlier in the chapter, Lester’s mother was murdered in a domestic femicide. Shaun, Travis, and Eric didn’t mention their own relationship with their mothers much outside of the DVA dynamic. Dave recounted the way his own relationship with his mother was strained and affected by her mental health issues and self-harming:

> It’s not your parents fault because they didn’t choose for everything to go tits up you know, I don’t resent my mum either because if I tell people certain things I saw like when she had her breakdown and stuff, they could think badly of her, but that was her mental health, she didn’t choose to, she felt bad when she was older,
sometimes I used to use it as a teenager, I would say, I’m fucked up because of stuff I saw mum, you chose him over us, I shouldn’t have seen you cutting yourself. I didn’t see her cutting her wrists but I remember hiding razor blades and seeing them with blood on and crying to my mum saying don’t cut yourself and I saw her ripping her hair out and whacking herself and everything and it is bad that I saw all of that but at the same time I know she did love us but she just went through a bad phase and she needed medication and whatnot (Dave).

This narrative reveals the contradictory feelings that Dave had about his mother growing up. Throughout there is a sense that Dave does not want to blame his mother, both for the violence, nor her enduring mental health issues. However, there is also the nagging feeling that Dave presents of frustration as to why his mother ‘chose him over us’ (referencing her violent boyfriend). This reveals an added complication to a child’s experience of DVA, when the perpetrator is not the blood father but a step-father or partner. This throws up different aspects of legitimacy and masculinity for the boys. Dave is also talking about the traumatic aspect of being aware of his mother’s self-harming, along with his futile attempts to stop it. The juxtaposition of the repeated word ‘bad’, with ‘love’, really emphasises the tension that Dave felt. This echoes Connell’s outline of cathexis (discussed fully in chapter three, section 4.5.4), where the contradictory emotional energies that are loaded in personal relationships is revealing of the gender order. In Dave’s case, he wanted his mother to nurture and protect him from the violence (both DVA and self-harm) yet found that this power dynamic was reversed between them.
6.2.2 Children of Rape

An unexpected theme in the narratives was that of being children (or grandchildren) of rape victims. Two of the participants related knowledge that there had been sexual violence within their families as impacting on their own identities. Viewed through dynamics of cathexis, this is complicated, as the men’s relationships with their family members is tied up with this history of sexual (and sexualised) violence. The knowledge that they had been somehow involved in the sexual victimisation affected their sense of masculine identity. Two important incidents in Dylan’s narrative were acts of sexual violence that had happened to his mother and his daughter. The first was at the point that he found out that he was conceived through rape. This was pivotal for him about how he saw his parents and how he felt about his own identity. In many ways Dylan conveyed the knowledge of his mother’s rape as a more significant issue than the DVA. He didn’t know about this until he found a letter when his mother was dying. He noted that he had given his father a ‘funeral fit for a king’, whilst knowing about the DVA, but once he found out about the sexual violence, he ‘would have carried him on a slab or a coffin and just dumped him in the skip’. He noted that;

“He hurt my mum, I know he hurt my mum years after, but he actually raped my mum for me to be conceived (Dylan).

This significant personal impact may be because it implicated him personally in a way that the DVA did not. In the interview this felt like an intimate revelation, as it
was a part of his story which he had not previously told. The telling of a private narrative was powerful for him, and thus for me to hear it. It was as if he felt responsibility for the violence that his mother had endured at the outset for having him, that he felt somehow more personally involved in the act of violence. He said that the biggest emotion that he feels about it was, ‘constantly guilt, I try to forget it, but I just can’t’. Dylan later discussed the significance of rape and why he felt it is more damaging than the other violence. For him it centred on the act of power being taken from an individual through rape. He noted that;

Rape ruins people’s lives doesn’t it, it ruins whole families, it ruins generations, women shouldn’t have to go through that, men shouldn’t have to go through that, but obviously it's the worst thing that can happen. I think it’s worse than death to be honest, because your living with what's happened, at least if you kill someone they’re not here no more, so they’re not having to live with it, it's just the families. It’s like a death, living with death for the victim innit. Taking someone’s power, abusing them, and making them do something they don’t want to do, hurting them, assaulting them, raping them. Its vile it’s disgusting, I think all rapists should be castrated slowly (Dylan).

For Dylan, a central issue with rape is the powerlessness it causes. The way that he asserted that rape takes peoples power is notable here, as this is framed as distinct from other forms of more ubiquitous violence. Dylan has been gang-involved for several decades and has clearly been involved in different kinds of violence. However, for him the symbolism of rape, being about the ultimate robbery of a person’s power makes him feel it is ‘worse than death’. Dylan noted that the
instrumental act of rape as ‘taking someone’s power’. This conveys a sense both of masculinity and power relations that amounted from Dylan feeling that he was victimised through the rape of his mother. It is a degrading act, one which involves active physical humiliation demonstrated on the body; male power of the gender order enacted through the personal. Here he is referring to the complexities of the knowledge of rape being in a family lineage. This knowledge made Dylan think differently about his ethnic heritage, as noted earlier (see section 6.1.3), he referred to himself as mixed-race to distance himself from his ‘rapist dad’s heritage’. To be a product of both the victim and the perpetrator of a crime such as rape is an incredibly complex issue. It is where gender and race intersect, so that Dylan is grappling with his self as someone who is perceived as a black man which associates him more with his father. Dylan’s identification as mixed-race detaches him somewhat from his father.

Sam also described the heritage of sexual violence within his family history. In his case it was his mother who was born as a result of his grandmother being raped. Again, it was not something that he was aware of until his adult life. When Sam found this out it was a way through which he found some understanding for his own mothers’ life:

My Nan was a rape victim. She was raped by my mum’s dad and my Nan chose to keep my mum and my mum grew up as the black sheep of the family or whatever you want to call it. She didn’t feel like she was a part of the family like that, and that’s why she excluded us, and that’s what we felt like we didn’t feel like we were part of a family. There was so much going on around, and if you put all the dots together then you could see that actually these were the reasons (Sam).
Sam conveyed a sense of the knowledge of his wider family dynamics once he learned about the sexual violence history within his family. It enabled him to have a different understanding of his own mother’s lack of emotional availability when he was younger, as being due to her working through her own rejection. Using Connell’s analytic method of cathexis to these two cases of rape within their families raises the issue of the way that the men’s sense of gender identity was affected by the knowledge that they were born from a legacy of sexual violence.

6.2.3 Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

**Runaway Love**

_Ludacris ft. Mary J. Blige_ (2007)

Now little Lisa is only nine years old

She’s tryin’ to figure out why the world is so cold

Why she’s all alone, and they never met her family

Mama’s always gone, and she never met her daddy

Part of her is missin’ and nobody will listen

Mama on drugs, gettin’ high up in the kitchen

Bringin’ home men at different hours of the night

Startin’ with some laughs, usually endin’ in a fight

Sneak into her room while her mama’s knocked out

Tryin’ to have his way and little Lisa says ‘ouch’

She tries to resist, but then all he does is beat her

Tries to tell her mom, but her mama don’t believe her

Lisa is stuck up in the world on her own
Chapter Six: Narratives of Childhood

Forced to think that hell is a place called home

Nothin’ else to do but get some clothes and pack

She says she’s ‘bout to run away and never come back

Music track selected by Dave

Dave selected the music track above, which is accompanied by a music video showing a young girl being sexually abused. Dave did not explicitly disclose that he had personally been a victim of sexual abuse, however referred to these issues more generally and then alluded to his own experience of victimisation through noting that he had been ‘affected’:

I was torn with songs coz there’s a few others that I had in mind... I know it [the song] has helped some people in that like it gives other people’s perspective, so it might help make them think shit yea it would affect anyone, it’s like perspective, the little sister and all that I’m passionate about and I think they cover, suicide, knife crime and then this like domestic [violence] and like paedophilia as well because that’s something that I’ve been affected by... I had like um my mum’s boyfriend was just bad. Like alcoholic, drugs and abusive and that (Dave).

As shown above he directly referenced the way that the little sister was centred in the music video. Dave did not directly talk about personal experience of sexual abuse, he went on to talk about an ex-girlfriend’s experience, as well as the way that he had reported suspected paedophiles to the police previously. When he talked through that story he noted,
I think when you know people who have been abused your looking for it, as soon as someone’s being slightly [dodgy], coz I’m paranoid (Dave).

As an adult Dave had responded to his past experiences by being hypervigilant to abuse around him. He recounted the ways in which he confronted people he considered acting abusively in public if he felt it was occurring.

In the interview with Sam he discussed his experiences of exploitation, sexual and otherwise. He noted that he had had to exchange sexual acts with older women in order to be able to sleep in their houses. However, in talking about his experience of victimisation, instead of saying it outright initially, he framed it as a women’s issue, before later identifying himself as a victim of it. This suggests that he has an internalised perception of sexual exploitation as a gendered phenomenon, despite afterwards noting that he felt that it was happening to him. Sam’s first theft was organised by an older woman. She was exploiting him - if he stole food from a shop, she would cook it for him (as he was very young and didn’t know how to cook):

*That is what Maslow said, you go to get your basic needs, you’ll go anywhere to find it and that’s why we have sexual exploitation of women, they will be sexually being exploited by a guy that’s beating them or treating them rubbish but coz their getting their affection, their belonging, certain needs from that guy, (sigh) they stay [pause] and I believe that’s what I was doing for a lot of the time...*

*... Back in the day, to stay in these people’s houses I had to do sexual acts with women to be able to stay in their house, erm [pause] so I didn’t even know what sex was, didn’t even know anything about that stuff, and I was brought into it at a very young age (Sam).*
This suggests that Sam had a reluctance to identify his own victimisation as a ‘man’s issue’, instead he felt more understood in conveying sexual exploitation as something that generally happens to women. This is consistent with UK Government policy, which frames sexual exploitation as ‘violence against women and girls’ issue. This indicates that, for Sam and most men, vulnerability and victimisation were at odds with the type of masculinity that he was seeking to perform at the time. Gender stereotypes have been identified as a factor that can conceal identification of sexual exploitation and abuse, as, ‘gendered perceptions of masculinity mean young males are unlikely to talk about having been sexually exploited due to shame, fear, and concerns about being labelled gay due to homophobic social attitudes’ (McNaughton et al., 2014, p. 14). As shown in the participants’ narratives, it was as if there was not a language available through which to conceive themselves being direct victims of such emasculating and usually gendered (female as victim) issues. Existing research into male experiences of sexual exploitation indicate that boys and young men are a ‘sizeable minority of CSE cases’ (McNaughton et al., 2014). They found that boys were more likely to become victims of sexual exploitation at a younger age than girls and were more likely to have a criminal record (48 per cent of males they studied, versus 28 per cent of females) (McNaughton et al., 2014, p. 7). This indicates that a story like Sam’s is not unique, where he was in an already vulnerable and homeless position and was then compelled to carry out criminal acts (theft) by his abuser.

6.3 Production Relations
6.3.1 Poverty

![Figure 3: Music Video stills from WestSideGunn ft. Tiona D. Never Coming Home (2014)](image)

To explain the above music track choice and accompanying video Jordan explained:

*So that song there I guess for me that would represent a song about west side gun, it’s a song that I would say probably represented the early parts of my life in terms of growing up and the visuals, lots of kids in the house, single parent, kids looking like not really [pause] not, not being looked after but their environment that they’re living in is a hard environment (Jordan)*

This passage above outlines the way in which Jordan used the visual aspects of the music elicitation method, as he referred to the ‘visuals’ rather than the lyrics themselves. The early part of the music video is filmed inside a small house with, as shown above, lots of children in and signs of lack of care. This stimulus prompted Jordan to talk about his childhood conditions which were much wider than just poverty, but also overcrowding, lone parenting, and neglect.

Several participants linked a financial desire to their initial engagement on-road. They had all grown up in low income houses, with some indicating they were living
in relative poverty. Access to particular material possessions, such as clothes and money for social activities, was seen as a necessary to gain acceptance from their wider peer group. For some participants there was an additional need to access resources from outside the home, which were also implicated by the DVA. In particular where the perpetrators of DVA were exerting economic abuse on the wider family. Economic abuse is a often hidden and invisible aspect of DVA, which has gained greater academic attention in recent years (Postmus, Hoge, Breckenridge, Sharp-Jeffs, & Chung, 2018). Control over financial resources has been historically central to the sustenance of patriarchy and thus the construction of hegemonic masculinity itself (Messerschmidt, 2018). Therefore, when the participants referred to seeking opportunities to make money in later childhood, this had connotations with also seeking increased power and markers of hegemonic masculinity.

In the participant’s narratives they described poverty, financial control over the family as part of the DVA, as well as the financial repercussions of the perpetrator leaving the family. The result of these different aspects was that the participants (as boys) were then not able to be provided with luxuries such as pocket money and fashion. For others, after the perpetrator had left and their mother was then a single parent, there was also limited access to money for luxuries. These financial limitations were combined with the pressure that the participants’ felt to dress and act a certain way, in order to enhance their dominant status in their chosen peer group.

Jordan’s performance of on-road protest masculinity was embodied in his self-presentation through clothes. He stated that he was set apart from his peers because of his ‘suave dress sense’. He also used his wish to present himself
differently as a motivating factor in becoming gang-involved, as the criminal activities meant he could make money and afford better clothes. He explained;

I had nothing growing up, what my mum could afford me was not what I wanted, so when I go to a place and worked hard or started committing crime, I started to manage to get what I liked and what I wanted (Jordan).

Jordan noted that buying clothes gave him a sense of self-esteem. He wanted his clothes to ‘represent’ him, as ‘clothes say something about a person, especially in the culture where I’m coming from anyway’. In this reference to his culture, Jordan is referring to the street culture to which he was becoming more involved. Financial motivations for gang-involvement were common among the participants. Access to financial resources is a marker of hegemonic masculinities, as financial independence and the notion of the breadwinner is vital to masculine achievement of independence. This is one of the ways that poverty intersects and is implicated in masculinity performances.

Eric mentioned money thirty times in his interview, which for contrast was only mentioned by Travis once. Although numeric representations of the data are not central to this study, the contrast shows the emphasis that Eric placed on money in his narratives. Eric explicitly said that acquiring money was a strong motivation for increased gang-involvement. He noted that he was being ostracised at school for not being able to keep up with his peers:

I needed some sort of money to take to school, I was getting bullied for wearing the same clothes, for not making trips, I didn’t have none, my mum was like ‘you make
it to UK you know’, but I get it but I was like I’m at school, you gave me the biggest gift I get it... but you’re not understanding I’m a kid, I’m at school, you need certain things, we live in a very materialistic world, and my friends who are poor as well, for me I wanted bare minimum (Eric).

As is displayed in this passage above, as a refugee new to an area, Eric craved the acceptance of his peer group. A tension is revealed here between his mother telling him to be grateful that he made it to the UK, which he is, but then was also trying to carve out a sense of normality among his peers. This desire for relational belonging is typical for refugee children, who are in a continual process of constructing self-identity (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019).

6.3.2 The Pressure to be the Provider

Distinct from the production relations concerned with the participants desire for luxuries, Travis also recounted the pressure to provide financially for the necessities when you are being brought up by a single parent family:

I know it’s not always the case but men are expected to be the breadwinner, so in all the single parent households in council estate areas, people are like seeing their mums struggling and feel like they have to fix the problem and it has to be the male of the family and that’s how a lot of them end up on-road (Travis).
This passage by Travis outlines the way in which poverty and masculinity intersected as he felt a pressure as a male to provide for his family despite being a child himself. This illustrates the way in which boys internalise the wider socio-cultural messages around hegemonic masculinity, which centralises economic stability and the ‘breadwinner’ role. Inherent in this is also a reminder of the underlying gender order, which decrees that boys should take the dominant provider position over adult women, usurping hierarchies of age. However, hierarchy aside, being the breadwinner is a specific socially sanctioned way for men to provide care in the family, without risking their masculine status (Gough, 2018). When discussing these wider cultural messages, for instance to be the breadwinner, Travis became emotional as he outlined the pressure that this put him under:

*I feel like, even that kinda ties into road culture and stuff like that, coz a lot of that is being what you are expected to be kind of thing and not being able to cope with it. Like your expected to be like the bread maker and look after your mum and that’s why people end up on road and stuff like that, and these are the pressures that can lead people to suicide, it’s just like, what it is, it’s like, trying a lot to live up to kinda thing and not being able to. Pushing yourself down into the dirt to try and be something you’re not and being told not to speak about it and be strong and all that (Dave).*

In this passage Dave is making a connection between the pressures that are placed upon men to be the ‘bread maker’ (breadwinner) and provide for his mother. This was in addition to the simultaneous pressures of having to be ‘something you’re
not’ as well as ‘not speak about it’ and ‘be strong’. These are the markers of hegemonic masculinity outlined explicitly. Dave then referred directly to suicide as a route out of the masculine pressures. In recent years there have been an increase in male suicide rates in the UK (The Office for National Statistics, 2019). This has resulted in high profile campaigns urging men to talk about their feelings, alongside the wider discourse on toxic masculinity, both of these undercurrents may have contributed to Dave speaking out (Gough, 2018).

6.3.3 Drug Dealing, Agency and Grooming

Following on from the prior discussion around poverty in childhood, for several of the participants’ this was a motivating factor in their initial involvement on-road and in gangs. Street based drug-dealing was often the first business that the participants had with local gangs. This was framed by some participants as part of a grooming process (Sam), whereas others framed it as part of an agentic decision to become involved (Dylan, Lester), or as a combination of the two (Eric, Jordan). As drug-dealing appeared to be so instrumental in the participants’ pathways into going on-road and ultimately becoming gang-involved, it was impossible to separate the production relations involved in the trade of drugs with the power relations that were also at play.

Dylan was clear on conveying that he went on-road and became gang-involved due to his own agentic decision. He emphasised his own agency and rational choice in framing the alternative environment as a coping strategy to avoid his home, where DVA was being carried out:
I knew right from wrong I knew what I was doing, and I still done it, and now I choose not to do those things. People can’t say I was forced into it or groomed into it, because if anything I groomed myself into it because I went there to escape what was happening in the house (Dylan).

In this passage Dylan is distancing himself from the concept of grooming, as one that means your power and choice has been taken away. Instead, he focused on the way that he fled from his home as a rational response to the DVA. Dylan’s point was emphasised when he said, ‘I knew right from wrong’, highlighting a sense of his agency and actively embracing what his perceived personal choice. Paradoxically he says though, he ‘groomed’ himself ‘into it because I went there so escape...’ this implies that really, he did not have much of a choice as there were limited options to go away from home.

Sam firmly situated the beginning of his on-road life as a result of grooming, which started out by being asked to pass on packages to people in exchange for ‘sweets, then fivers [five pounds payment]’. He noted that when he was being asked to sell things by the older boys, he hadn’t realised at the time that he was engaging in illegal drug dealing. He then spoke of his shock when he first saw someone overdose and realising that it was because of the drugs that he had sold him:

The first time I sold drugs was when the older boys they gave me this stuff, I was only eight [years old] and I walked down the road and I saw erm, I had to give it to this guy and then they’d give me sweets and then fivers and it went up until one
“day I see the guy OD’ing on the floor and I realised what I gave to that man was drugs and I was scared and I didn’t wanna be in that lifestyle so I kinda ran away but I ran away from them but they lived on the estate so they was always there (Sam).

Here Sam conveyed how he felt ‘scared’, although it is less than clear whether that referred to being scared of being caught selling drugs or ending up OD’ing (overdosing) himself, however both were possible. Crucially the futility of running away can be seen here, as he ran but they all still lived on the same estate, thus the expression ‘kinda run away’. This emphasises the ways in which living in a gang-affected area is defining of the limited options to reject the gang as a peer group. The basic fact is that he had no-where else to go, at aged eight, particularly when he was also feeling unsafe at home. Thus, grooming aside, his options were severely limited. Sam noted that these experiences meant that he needed to ‘grow up really fast’:

I had to grow up really fast, there’s many nights when I was younger, selling drugs at the age of 8, like the older boys would come up to me, give me stuff and I would just go sell it, but I didn’t know exactly what I was doing at that time either, so I was being groomed into a lifestyle that I wasn’t aware of and my environment was training me and building me up (Sam).

The idea of his environment training and building him up is a powerful image; grooming equating training in part. He later told me that at the time he didn’t know the concept or language of grooming. This is a concept of victimisation that he has
learnt later in life. This discussion of grooming presents a distinct form of power relations that were present in the participants’ lives in childhood.

Eric’s narrative around going on-road and becoming increasingly gang-involved was more nuanced than the poles of victim/agency. Eric noted that he initially chose to start drug dealing as a way to gain money, to buy luxuries that enabled him to keep up with his peers. This then escalated as he became more involved with others who were gang-involved, until it was difficult to extrapolate himself from it:

_These people have accepted you, they wanna be bad and stuff like that, but they are your friends and slowly and slowly you fall into it. Well that’s what happened to me anyway, now I found myself just falling into it... you start buying weed for your friends to sell and the elders they see you, the older guys they see you, that guy fights, coz I was fighting like guys three or four years older than me and I was this short guy so they would take interest in you ... I give you this money and then I’ll buy my sister stuff, but you know you’re not realising that what you’re doing is like, if it continues now, you’re in that life, your literally in that life for God knows how long (Eric)._  

As shown in this passage the drug dealing was only one element that got Eric ‘noticed’ by gang elders. It is important to consider, as Eric indicated in this passage, that acceptance was a major motivation for his gang-involvement and so becoming noticed and appreciated would have been largely a positive outcome. The other was the fights that he was getting in at school. As discussed in the prior section (section 6.2.4), for several of the participants’, Eric included, fighting was initially a way to offload the residual anger from experiencing DVA, as well as inhabiting a
type of more emboldened masculinity performance (discussed further in chapter seven, section 7.2.1). It is evident that Eric’s narrative cuts portray more complexity between agency and grooming, which presents it more like a slippery slope, which he didn’t become fully aware of until it was too late. This has similarities in the way it was discussed by Jordan, who distanced himself from the notion of grooming, instead emphasising that there had been a pull to the streets:

_There’s a lack of opportunities, there’s not enough money, as a result you’re just drawn, for me anyway, drawn to the streets, making bad choices, and drawn to trying to find a way out and in the process that comes with drug dealing, robberies, violence, respect (Jordan)._ 

Like Eric, Jordan foregrounded the desire for money as a key motivator for their initial on-road involvement, as part of trying to ‘find a way out’. This resonates with Merton’s Strain Theory (1968), which emphasises the way in which the pressures of poverty and adversity, as well as the wider capitalist economy which values wealth, create a strain that results in criminality. This can be supported in some ways by the narratives above, that talk about material gain and the pressure of poverty being motivating factors. The complexity around grooming and the drug trade has been explored by Irwin-Rogers (2019) who looked at the way that the popular statutory approach has been to blame the ‘violent and coercive gang leader’ for young people’s involvement in drug distribution (p. 11). Irwin-Rogers argued that this keeps the blame on individuals which is a distraction from the underlying structural factors that influence involvement, as shown in the narratives above.
6.4 Chapter Summary

What the analysis in the preceding sections show is the close relationship between experiencing DVA and feeling powerless, compounded by the lack of knowledge about the whole picture. This was echoed in McGee’s study, where she noted that, ‘what was evident from these children’s accounts was that by hearing violence but not knowing what was actually happening, their own feelings of powerlessness increased’ (McGee, 2000, p. 64). For many of the participants in this study DVA was associated with a core sense of powerlessness. This sense of powerlessness was linked by Eric to the way that he then engaged with his peers at school, as he sought to regain a sense of power. The following comments illustrate how lack of awareness of the underlying dynamics of DVA, alongside a lack of power to act lay the foundations for home to be an undesirable place to be, while also illustrating the sense of powerlessness through being overlooked and not having their distress acknowledged.

The participants indicated that they inhabited contradictory masculinity positions at a young age. They were living in a violent context where there was a male perpetrator who was performing a type of protest masculinity, dominating the mother and the children in the house. Some participants indicated they had complex relationships with this violence and dominance, as they denounced it but simultaneously sought spaces (such as in school) in which they could enact violence. This was expressed as linking with the desire for power and respect among peers. This is distinctive, as both the fathers and the men themselves (as boys and young
men) were marginalised and frozen out from the markers of hegemonic masculinity. This juxtaposition was spatially defined, as they inhabited a subordinate masculinity at home and then simultaneously enacted protest masculinity position outside of the home, in school and on-road.

What this chapter showed is that the participants’ relationship with violence in their lives changed as they went through the spatial transitions from home, to school, to being on-road. Violence in some form was a constant presence, but the dynamics of it shifted in subtle yet significant ways. In the above discussion I proposed that one of the key drivers in the move between parental home to on-road was that, despite both being inherently violent and unsafe spaces, the violence of the street is marked by a knowable code. This ‘code of the street’ is relatively straightforward compared to the unintelligibility of the DVA context, where children sit on the periphery of the code. Central to the DVA is the holding of power and control by the perpetrator and from which children are excluded. The gender dynamics are further amplified because in the participants’ stories the primary perpetrators were all male, which somehow left the children as boys conflicted and subordinated. The conventions of male power were directed against them and their primary carer in the home, but were available to, and effective for, them elsewhere, such as in the classroom or on-road. By engaging in the code of the street the men were able to redefine themselves and thus gain power, respect and the sense of achieving a type of successful on-road protest masculinity, none of which was available at home under the perpetrators reign. Threaded throughout this chapter is Anderson’s (1999) notion of the ‘code of the street’. I argue here that in the private context of DVA at home, there is an unknowable code for the children who live there. Within DVA the main code is that the perpetrator holds power and
control over the family and is able to change the rules as they wish. The way in which the young men created ‘space for action’ (Kelly, 1987) and resistance to the DVA was by physically choosing to leave the private domestic space and to shift to occupy the less defined spaces of life on-road.

The school was shown to be a space where the dynamics of violence, agency and resistance interacted. School offered an opportunity for the young men to find acceptance, a peer group, a way to be out of the house and thus away from the DVA. It was a space in which to regain a sense of lost power and test their masculinity through fighting. Fighting was noted by several participants as a way to cope with the anger that brewed within when faced with the DVA at home. None of the participants in the study mentioned disclosure, recognition, or support for the DVA in childhood. Processing their feelings in a physically violent way led to them being labelled and often excluded for those problematic behaviours furthering the push to another space; the life on-road. In between these shifts in context school was an in-between space which served to contextualise the participants’ experiences as different to the norm through their comparison with their peers. For some of them engagement in school was a coping strategy, both through full participation or as a space to enact violence, framed as a method of conveying and releasing anger.

The participants’ masculine biographies also changed through space. They referred to being side-lined and subordinated at home, and in some cases abused themselves in humiliating ways. They conveyed a sense of how all-encompassing the environment of living with abuse was, so much so they changed their lives to stay out of home as long as possible. They then adopted an emerging protest
masculinity of their own as they sought power and respect through enacting violence with peers. In the public context, the ‘hardness’ and toughness that they had gained whilst living at home with an abuser became a viable currency for masculine interaction. As they moved from the private sphere where they were powerless, the qualities of survival that they gained worked to their advantage in the public, street context. The code of violence changed within this shift, to go from them being victimised by a violence they could not make sense of or respond to directly, to enacting violence themselves in a sphere where they could use it to gain power and respect. Through this shift the participants went from a subordinate masculinity to an emerging protest masculinity.

Violence was the constant thread in the narratives. What changed was their relationship to the violence as they grew up. In early childhood they were victims of violence and abuse in the domestic sphere. At this time, they positioned themselves as both powerless and lacking the full knowledge of the violent dynamics around them. As they grew older, several of the participants framed school as being a site of their emerging perpetration of violence, where they started to enact violence against peers. This then escalated on-road, where the participants referred to experiencing violence (both as victims and perpetrators) on-road and/or in the gang context. As they described this evolving journey of adolescence around violence there was a sense of their relationship to the violence changing. Moving from the position of experiencing violence as a victim (or proxy victim) to then seeking opportunities to enact violence in a more agentic way themselves. Through this move on-road (explored further in chapter seven), as well as the shift to them seeking ways to feel both a sense of accomplished masculinity and power, the way in which they became involved with violence changed. They went from being
victims to violence around them to more agentic in their involvement in violence as perpetrators.

The dominant power relation that was present when the participants lived with the DVA perpetrator was that of subordination, which resulted in the boys’ inhabiting a subordinate masculinity. This was more than just an issue of being a younger and thus subordinate by age to the father or step-father, who in most cases in the present study was also the DVA perpetrator. But subordination in terms of masculinity was also expressed through the way in which the boys were positioned in relation to the male head of the household. Whilst at home living with the DVA they described their sense of powerlessness in light of their mother’s abuse, and in many cases, the direct child abuse they experienced as well. DVA perpetration can be seen as a form of protest masculinity on the part of the male perpetrator, as it relies on the exaggerations of male privilege and in particular, grounds itself in the exploitation of unequal power relations between men and women. Ray noted, ‘we should recognize that domestic violence is ubiquitous and a routine means of maintaining patriarchal power and authority’ (2018, p. 123). This extended within the home over the primary victim (most often the mother in the participants’ narratives) and the children within the house.

The way that the participants expressed their sense of subordinated masculinity was implied through the way they conveyed both the sense of powerlessness that they felt whilst living at home when the abuse was occurring, as well as the way that this contrasted with their experience of developing a hegemonically masculine position elsewhere to make up for it. Gunter (2017) noted that school was often a site of contestation of masculinities for black boys who were also increasingly participating on-road, due partly to the perceived mistreatment by mainly white
these teachers ‘disrespected’ the young people, who then retaliated due to their engagement in the on-road ‘code of the street’. These modalities of masculine identity were juxtaposed as a way to somehow offset their powerlessness at home through emphasising their toughness at school.
7 Chapter Seven. Masculinities on-road

Slippin

DMX (1998)

That ain't the half, shit gets worse as I get older
Actions become bolder, heart got colder...
...Three years later showing signs of stress
Didn't keep my hair cut or give a fuck how I dressed
I'm possessed by the darker side living the cruddy life
Shit like this kept a nigga with a bloody knife
Wanna make records but I'm fucking it up
I'm slippin', I'm falling, I can't get up

Music track selected by Sam

In the previous chapter the beginnings of the participants’ masculine biographies were outlined. They revealed the ways in which they inhabited a subordinate masculinity whilst living under the shadow of the DVA perpetrator in the private realm of home. They then sought opportunities outside the home where they were able to capitalise on how ‘hard’ and tough their home experiences had made them, added to the residual anger that they carried and looked for an outlet to express. Through these means they developed an emerging protest masculinity, propped up by the pursuit of opportunities for material gain which started their journeys on-road.

In this chapter, the developments in the participants’ masculine biographies are discussed in relation to their adolescence - this period represents their main time
on-road and gang-involved. The participants revealed the various ways in which they adopted a protest masculinity defined by its marginalization and attempts to redress the powerlessness that they felt in younger childhood. There were two distinct ways the participants spoke about themselves involving masculinity as something culturally achieved. These were though the discourse of being or becoming ‘a man’ and being/becoming ‘The Man’. In this chapter I will explore in more depth the portrayal of both becoming ‘a man’ and ‘The Man’ and what this reveals about the type of masculinity that is at work in these contexts.

7.1 Power Relations

The power relations that were expressed in terms of the gender order were again centred on the hierarchy of masculinities between men. In the narratives the on-road and gang cultures were both framed as masculine domains, where the men sought to dominate others and progress through the ranks among men. In this realm there were specific codes of behaviour, that included pride and respect as ontological assets. The hierarchical aspect was conveyed both through the reference to ‘The Man’ which described the ‘alpha male’ who embodied a successful protest masculinity. One survival strategy for life on-road was to act as ‘the nutter’, which is a specific form of embodied practice the participants’ adopted in certain settings.

7.1.1 ‘A man’ versus ‘The Man’: Emerging Protest Masculinity
In the narratives there were distinct ways in which participants described masculinity as something culturally achieved. This achievement was expressed through a discourse of being/becoming ‘a man’ and being/becoming ‘The Man’. In the interviews the process of becoming a man was mentioned in many different ways, focusing generally on the symbolic values and gains that the individuals associated with becoming a man. Alongside this was the discussion from some of the participants of their achievements of becoming ‘The Man’. Capitalised here because it was conveyed as a title, rather than a description itself. In becoming ‘The Man’ there were even more layers of symbolic representation that conveyed what it is to become the ultimate man in the gang context.

Discourses of perceived hegemonic masculinity were revealed in the interviews through the distinction between ‘a man’, to becoming ‘The Man’. Not all of the participants I interviewed had achieved this status, or at times were not certain if they had, but they all appeared to have an awareness and understanding of what ‘The Man’ was about. In the narratives a distinction was often made between the qualities they attribute to an everyday masculinity (‘a man’), which included independence, looking after one’s responsibilities, a sense of being respected and access to a type of power. As the participants’ referred to achieving the status of ‘The Man’, they then started talking about different elements of masculinity performance, including being feared, having power over others, enacting violence and respect. As they then moved on to talk about being The Man from a retrospective position, several of the participants noted that, now looking back, they feel that they had conflated fear and respect at those times, which they now see as distinct.
7.1.2 Becoming a Man

When talking about his youth, Eric firmly centred his use of violence as a tool to ‘be a man’. In this passage he clearly defines masculinity in relation to his experience of his father’s dominance and violence at home. As noted earlier, Eric outlined how at home he felt subordinate to his father, who was ‘The Man of the house’, which left Eric wanting to search for his own sense of being ‘a man’ when outside of his home:

“For me it was like I wanna be a man, I wasn’t man enough, because he [father] was here having fights with woman, making woman get scared of him, for me now way, for me this was a big problem so it became a thing it was like, I would go up there trying to pick a fight with men, because it was a way to feel like a man (Eric).

Eric juxtaposed feeling disrespected at home due to the violence he experienced with his sense of an evolving masculinity and wanting to feel ‘like a man’. To do this he would pick fights with men as a way to rebalance a sense of his own power. He rationalised that as long as he does not fight women then he was not emulating his father in any significant way (later in the interview, Eric admitted perpetrating DVA against women in his youth). This passage emphasised the journey to gain manhood through fighting; the physicality of attempted gains in masculinity. For Jordan, it was the process of being thrown out of his childhood home that prematurely initiated the process to have to ‘become a man’.
I’ve never gone home, I’ve had to make my own home and as a result **you’ve had to become a man** and take care of your responsibilities and you start to build your future and that’s what it’s about (Jordan).

So, for Jordan the process of achieving self-sufficiency is what becoming a man is about. Again, this is achieved in an embodied way, rather than being just a conceptual notion, Jordan achieved independence by physically leaving his childhood home and never returning. This symbolic shift operated alongside the physical shift.

In the interviews there were several references to the notion of ‘The Man’. The title ‘The Man’ was most commonly used, however other related terms included, ‘the boss’, ‘King’, ‘the guy’, ‘The Man on the block’, ‘The Man of the house’, ‘top man’. What these all have in common is a clear reference to the maleness of these roles, with all of them being terms that clearly refer to masculinity, with the exception of ‘the boss’. Some of the participants’ explained what this meant, and through this, what masculine status looked like in the gang context. For many of the participants the peak of their gang life was to become ‘The Man’. Dylan plainly asserted;

*I was The Man, do you know* (Dylan).

Several (Dylan, Sam, Lester, Jordan) mentioned being ‘The Man’ as if it was a self-explanatory concept:
I was The Man, if you understand what it means, I was the top guy and on one side I was the top guy and I had the pretty girls over here and they were all over me, and then I had all the mandem, like the gang all respecting me, the streets respected me, I was the guy (Sam).

It evoked a sense of being the ultimate masculine icon, the alpha male. Sam explained the concept to me as being ‘the top guy’, which came with access to women, respect from the gang and the streets. ‘Pretty girls’ are clearly commodified in Sam’s extract here, framed as a benefit of holding The Man status. This was also mentioned by Dylan, who framed his increased status as including ‘access to women’, as if they were a type of profit in this enterprise. Sam also outlined that being feared by his peers was part of the process of becoming The Man:

I became The Man eventually and everyone loved me, well, they didn’t but they feared me, I wanted respect, but I didn’t, they feared me, and people showed me, like lifted me up, glorified everything that I did, erm, and I became the boss (Sam).

The idea of the boss represents being in control, and at the head of a company. This is a concept which has historically been associated with hegemonic masculinity. What became clear from the participants’ narratives is that violence was of primary importance as they shifted to becoming gang-involved. It was ever-present in the participants’ lives in their younger years and as they got older their position in
relation to it changed. They moved from straddling the distinction between victim at home and perpetrator on-road, to becoming both victim and perpetrator in the gang context. The primacy of violence was explicitly acknowledged by Jordan:

*In terms of violence, being a main language on the streets, violence is a way of communicating on the streets, it’s the way we send messages, it’s a way of getting respect, it’s a way of getting paid, it’s a way of surviving (Jordan).*

The way in which Jordan centralised violence as literally the communication and currency of the streets emphasises the way in which violence was not a rare and peripheral occurrence but was fundamental to the on-road culture. By claiming engaging in violence is a way of ‘surviving’ also reinforces this point, that it is essential to engage in. All of these messages show how violence was inverted on-road, from the way it is usually hidden in the DVA context.

### 7.1.3 Racialised Connotations of ‘The Man’ Status and Gang Involvement

The enhanced status within the gang of becoming ‘The Man’, was something that all the participants appeared to recognize as existing within the gang structure. However, there were many similarities with the way in which Connell described hegemonic masculinity in the mainstream; that it was a status of exaggerated masculinity that all men are aware of, but only few achieve. I interviewed an ethnically diverse group of participants, however of those, it was the three black British men (Dylan, Lester and Sam) who explicitly claimed that they had achieved
being ‘The Man’ in the gang. In a complete contrast, the two white men firmly conveyed that they had been on the periphery and very much downplayed that they had a role in the inner workings of the gang they had been involved in. This could partly be due to the dynamics of what they chose to tell me, as a white interviewer. However, this alone does not explain the stark difference (even within such a small study). It could be to do with the sub-culture of on-road being grounded within a hyper-masculine stereotype of black masculinity involving gangsters. The white men felt the presence of the ‘chav’ discourse which is a specifically racialised form of class denigration, which appears to refer mainly to white people. The term ‘chav’ is generally used to describe the white working class and has been often used in a derogatory way. Chavs are a social group in the cultural imagination who are characterised by a portrayal in terms of negative class traits ‘dishonesty, laziness, fecundity, recklessness and ostentatious consumption practices’ (Raisborough, Frith, & Klein, 2013, p. 253). This is a distinct stereotype from that of black working class and criminality, which tend to be more associated with gangsters. One has become elevated and notorious, the other degraded and abject in an unlikely but prevalent racialised inversion. This has been highlighted by Patrick Williams (2015) in his analysis of the association of marginalised black men in gangs (see chapter two, section 2.2 for more on this). This disparity could also be something to do with an internalisation of the association with black men and gang criminality, which the white participants I spoke to did not feel as keenly.

The two white participants referred to different markers of their societal marginalisation, using the language of ‘chav’ to identify themselves and their presentation style. Dave referred to himself as being a ‘chav’ three times in his
interview. In one case he was describing outspoken behaviour, as reverting to being a chav:

_I get pissed off and then I’ll revert to being a chav and say shut the fuck up who you talking to you prick_ (Dave).

Shaun noted that one of the biggest reasons that he wanted to engage in the research itself was to show people that he was not from a TV family:

_Some of them did have the type you hear from on the TV, come from an unstable home, mum was an alcoholic, dad was … and that was the case for some of my friends_ (Shaun).

This references the type of show such as _The Jeremy Kyle show_, which centred on the humiliation of white ‘chav’ families who led chaotic lives which were then exploited for television. Thus, what became clear in this contrast is that the stereotypes around marginalisation and inner-city poverty which are typified in chav discourse drew on general racialised discourses that had been internalised by the participants’ (Tyler, 2013). Both white men (Shaun and Dave) took a colour-blind perspective to gang activity and the people involved. Shaun, in particular, very much portrayed the gang as reflecting the racial dynamics of the wider community. He noted that he came from a multi-cultural area and the young people all spent time together, however some of them happened to be in the gang, so they would
all be spending time in the day ‘playing FIFA’ and then go out to attend to on-road and gang-involved activities:

You’d have a big group of friends then you’d have individual groups who were closer. But when you were a big group, you’d all go around together in a set. The immediate ones were the ones in a gang, but playing football or something, or playing basketball on the courts, they’re just the same as us, Asian, we even had Chinese kids, we had a Chinese guy that was with it, we are very multi, multicultural. Them block, them white and black folk, them Asian guys were not at an age where they wanted to be in gangs, they would play football go into their houses and play computer games and stuff, it just didn’t interest them, but we was all still friends, we didn’t encourage them to be involved or, they didn’t encourage us to get out of it, do you know what I mean? (Shaun).

In this passage above Shaun is emphasising racial and ethnic neutrality in terms of which young men in his local area became gang-involved. He emphasises the multiculturalism in his neighbourhood but then downplays the significance of any differences. To conceptualise whiteness in the thesis I have drawn on Frankenberg’s (1993a) work. She carried out life-history research with white women to look at how they conceptualised race. She found evidence of individuals using, ‘colour-evasive and power-evasive discursive repertoire… partly in response to essentialist racism’ (1993a, p. 139). Thus, by claiming to be unaware of the racial dynamics they are revealing a knowledge of the structural inequalities that exist. Frankenberg noted that using a colour-blind perspective on race is, ‘a mode of

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2 Football based video game on ‘Xbox’
thinking about race organized around an effort to not ‘see,’ or at any rate not to acknowledge, race differences’, which she calls the ‘polite’ language of race (Frankenberg, 1993b, p. 142).

Despite talking about being personally unaware and unaffected by racism, Shaun in particular framed an association of black-hegemonic-masculinity with gangs in his community. This was revealed as he had been criticised for enacting blackness. Shaun was the only white member of the gang he was involved with and insisted that this was non-political. Shaun found the biggest stereotyping that he faced whilst gang involved was from his white peers in the wider community:

*It weren’t being white weren’t an issue being in a gang, you’d get a lot of people ... they’d pick up on the way you spoke, do you know what I mean, say your speaking like a black guy, I’d be like ‘how am I speaking like a black guy’, I’m a white guy so I speak like me, I speak like the area that I come from, and it just so happens the area that I come from the majority are black folk. And if you really want to get technical it’s not, speak like a black guy, because when you say black rap, you get like an African, if you’ve got someone with Jamaican or African roots and you get them where they are actually from I don’t sound like them, do you know what you mean., and you’ll get a black guy from [city] and he don’t sound like them either. So, if he don’t sound like them and I don’t sound like them, do you know what I mean? It’s an area thing, coz you are into it, it’s like there’s so many white people, So many Asian people, so many black people. It probably is majority black people, but I could easily string together 20 white, 20 black, 20 Asian and they’d all sound the same, so it’s not like, it’s just a, I don’t know that will always be something that will be said (Shaun).*
Shaun noted that he would be criticized by people within his community for, ‘speaking like a black guy’. Shaun responded with claiming he spoke like someone from his area, rather than through racial codes. All of this puts into focus the extent to which on-road is considered by society as a black space, despite there being multi-cultural engagement in on-road and in gangs. This could be do with the development of protest masculinity in the gang context being a space where black males can claim a hegemonic position in a way that is less accessible in the wider society due to the effects of racism. However, it could also be because of the racism of gang labelling itself, via tools such as the London gangs matrix that the wider society more easily situates black men as claiming the ultimate criminal position of gang leadership (Williams, 2015).

7.1.4 Pride

Connell asserted that one of the strategies that men use when they are experiencing a marginalization from the ability to achieve a hegemonic masculinity, is to develop an overwhelming concern with one’s own ‘front or credibility’ (Connell, 2005, p. 116). For the participants’, maintaining this front differs from a traditional working-class masculinity in their preoccupation with not being slighted or disrespected in the wider community. This was communicated by the participants’ as a concern for ‘respect’, ‘pride’ and ‘ego’. The distinguishing feature of the men’s narratives in this study was that when talking in retrospect about their time whilst on-road and gang-involved, they discerned the way in which pride entrapped them in a pattern of constant guarding of their sense of self-respect. In that way there is a dual meaning to ‘pride kills’, both directly when apparently
violated and indirectly when meaning the men cannot talk about their trauma which would lead to self-destructive behaviour.

Pride was referred to by many of the participants as the deadliest element of the protest masculinity performance. Both Dylan and Dave explicitly commented that ‘pride kills’, thus decentring the act of murder by an individual or a gang and instead focusing on the code of the street which dictated the murderous behaviour. Dave talked in depth about a situation among peers that he had been privy to, where a friend was murdered for putting his arms around a rival gang members ex-partner. Dave noted the trivial reasons that had resulted in the perpetrator receiving an eighteen-year jail term, asking;

So, was it worth it for the case of pride? ... Coz he could have walked away (Dave).

Dylan noted that no one had known the pain that he was experiencing at home during living with the DVA. He said men and boys don’t talk about it because they have ‘pride’:

Pride kills. And pride does kill because people are willing to die for pride (Dylan)

Travis made the link between pride and poverty, noting that when people are living in poverty, they have limited resources from which to draw on, so their ‘egos’, which I read for an element of pride, become implicated in an honour-based retribution system:
The thing is just like, all this road and living in poverty it’s like ego if you know what I mean, people that want more for themselves but because of poverty they haven’t figured out the exact way to get it so they start doing stuff like drug dealing and stuff like that, then egos come into it as well and like if you’re having an argument with a friend and you just fall out and it’s normal and you make up and whatever, whereas if two roadmen get into an argument with each other and they fall out coz they have ego issues and so many behind them as well-being like ah you can’t let him violate you like that, it almost always escalated to bigger problems than it actually is (Travis).

In this passage Travis is providing a contrast between the way in which a ‘normal’ way to settle a disagreement with a friend with the way in which people on-road deal with conflict. Travis implicates the additional issue of ‘ego’ as well as the people around an individual who relay the importance of honour and not letting a friend be ‘violated’. Violate is outlined by the Oxford Dictionary (2019) as meaning to ‘treat (something sacred) with irreverence or disrespect’. To use this term communicates just how pride and ‘ego’ is constructed as a sacred resource, imperative to protect, in lieu of other material resources.

7.1.5 The Nutter

Another theme that emerged in the narratives around performative protest masculinity was the way in which the participants’ adopted a persona of being
‘nuts’/’nutter’ as a protective strategy. Sam noted in the interview that one of the reasons that he was feared was because he was considered a ‘nutter’:

\[ I \text{ was The Man so even when I did it, they couldn’t really tell me anything because I was a nutter, they used to call me mad [nickname]… they used to say he’s mad like, that’s what he does, so no one could really say anything (Sam). ] \]

As outlined here Sam had almost claimed nutter as a trademark at the height of his on-road and gang-involved life. He noted that he had a reputation of having fewer boundaries and to not stop when he got angry. This served to deter peers from being confrontational with him, as well as mitigating any responsibility for his actions when he did go further with violence than his peers. Acting crazy, or limitless, as a form of both a performance of protest masculinity but also a personal protection strategy was also described by Dave:

\[ You \text{ kind of overcompensate then and like I’ve been happy when people have thought I was nuts, even though as I say I’m not a violent guy … I don’t enjoy fighting but I think coz I’m not scared of people they just sense that and they just leave me alone and then, but really I’ve liked it at times where people have said he’s mad you know, he’ll fuck you up or this or that, I used to have people who had this reputation or this idea of me that I was this nutter and really that is a shame isn’t it. (Dave). ] \]
Inherent in this passage from Dave is a contradiction between the need to seem like a nutter, which evokes the potential of volatile and extreme violence at short notice, with his own desire not to ‘be a violent guy’. This was a strategy developed by Dave after his childhood experiences of severe and violent bullying by peers. He described the process he made between being a victim to defending himself which was heavily tied up in his embodied performance of protest masculinity. This is further outlined in the passage below;

_I actually tried to look dodgy as well, I used to shave my head before it started receding and my mum said you look like a football hooligan and I said good, coz where I live, if they think I look nuts they are not gunna bother with me. So, I used to try and look as dodgy as possible ... I liked looking dodgy and it’s a shame you have to be like that (Dave)._

In this passage the retrospective element of Dave’s narrative again becomes clear. He is reflecting on the past strategies he developed in order to reduce his changes of harm on-road. Looking back, he comments that it was a ‘shame’ that looking like that, and deliberately marginalised himself in that way, was the preferable option. Dave entered life on-road after living in a gang affected area and being badly bullied. As outlined in chapter five, Dave reached a point where he felt it was a choice of either starting to fight back or continuing to be abused. This is reflected in his choice to look intimidating as a protection strategy. Looking like that will then have drawn reactions from others that would have positioned him even deeper within the protest masculinities discourse even if he personally did not identify with it. Jefferson noted that being considered the ‘the ‘headcase’, or ‘nutter’ is the
extreme example of hardness because his willingness to risk the body in performance is apparently unfettered by any of the normal constraints, fears and calculations’ (Jefferson, 1998, p. 93). At a different point in the narrative Sam mentioned again;

*I was not right in my head, like, and then in the midst, so to show you how messed up and mixed up and how mad I actually was, they would get me out of my cell to beat someone up (Sam)*

In these passages Sam sought to convey the extent to which he was operating outside normal social boundaries. He was suggesting the prison guard’s exploitation of his ‘nutter’ persona emphasises how tough he was. However, this is also an example of the instrumentalization of his ‘nutter’ persona by the prison staff for their own means. As it happened in a prison, it is questionable whether Sam had much choice when asked to perform the ‘nutter’ on their behalf. This is therefore a complex power play between the prison guards and prisoner, as well as between ordinary and ‘nutter’ masculine performances.

‘Going nuts’ as a form of resistance has also been explored by Wilson (2003). In research in a young offender’s prison. He found that, ‘Going nuts’ was not something to be done lightly, but was instead strategy to be used sparingly and when other options had been exhausted’ (Wilson, 2003, p. 421). Lester alluded to ‘going nuts’ in prison in protest of the racism that he was experiencing perpetrated by the prison staff. In the following incident he had been transferred to a prison in a predominantly white area in the north of England. He climbed up on a prison roof demanding to be transferred to a different prison, refusing to come down until his
demands had been heard. He ended up spending three months in solitary confinement, however was then able to make complaints to an external commissioner which resulted in the move that he desired eventually:

I had to climb up on the roof yea inside the workshop just to get a move yea... I got up on there and there was just a little ledge space like this and I was just about on it like this yea and I'm telling you these screws yea were like massive and they were snarling and if they could have ever got me [laughs] I would have been in bits 'FUCKING GET DOWN HERE NOW', listen brother I'm not going anywhere innit and if you come any closer I'll jump ... then the governor come and some speech ledge talker who could allegedly talk people out of things and I said 'listen to me carefully, you can't talk nothing out of me yea, I'm gunna explain to you yea ... Your prison's racist, I'm not staying here anymore, and that's why I'm up here on the roof do you understand?' So then the governor come and some screw come what I did trust and he said, 'It's me man they’re not gunna do you, I’m gunna stay here until you come down, I’m gunna put the cuffs on you and I’ll take you to the block', and that’s what happened. I sat down there for three months and started having to make some more complaints until I started making them out to the commissioner outside. The one thing about prisoners, they’re resilient and they learn ways to get things done. Unorthodox but what works (Lester).

In this story of Lester going nuts, he described negotiations of power throughout the incident. Initially he had power due to his behaviour, going up on a ledge and refusing to get down. However, he then mentioned his fear at that time, that if he did get down then the prison officers would have got to him and he would have ‘been in bits’. Lester then agreed to come down not only after being heard by the
Governor but also from a prison officer who he trusted to safeguard him when he did come down. Although he ended up having to spend the period of time ‘on the block’ and it appeared that the initial protest didn’t directly result in a move, Lester attributed his move to his actions. In summary, he noted that this was an example of a strategy to be heard and an example of resilience. Lester’s story highlights the thin line between out of control nutter performance and an instrumental performance and perception of the nutter. This story is also about bravado, as Lester portrayed this incident as an example where he was both clever and determined, who merely sought his rights, even in the face of ‘snarling screws’. Going nuts here was presented as a form of protest and of being heard.

7.1.6 War Language

In the interviews there were various examples where phrases alluding to war were integrated into usual speech. For instance, Eric referred to people as ‘foot-soldiers’, Dylan discussed the use of ‘peace treaties’ to resolve gang conflicts. One way that war language was used was to explain that the stakes were high—literally life or death. The notion of war conveys this grave reality. Sam also referenced war language to describe the mentality that is needed for someone to thrive whilst on-road:

*Warriors go into war, Spartans go into like 5000 people, they must’ve lost something, some connection to go in there and do that, to kill and some erm (sighs) yea, like [pause] that was me I was very disconnected, but very connected spiritually (Sam).*
In this passage Sam noted how he became someone who was internally lacking the connections needed to care. Sam likened this experience to historical warriors the Spartans, who engaged in win-or-die style battles. This passage denotes a sense of fatalism and resignation, as if the choice to go to war had been taken over. The juxtaposition of war imagery and disconnection with a parallel sense of being ‘very connected spiritually’ echoes Deuchar’s findings, who found that gang-involved men juxtaposed their journey as going from ‘warriors to peacemakers’ (2018, p. 177). Sam was conveying this message from a retrospective position, thus emphasising the spirituality that was present in the years before he later had a religious awakening (see chapter eight, section 8.2.5).

A benefit from likening the experience to a war is that it can also explain how much time can pass within one extended disagreement. Dylan noted how he was in several wars, which each lasted for several years. The language was used in different ways; to signify the high stakes, to portray the mentality of gang life, to explain the lengthy feuds. There is also a definite link to a traditional masculine imagery in the language of war; ‘qualities such as aggression, rationality, or physical courage are identified both as an essential component of war and also of masculinity at a given place or time’ (Hutchings, 2008, p. 389). This taps into a very specific masculinity discourse which conveys the notions of honour, of doing one’s duty, of being part of a larger group. It also conveys the seriousness of the stakes, as Dylan noted below, which people are fighting and willing to die for, however meaningless or incomprehensible it may look from the outside:
Masculinity is linked to war because, ‘formal, relational properties of masculinity provide a framework through which war can be rendered both intelligible and acceptable as a social practice and institution’ (Hutchings, 2008, p. 389). In this way the relationship between masculinity and war can be ‘mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing’ (Hutchings, 2008, p. 391). Kerig et al. (2013) advocated looking at the parallels between gang research and literature on child soldiers. There seems to be some connection between the two experiences. They found that ‘mirroring the literature on child soldiers, gang-involved youth are exposed to a range of violent experiences as both victims and perpetrators’ (Kerrig, Wainryb, Twali, & Chaplo, 2013, p. 775). The language of war offered the participants’ a positive discourse to underpin the performance of masculinity. It alludes to a sense of loyalty with your wider group or army, which includes within it the value of retribution on behalf of the group, without necessarily understanding why. It is violence in a societally acceptable context. It also explains the conditions in an apt way: you cannot choose to back out of a war, it is a long continuous battle.

Dylan described how he went from being part of a group of friends, to all-out war, after he had vowed to avenge his friend’s murder. Dylan mentioned attempting ‘peace treaties’ among warring rival gangs. This serves to de-personalise the
violence that was occurring. It ceased to be the doing of a group of individuals who could choose to stop, but was rather a collective, like a guerrilla army, which would need a treaty arrangement to stop:

_We went to all-out war, and it lasted forever basically, I lost over thirty friends and family, in [year] my best mate was killed in front of me, shot in his head ... a lot of people wanted to have peace treaties but they didn’t see what I seen, they wasn’t there and nearly killed like I was nearly killed (Dylan)._

However, in the above extract Dylan also brings his personal experience to contextualise the war. He remembers the time when his best friend being killed and how this impacted on his decision to keep engaging in the war. Taking revenge was a way that he could make meaning about his gang-involvement. This contrasts with his comments above where he noted the pettiness that often caused the wars. Through his involvement in the war he found a reason to continue it, despite it starting over relatively trivial matters.

7.1.7 Self-Harming through Co-Victimisation and Perpetration of Violence

_Ghetto_

_Akon (2004)_

_These streets remind me of quicksand_

_When you’re on it, you’ll keep goin’ down_

_And there’s no one to hold on to_
Using Gilson’s (2014) conceptualisation of vulnerability, which emphasises the close relationship of violence and insecurity, the pinnacle of this interrelationship between vulnerability and violence is evidenced in self-harming. Self-harming in the narratives was discussed in a range of ways, both directly (harming oneself directly) and indirectly (harming oneself through engagement in fights). Self-harm in the form of alcohol abuse was mentioned by Dylan, who noted that he dealt with the guilt that he felt about his mother’s treatment both by his father;

[I drank] two bottles of Jack Daniels a day for eighteen months and I wasn’t even getting drunk, I was immune to it because what was going on in my head. (Dylan)

He spoke about this as a way to convey the depth of his feelings and his vulnerabilities. The notion of engagement in violence as a form of self-harm was raised by Sam. Sam said that he lost the ability to care about himself or others. He noted that it was this lack of care and hurt that led him to the point of ‘exploding’. Sam framed the violence that he experienced in the gang as a form of self-harm. He noted at several points in the interview that he got to the point of finding pleasure in his own victimisation. Although that is simplifying the issue, as the
examples that he raised were often when he was engaged in violence himself (such as in a fight). So, fighting is an embodied coping mechanism at the intersection of victimisation/perpetration. The extract below particularly highlights this issue;

I’ve seen people being stabbed, I’ve stabbed people, I’ve been bottled in my head, I’ve been bricked in my head, I’ve been run over, I’ve been thrown out of windows, I’ve just self-destructed myself that was how I was err I was, it was self-harming basically. But when people punched me, I felt good. Like I remember one day having a fight and this guys on top of me and he’s hitting me and I’m shouting ‘hit me’, ‘hit me’ and I’ve got my arms open and I’m letting him hit me, and then my boy runs over and kicks him off of me and we beat him up and my boys like ‘why are you doing this’ like what’s going on with you? and I was like, I don’t care about life (Sam).

This passage juxtaposes talk of engaging in violence, portraying the protagonist as tough, yet simultaneously outlines his deep feelings of vulnerability and helplessness in those moments. Sam is emphasising toughness and enduring violence and pain, which are highly valorised characteristics of masculinity, seeking invulnerability and omnipotence. However, at the same time he is also exposing his past vulnerability. To hear this type of narrative is as a result of the retrospective nature of the interviews, as it is with hindsight that Sam has been able to group together these destructive behaviours as actually a form of self-harm. There is indeed a contradiction in these ideas, as he will have been engaging in violence himself in these exchanges, however here he is framing himself as a passive party to illustrate his inner feelings of vulnerability. This theme is pertinent in the self-
harm literature, which emphasise the way that individuals ideas of masculinity are implicated in their self-harming (Green, Kearns, Ledoux, Addis, & Marx, 2018).

7.2 Cathexis

1-800-273-8255

Logic ft. Alessia Cara, Khalid (2017)

I've been praying for somebody to save me, no one's heroic
And my life don't even matter, I know it, I know it
I know I'm hurting deep down but can't show it
I never had a place to call my own
I never had a home, ain't nobody callin' my phone
Where you been? Where you at? What's on your mind?
They say every life precious, but nobody cares about mine

Music Track selected by Dave

As outlined in the preceding chapters, cathexis, in Connell’s original conceptualisation, referred to the ways in which intimate relationships with women were framed in relation to the wider gender order. Connell focused on these interpersonal elements as a way to focus on the ways that men had internalised protest masculinity in their private relations. In this section I focus on the ways in which the participants conveyed their personal connections in the gang context as well. This is because the ‘ties’ developed to the gang functioned as replacements
to other intimate relations at the time, although were at the same time perceived as based on fear rather than friendship.

7.2.1 Gang Ties

Gang ties were specifically expressed about all-male peer groups. Even when women were discussed as involved, they were presented as outside of the intimate group. Also revealing in terms of cathexis was the way in which women were situated as separate, reified, and almost objectified as a separate group who were at times victimised and then held responsible for this victimisation. The participants appeared to talk about women as performing a function of the object of their expression of heroic masculinity.

In terms of cathexis, the participants detailed the ways their lives became entwined with the gang as their priority relationship. The primacy of this relationship was expressed by the repetition of ‘tie/tied/tied’ and similar sentiments. This gave an image of a physical connection to the gang, as well as giving connotations of being restricted. Jordan emphasised this through his comment that, ‘it’s not a matter of walking away’, as in he did not feel he could freely leave the gang as he wished:

On the streets it’s awkward being in it and when you’re trying to get out of it it’s difficult... you get a lot of hate as I was saying from the previous song, but that hate’s now because you’re gunna change, people feel loyalties, due ties, as people feel you’re tied in almost it’s not a matter of walking away it’s like a family you just can’t walk away from your blood family, even if you do walk away your still gunna
be tied because you’ve spent so much time and that’s what it literally is, your friends on the street at the time can be closer than your actual blood family, where you’re willing to die for them the same and you’d die for your brother or sister or your mum or uncle, dad, or brother, or whatever brother or cousin (Jordan).

Jordan compared this commitment to the ties formed to family, which is a metaphor that helps him explain the way that you can physically move away from them, but, ‘even if you walk away, you’re still gunna be tied’. This conveys the complexities when one tries to extricate themselves from the gang, comparing the invisible ties to those caused by blood. In some ways the gang is described as operating as a form of replacement family, as Jordan noted that ‘at the time’ the friends on the street can feel closer than related family. To really illustrate this point Jordan referenced the lengths that he would go to for this surrogate family, even die for them.

7.2.2 Sam’s Search for a Mother Figure

When Sam discussed his intimate relations with women on-road and gang-involved they were heavily tied up with his simultaneously expressed desire for a mother figure. He firstly said that he was in a lot of relationships (‘going from girl to girl to girl’) due to his search for a mother figure. He mentioned one woman that he had a relationship with who lived at home with her wider family in which he was integrated quickly. Sam said through moving in with his girlfriend’s family;
I got a mum, I got an aunty, I got a sister and a little brother, and I became a father figure to the baby that was in the house and a girlfriend all at once, I found a family and they all, and we grew, and we loved each other (Sam).

Sam’s peers couldn’t understand why he sought the domestic life in the way that he did, but he later noted, ‘to me it made perfect sense, it was my heart I was searching for a family, I was searching for love’. However unfortunately the family themselves were also on the margins, dealing drugs from the house. As much as he sought the connection of family, Sam also noted that he didn’t feel able to stay with women for long, as he would always be expecting them to leave. What this revealed was the vulnerabilities that Sam felt during his time on-road. As much as he appeared to have rejected the home environment and sought a space where he could enact a protest masculinity, he was still searching for a way to enact the traditional male role within a conventional family.

7.2.3 Gang Love

Shaun outlined the process of how one starts to inherit gang issues from older peers. He notes how the gang issues had always been ‘in his head’ from his wider upbringing on his estate. However, it was when he experienced perceived injustices himself, like peers getting killed, then he was able to relate directly to the feeling of anger and revenge. It is this process that personalized the wider gang issues to him. Here he conveys the power of those feelings, the cathexis evident in the emotive terminology:
It’s mad how you feel like what’s in your heart. I remember how I felt, and that stuff got so strong in my heart, how I felt for them other kids that I didn’t get along with, it was like a proper strong feeling to want to hurt them, do you know what I mean?

The way you feel for the opposite side it’s just, you wanna make money and not wanna get a job, it’s like it’s so strong, you’re in a gang and your feelings for that gang is like mad, it’s like love. It’s mad, it is mad, you just love it. And it’s like in your head and in your heart, you think you just want it to be strong and you don’t want it to go weak, so you just want to be in the thick of it, coz you think you’re not letting this shit go. Even now to this day I think sometimes something happens, it’s always gunna be there in these things. But when you’re older you know what’s right and what’s wrong. As much as things bother me you have to let things go (Shaun).

To emphasise the depth of his feelings for the gang, Shaun refers to ‘my heart’. He repeats ‘heart’ three times here. Shaun is using this to convey both the depth of feeling as well as to portray that it was genuine. An intriguing factor in Shaun’s discussion about the depth of his emotional connection to the gang is that he was not claiming to be seeking alternative relationships away from his family, but rather additional ones. He emphasises the way in which the collective hate that the gang shared was a vehicle for feeling the collective love of the group. It is another way in which protest masculinity and vulnerable masculinity are so closely aligned. The violence allowed him to feel love.

The narratives often focused on the way the participants’ grew apart from their families and became disaffiliated, then conveyed the yearning for new connections. This often signified an emotional shift from loyalties moving from home to the gang.
This was a form of cathexis, resolving or at least responding to their unmet emotional needs. This understanding, informed by Connell’s theorisations, offers to deepen the scope of research activity looking at gang and gang-related activity as an alternative quasi-family space that addresses men's emotional desires.

When talking about their time being gang-involved, all the participants’ described the bonds or ‘ties’ between the men in the gang. Jordan conveyed his affiliation to the gang, likening them to ‘blood family’ that you are ‘willing to die for’. Dylan described the gang as ‘like a family on the streets’. As outlined earlier in this section, Shaun described the strength of feeling that he had for the gang as akin to ‘love’.

This trend for marginalized men to disassociate with their families and instead replace their primary ties with their peer group was noted by Collier (1998) in his study of men, masculinities and crime. He noted that this shift often occurs as a tenet of achieved hegemonic masculinity and is signified by true independence of family or ties (p. 76).

Eric talked explicitly about a sense of realisation and loss when he started to break away from his family and he later noted that he then started to change and feel emotional attachments with the gang instead. He noted;

When I saw what my step-mum would do to my dad, and then what he would do to us and then she would do to us, I was like I was clever enough to understand that’s not love, and that made me realise that I don’t have a family, because my family don’t do that (Eric).
In this excerpt Eric is conveying how he disaffiliated from his family, once he conceptualised them as not constituting a family at all because of the violence and abuse. By framing it that way he is evidencing his disaffiliation with his blood family, opening up himself for reaffiliation with the gang. This idea was also explored by Sam, who referenced his constant search for a mother figure in the women that he met with when gang involved. He noted that in his ‘heart I was searching for a family, I was searching for love’. Sam repeated throughout his narrative his yearning for a family and a mother figure, in particular.

Eric’s narrative outlined how he navigated a need for peer acceptance. That as a ‘kid’, he sought acceptance but the people who were receptive to this need were ‘guys who are bad’. In making this connection so quickly, Eric has simplified an issue which can be characterised as a willingness to anyone who might offer acceptance. He conflates acceptance and love by noting that, ‘the gang loves you... then you feel accepted’. Eric frames himself as naïve in this exchange, by stating that ‘you don’t know what you’re getting yourself into’. Eric is firmly framing his motivation for getting involved with the gang as driven by the desire for acceptance above all else.

Eric framed his acceptance in the gang as intertwined with his refugee experience. He noted that he was tougher than his peers because of his life experiences. Through this Eric foregrounded his identity as a black African man and as a refugee, foregrounding them in his childhood experiences. These experiences are also conflated with cultural notions of masculinity, through learning from his father about how an African man should behave. To understand how these elements of identity interact it is important to frame Eric’s intersectional identity in relation to his gang-involvement.
7.2.4 Love and Fear

Fear played an instrumental role throughout the men’s lives as revealed in the narratives. Fear was present in childhood, as the men were scared of the actions and reactions of the perpetrator (as explored in chapter six, section 6.2.1). The participants alluded to the way that they discovered could inspire fear themselves using their own violence (see chapter six, section 6.2.4/6.2.5). As the participants described the height of their time on-road and gang-involved the existence of fear was a common theme in the narratives. This was largely due to the fact that these were retrospective accounts; they were allowing themselves to share their stories of vulnerable masculinity as well as stories of protest masculinity. This resulted in a unique snapshot at the internal emotional lives of the men as they dealt with these past fears. Shaun noted;

_I was very very, very [gang] involved. But it’s mad because when I look back now it scared me so much (Shaun)_.

This quote by Shaun was revealing. He noted that the fear was powerful, but he must have had to work so very hard to suppress it in order to continue his activities. This is an example of cathexis at work, as he managed the contradictory feelings of power and fear. At times this was about the participants themselves being afraid, but also inspiring fear in others, which several mentioned, often citing the following conundrum;
I wanted respect but I got fear (Sam)

Everyone professes to love you because you got money or because they’re scared of you and it’s all fake coz, they don’t love you yea and you just get caught up in it (Lester)

In the participants’ narratives about love there always appeared to be fear being as an emotion that was mentioned alongside it. Above, both Sam and Lester look back in hindsight and now realise that they were not actually respected or loved but feared. This suggests being respected in the gang is to be feared (for more on this see chapter seven, section 7.2.1 for what makes ‘The Man’ in a gang). This close connection between fear and love mirrors their early relationships with their fathers, who they feared and loved, due to the existence of DVA. Their fathers related to them only through instilling fear and thus being ‘respected’ to a point. This analysis of fear and love links back to the prior analysis around gang ties and a sense of love within the gang (sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2). Eric’s narrative below goes further into the inherent contradiction of seeking love and getting fear that Sam and Lester allude to above. There is a significant mirroring here of the relationships the participants had with their own fathers in the early years, where again, they yearned for love yet got fear and abuse. It is pertinent that both Sam and Eric who discussed this also experienced physical child abuse in their early years:

Growing up you realise that you don’t know how to have good friendship with people and the people that you hang about with a lot, they’re not your friends they’re there for common goal maybe. Yea we might be from the same area, we’re
boys were bro’s, but it is not a friendship. Or they’re your friend because they’re scared of you, usually they’re friends with you coz it’s like I’d rather be friends with that guy than be his enemy, or his friends or the other group of friends because I have protection, there’s kids that come out and like I got some sort of protection. And him he doesn’t know what he’s getting himself into. And when you see stuff like that you don’t, coz it’s like you’re seeing it how they are, the love the affection they have that you don’t, so know it’s like, you’re seeing films, you’re seeing what love is (.) yea it starts making you feel like you’re living a different life (Eric).

In this passage Eric is tussling with the emotional contradictions of gang involvement. In the preceding sections I have analysed both gang ties and gang love, yet here Eric problematises them both as functional responses to ultimate fear. Eric is putting into question the very fundamentals of friendship with his peers, noting that perhaps it was only ever about fear, protection, and a ‘common goal’.

The way in which Eric distinguishes between being ‘boys’ and ‘bros’ but not friends shows the way in which the gang was tied together, in the same way a family is tied without a choice, which is quite distinct from a friendship. The close relationship between love and fear is emotionally charged. Decker and Van Winkle (1996) noted in their research into gang life that fear was instrumental in gang life, as it both constrained the men as well as compelled them to commit further violence.

7.2.5 Reflections on DVA Perpetration

As noted in Chapter five (section 6.3.1), the participants’ spoke about women, in particular their female family members, with a huge sense of reverence and value.
However, at times they leaned towards reifying these women in an almost de-humanised way - they were placed on an ideological pedestal. This was extended in their retrospective narratives of adolescence, where some of the participants’ recounted their experiences of both protecting women and perpetrating abuse against them. In both of these cases, women were positioned in a way that framed them as objects against which the men constructed their masculinities, either as protectors or perpetrators. As such, this framing is consistent with Connell’s account of cathexis, as the way in which personal relationships are constructed through personal feeling and what they reveal about the wider gender order.

Several participants shared their views of DVA perpetration from their perspectives as adults. Dylan and Eric conveyed a broad disapproval of DVA. Dylan explained about how, from a young age, his personal boundaries precluded any violence against women. He stated that he;

...knew from the age eleven, twelve, that I could go out and kill somebody and not feel no way about it, just so as long as it wasn’t a woman’ (Dylan).

He asserted that he had never ‘raised his hand to women’ due to seeing what his mother experienced. He categorised people as either in one of two camps around DVA perpetration, those who are ‘proper against it’ and those who do ‘hit women’. However, in the same passage Dylan explained that he ‘shot and stabbed people’ but that he always respected his mother (and by implication, other women too). He emphasised the strong boundaries that his mother placed on violence against her; ‘my mum said if you ever raise a hand to a parent that’s when you get disowned, so
my mum never disowned me’. Dylan conveyed a sense of the hierarchy of violence in his view, framing his perspective of violence against women as being somehow more inherently wrong than violence in general. The way that Dylan both normalised violence as well as disdained violence against women is revealing as to the way in which Dylan perceived wider gender dynamics. As a child he framed his mother as a victim, but his father as someone who was able to fight.

When I prompted Lester to talk about his experiences of DVA he initially thought I was enquiring about his own perpetration as he answered from the outset, ‘I’ve not had the domestic part of violence. I’m not a domestic violence person’. To distinguish the ‘domestic part’, matches the wider finding in the research that gang related violence is firmly situated within public rather than private space. Lester is acknowledging this spatial boundary of violence. This is because in the context of the wider narrative Lester disclosed various other types of public violence that he had engaged in, including gun crime. This suggests that Lester somehow differentiates people who engage in violence outside of the domestic space (public) as different from those who engage in violence within it (domestic). Lester then went on to describe a domestic situation where he lived with multiple partners, outlining that he didn’t engage in DVA because he didn’t ‘need to’. However, the context he described appeared to be a controlling one, not least because one of the women accused him of false imprisonment when she escaped. Thus, there is potential that Lester carried out coercive control over the women, however without the physical violence usually associated with DVA. For Lester, if he was managing to exert power and control over his domestic situation without the use of violence then DVA was not necessary. Lester described how he displayed his power in that situation by conveying his expectations to the women, which worked
because ‘they didn’t say no to nothing’. This revealed a functional attitude towards violence. Lester outlined that as long as, ‘they’re getting what they want, you’re getting what you want’ then violence was not necessary. In contrast to Dylan, who asserted a more blanket negative attitude against DVA perpetration, Lester was instead acknowledging its uses for domestic control and saying it was not necessary in his context.

Eric discussed DVA perpetration in a different way. Eric recounted it from two perspectives, split by what I call a narrative break. He told one version of his story, then corrected himself and told a different version. This is significant as not only does it present the messy contradictions of the perspectives of a survivor of DVA himself, who then engages in the hyper-violent gang context. It also shows the effectiveness of the unstructured narrative interview technique which gave space for self-exploration over structured questioning. Eric began talking about DVA by framing his sister as a potential victim and himself as the protector brother. Eric framed this part of the narrative as a hypothetical talk with a potential boyfriend of his sister. He laid down his boundaries which is that ‘you can break her heart...but what you can never do is hit her’. He then framed his step-mother as being a victim of domestic abuse because she didn’t have a brother, the implication being that it is a male family member’s role to protect women. Eric conveyed a hypothetical threat to an abuser of his sister, by stating, ‘my guy, I do not do that stuff, but for you I’d go to prison’. Here Eric is emphasising that this would be an extreme consequence for him, but one he would freely take - he would ‘call the police and the ambulance and walk into prison’. This is a powerful image that he would be acting with such clarity that firstly, he would have no fear of the police or prison, but also, have enough of a sense of humanity to call the ambulance the victim
would certainly need. This is constructing a compassionate discipliner role. Eric notes his concerns that his sister could be especially vulnerable to DVA because of her experiences at home, which he is constructing as a gender issue that does not apply to him as a male who has experienced the same. Eric began discussing this with a monologue about how wrong it is to be violent to a woman. However, in a fascinating turn after being so passionate about not being violent, he then admitted that he did actually ‘hit girls’ in past relationships. This was a stark juxtaposition between viewpoints, where Eric changed from presenting me with a sanitised account of himself, to presenting himself more honestly. Below is the moment that of disclosure:

Maybe it’s just me but I couldn’t do it [perpetrate DVA], that’s the worst thing I could even do.

Nah [pause]

Growing up though I have to admit I did hit girls [pause]

I did hit girls growing up [pause]

It’s sad [pause]

It was during the girls getting angry, it was never the girls that I knew it was always like, when you hang around the same crowd there’s always people that always want to show off in front of people, and when those girls hang around with gangs, this is what’s crazy, that you’d slap her and beat her and nobody ended it (Eric).

This was a significant disclosure as he had been talking extensively about the damage of DVA to himself in the past, as well as the threats to his sister. Eric framed
the girls as having some responsibility for the violence. He noted that he was only violent, ‘during the girls getting angry’. He conveyed a wider tolerance for this as it was a way to ‘show off in front of people... what’s crazy, that you’d slap her and beat her, and nobody ended it’. Eric placed responsibility more on the girls for continuing to spend time with the gang despite being beaten, rather than on the perpetrators for carrying out the violence. He begged the question, ‘my God, what kind of people were you... what was happening at home for you to feel that’s fine?’.

Also inherent in this part of Eric’s narrative was the way that he distinguished between boundaries of those who were gang-involved, and those who were not. For these two parties the rules were different. Eric noted that the girls who were victims of DVA were those who, ‘hang around with gangs’. He asked why they didn’t call the police, because;

> Snitching that don’t apply to you, that applies to us on the street maybe, it does not apply to you, call the police, what’s worse why are you still gunna be around? (Eric).

Through this ‘the street’ is defined as a male domain, one in which the women take marginal position. There is also an inherent contradiction here, when Eric asked why the women – the victims of male violence in the gang - did not call the police, he downplayed any sense of fear they may have had of future violence. This is alluding to the ‘code of the street’, where a distinct set of etiquette outlines boundaries of violence, including a penalty for reporting incidents to the police.

What these stories about DVA convey are distinct masculinity performances, or distinct positions in relation to the notion of DVA perpetration. Dylan positioned
himself in a way that conveyed a sense of chivalry, whereby it was acceptable to engage in violence with men, but there was a boundary around the perpetration of violence by men against women. Lester viewed the issue differently, as instead of conveying a sense of disapproval about DVA, he framed it as functional, with him not needing to engage in it. In Eric’s talk about DVA perpetration his positioning shifted throughout the narrative. Initially he conveyed a heroic masculinity, framing himself as the noble protector who could/would be violent, but only if necessary, to safeguard his sister. He then disclosed his previous violence against women, which he framed as a fault of the women for tolerating it and not leaving. What these distinct positions reveal is the complex way that masculinity is navigated in the light of violence performance on the street. All of the participants’ referred to women being somehow different, or outside the usual code of the street, signalling the gender exclusion of women as well as the way that experiencing DVA does not necessarily make a person anti-violence.

7.2.6   Vulnerable Masculinity, Death, and Murder

Realogy

Depzman (2013)

Every time that I see your face, I feel the pain
When I’m on road just knowing that you ain’t here don’t feel the same
I miss you bro, love you bro, Swear I wish could hug you bro, I need you bro

Music track selected by Travis
This music track was selected by Travis who used it to talk about the murder of a peer. This song was written and performed by the artist, Depz, at a memorial concert for his own friend who had been killed in gang-involved violence. The lyrics are Depz talking about his own grief for his lost friend. However tragically Depz himself was murdered at that very memorial concert. This is an example of just how ubiquitous fatal violence is within the on-road and gang context, as well as highlights the close relationship between music, memorial, and on-road subculture.

It is essential to consider the vulnerabilities alluded to by the participants. As noted above in the discussion on preferring to act like a ‘nutter’ as a form of protection, gang-involvement can be a scary and lonely situation for young men. All of the participants had lost a friend to violence whilst on-road and gang-involved, and most had experienced the incident first-hand. These examples of the men’s most vulnerable moments were tied up with experiences of violence. As Gilson (2014) noted, ‘we discover in acts of violence an extreme form of the most fundamental dynamic: the way in which we are always vulnerable in relation to one another’ (p. 48). The way that vulnerability became visible through violence was emphasised in the narratives, through the illustrations of how they coped with the violence (both DVA and gang violence) in various ways.

Almost coming full circle, they had gone from experiencing DVA as children, to experiencing violence on-road. This experience served different functions in the participants’ life-histories, but it was the most common aspect of all the narratives. Some of the participants mentioned being present at a friend’s murder, others were just aware of these events happening and attended funerals. Either way, these experiences when compounded by the historic experiences of DVA can be constructed as a form of re-victimisation. Add to that the complexity that gang-
involved men who experience extreme forms of violence are often complicit and there is even less available empathy from society and services. All of the participants mentioned the death of a friend as part of their time whilst gang-involved. Then a picture emerges of men who are multiply traumatised but would have little access to support or sense of wanting to access it:

*I lost [dozens of] friends and family, in [a year] - my best mate was killed in front of me, shot in his head* (Dylan).

*Seeing all my friends die, my friend coming to meet me to come to a show and then he gets killed on his way to meet me. My other friend died on a bus we were all talking the next thing you know my boys on the bus with a few on the guys and he gets stabbed on the bus and he dies* (Sam).

*My friend got stabbed in front of me, he’s got his stomach got opened in front of me and then, it’s just too, too, it’s just, it was this summer... just so many kids were getting stabbed, my friends were just getting stabbed up* (Eric).

*When I went to do that talk in [Area] when the boy died it hurt me so much. A boy was stabbed, and his guts had been exposed out on the pavement* (Lester).

*Funerals and you know burying friends to get friends getting jail, that was all part of that experience which was negative* (Jordan).

*My friend who’s dead ... he got killed, he was only sixteen. He was in a car and some [gang] kids and some girl rang them and said these lot are here, so these kids ran on to the car and only he got shot and he got shot through his head* (Shaun).

*I’ve had more than one mate be killed over the years erm and other mates being stabbed* (Dave).
Someone that I chilled with got stabbed to death recently and not long after another person who I used to chill with actually got arrested for the murder, so it puts you in the middle of some really weird situations (Travis).

The sheer ubiquity of the experiences of death and murder at a young age is a shocking indictment of the levels of violence that exists on-road and in gangs. Ongoing violent incidents were framed as being part of a wider system of vengeance. Having a quick response rate between violent victimisation and vengeance means that an individual does not stay as a victim for long before changing the dynamics. It is a constant cycle of violent victimisation and perpetration. This never-ending cycle was spoken about by both Dylan and Shaun. Shaun discussed how the awareness of murders within his peer group played a role in his increasing sense of loyalty to the gang he was involved with, which led him to become involved in the ongoing retribution:

When you’re a kid, you get a bit of ‘oh I love this older guy, he’s cool’ then you see him killed and then it’s a bit of a, ‘why did he get killed’, then another one will get killed and another one would get locked up and you just see things and you hear things and you don’t like it (Shaun).

More explicitly for Dylan, his experience of his friend’s murder was a key factor in him pledging revenge, which then led to a period of gang conflict. He noted that this was;
... a pivotal moment because I vowed never to stop avenging for the sake of him (Dylan).

An important consideration here is that these experiences, in the context of the participants’ experience of DVA at home, would have been very traumatic turning points. So, despite them talking about the engagement in violence on-road and in the gang, it is important to consider the wider implications of their continuous involvement in traumatic events that they also experienced at the same time, highlighting the dual victim/perpetrator tension for gang-involved men. This dichotomy between victim/perpetrator has previously been explored by Gadd et al., (2015) who noted how easy it is for young men who perpetrate violence to be constructed as the ‘ideal offenders’ (p. 151).

The young people who are tied up with the violence on-road that is associated with their peers’ murders will not be looked at as victims of adversity in their own lives, but rather will be blamed for the dangers they present to wider society (Gadd et al., 2015). Renzetti (1999) looked at women who are both victimised and engage in violence. She proposed that we look at victimisation through a strengths model, whereby both victimisation and perpetration are viewed on a continuum of survival. She urges us to set aside the stigma and instead focus on the ‘full humanity of an individual’ (Renzetti, 1999, p. 52).

7.2.7 Valued as their Mother’s Sons

Mother’s Son
Devlin (2013)

Every mum loves their son
Remember that the next time you’re loading up the gun
Cock it back, make it throw in and you run…
But our mom’s mind is below imagining
The subjects I’m tackling, left to cry tears when I scream, see this really happening
Every young soul that’s killed in the field
Never perish to the hating pull to his own
This rap tool to his home, till his own home
To leave the marker on this first wounds talk broke
You can never really hurt one person
Only damage everything they ever know
So next time you see red, think slow
Before you strip another woman of her soul…
...We’re all our mother’s sons

Music track selected by Travis

The above section from a music track that Travis brought to the interview centralised the lives of on-road and gang-involved men as being important as they are their ‘mother’s sons’. This is revealing about cathexis, which focuses on the emotional charge within relationships. Several of the participants framed their own value as contingent on if they were important to someone else. It was as if they were so complacent about violence, criminality, and death, that the personal effect on them ceased to be important. Instead they focused on the consequences of these issues on the women closest to them. This is revealing about the wider
gender order, as the men conveying a lack of care for themselves is a typical display of masculine strength and invulnerability. By showing vulnerability through the lens of their mother’s worry and pain, they are reinforcing the feminisation of both emotions and vulnerability and detaching themselves from it. This echoes of the previous discussion about some of the participants’ experience of sexual exploitation (see chapter six, section 6.3.3), where they constructed their victimisation through the framing it as a female issue. This trend shows the ways that the participants maintained a sense of masculinity by distancing themselves from feminised traits.

Positioning themselves as protectors of family members was the main motivation for change. It seemed to be easier for them to frame their own vulnerabilities through identification with women’s victimisation rather than their own. It allowed them to avoid reducing themselves to being vulnerable. Lester explicitly referred to this in his narrative:

*Women, aunties, sisters, mothers for underprivileged people and especially black women whose children are gunna be more likely to be the ones what are the victims to this, one’s dead ones in prison yea, that’s always the scenario yea, they got, you’s have got the most to lose (Lester).*

Here Lester is framing the female relatives of gang-involved men as the primary victims. By using the term ‘you’s’, he is projecting onto me the representation of wider womanhood/motherhood, which reveals the underlying awareness of our gender differences in the interview dynamic. This links back to the intersectional
interview dynamics as discussed in chapter five (section 5.7.4). It is striking that he conveys that they/we have the ‘most to lose’, more than the men who end up dead or in prison. It is as if the value of gang-involved men relies on their relationships with others, that they aren’t as intrinsically worthy themselves. There are also racialised implications of Lester’s statement, being that black women in particular are the ones to suffer the most collateral damage from youth violence.

Dylan also framed his mother’s concern with his wellbeing as a central issue, which he framed as more significant than the worry that he had for himself;

*My mum could only sleep easy when I was in jail for the simple reason that she wouldn’t get a knock on the door saying I’ve been shot, knock on the door saying I’ve been arrested, knock on the door saying I’ve been charged with murder, knock on the door saying I’ve been shot again, knock on the door saying I’ve been stabbed, knock on the door saying I’ve been shot again. So, the only time she would sleep was when I was in jail (Dylan).*

In this passage Dylan is sharing some of his own most troubling times that occurred at the peak of his time on-road and gang-involved. However, he used his own mothers worry and lack of sleep as a way to talk about times when he has gone through adversity such as being arrested, being stabbed, and being shot. This reinforces the underlying themes of cathexis as discussed throughout this section, as Dylan frames his own fears and concerns through the way they affected his mother. In doing this Dylan maintains his own sense of invulnerable masculinity, whilst also sharing the situations that have indeed made him vulnerable.
7.3 Production Relations

Changes

2Pac (1998)

I'm tired of bein' poor and even worse I'm black
My stomach hurts so I'm lookin' for a purse to snatch
Cops don't give a damn about a negro
Pull the trigger kill a nigga he's a hero
Give the crack to the kids who the hell cares
One less hungry mouth on the welfare
First ship 'em dope and let 'em deal the brothers
Give 'em guns step back watch 'em kill each other

Music Track selected by Eric

The lyrics in the music track above highlight the issue of poverty with the intersection of gender and race. This was a thematic juncture that was returned to throughout the narratives and highlights why employing the lens of intersectionality is so important, as poverty is compounded by the other interlocking structural inequalities around race and gender.

The production relations that were discussed in Chapter six (section 6.4) were centred on the ways that the participants attempted to accumulate resources despite being children living in low-income families. This theme continued in the narratives of adolescence, where they were getting more involved in the criminality aspect of the gang, as well as this type of criminal pursuit of resources also a firm aspect of on-road culture. The production relations that the participants’ spoke
about at this time in their lives was concerned with their active involvement in crime as both a lifestyle choice as well as a means to access resources. Glynn (2014) noted that, when black men cannot find opportunities or have the resources to enact a ‘positive masculine identity’, then crime becomes a more attractive option. As was also stated by Collier (1998), the pursuit of criminal activity offers a range of benefits to men marginalized out of the mainstream. The means of production that the participants referred to in the narratives was predominantly robbery and drug dealing.

7.3.1 The Trap

In the previous chapter (section 6.4), I analysed narratives that focused on the ways in which the participants described their initial involvement on-road, which most often centred on seeking financial gain through involvement in drug dealing as a catalyst for their on-road and gang-involvement. Several of the participants then indicated their gang-involvement spiralled from that point, escalating to a situation where they felt involved in ‘bigger moves’ (Eric) than they had originally planned or expected, such as robbery, county lines drug trafficking, and firearm activity.

As the retrospective narratives came forth the participants’ often reflected on the way in which money served as the initial driver for gang-involvement but then things spiralled out of control. In the passage below Lester noted the way in which a desire to make money quickly evolved into carrying a firearm and normalising extreme violence:
It spirals to where everything’s just about money money money money and you just get caught up in it and if you rise to the top like I did you’ll end up getting big money and then you’ll have your gun with you every day and then everything will become normal and then you’ll end up shooting people like its normal and then it’s obviously not normal and the more you do it the more casual it will become to do it, do you understand? (Lester).

Lester noted that as he accumulated more wealth it was directly linked with gaining power. However, in retrospect Lester questioned that power, as he noted (a sentiment which was also echoed by Sam), that he wanted love but instead people were scared of him. This has a notable similarity with the role of a DVA perpetrator, whose masculine domination results in power gained through fear rather than love. Arguably, the patterns that the participants learned in their childhood, through the experience of DVA, is then repeated in their own pursuit of power at all costs. In this passage Lester is also highlighting the way in which the desire for financial gain, which started out similar to the other participants (as discussed in chapter six, section 6.4) then escalated to become more about power than anything else. The use of the word, ‘spirals’ is a powerful image to describe his experience and invokes a continuous lack of control. Shaun had a similar story, which took the same trajectory from an initial desire to make money, which then escalated as he became increasingly gang-involved. In a parallel to Eric’s reference of things spiralling, Shaun said things, ‘switched up’:

I wanted to make money, but I wouldn’t make it like get a job [laughs] probably like smash someone’s window and take their satnav [laughs] do you know what I
mean? Which is bad, but you’re a kid, everyone’s done some stupid shit when they’re a kid... I don’t know what happened, just all of a sudden it just switched up and yea I was just involved, but then when I was involved. I was very very, very involved. But its mad because when I look back now it scared me so much (Shaun).

In this passage Shaun was initially laughing and conveying his involvement in crime as an alternative to a regular job. He sought to downplay the effects of this, in actions such as theft of a satnav and damage of a car, by framing it as childish behaviour. By repeating the term, ‘kid’, Shaun is emphasising naivety and innocence as the context of the crimes. However, then he then referred to it ‘switching up’, which resulted in him becoming ‘involved’. The repetition of ‘involved’ seems to serve as a euphemism for the way in which Shaun became more inextricably linked to the gang and involved with associated criminality (which was pertinent as Shaun ended up serving a long prison sentence for fire-arm related offences). In the above passage as well, Shaun refers to the fear that he felt at the time. This shows how Shaun was able to convey the vulnerable masculinity that he felt at the time where he was also exhibiting protest masculinity. It shows how the participants shared their past insecurities through retrospective narratives.

This same narrative theme which involved the evolution from seeking money to escalating gang-involvement was outlined by Travis who made a word play by referring to it as a ‘trap’. This is both a reference to ‘trap-house’, the urban slang name of a drug factory, as well as the usual meaning of, ‘snare’ (Collins, 1988; The Urban Dictionary, 2019):
Travis: It starts off with the money but once you kinda get involved to that culture there’s a lot of people out there who are probably making enough money to get by now but they are still doing it anyway and a reputation and they fall in love with that kind of lifestyle, like the people that could just stop now and be happy are probably gunna carry on for a few years and either end up dead or in prison, they haven’t clocked on yet that they don’t need to do it no more, that’s why they call it the trap innit [laughs]

Jade: Is that what they call it?

Travis: Yea, like everything like the place where they cut the drugs, they call it the trap house- they call the end [neighbourhood] the trap, like everything to do with the word trap really

Jade: Interesting.

Travis: Yea it is a thing, they all blame the Government that they are trapped in these situations, but it gets a bit ridiculous when people are killing each other over postcodes which is land that they don’t even own, it’s not even their land.

In this passage Travis sought to highlight the futility of ‘the culture’ of on-road and gang-involved young people. Mirroring the other passages previously explored, he began by talking about the way in which the desire for money escalated to an increased involvement on-road. In this excerpt Travis is framing himself as separate from those who engage in this ‘culture’, as he commented on the futility of gang claims to territory, ‘killing each other’, when that land which they do not own. Travis conveys a cynicism about the perceived ‘trap’ enforced by the gang, the drugs, or by the government. Instead he noted optimistically, that people who are involved ‘could just stop now and be happy’. Travis was the youngest participant in the study
(twenty-one years old) and this could have contributed to his relative optimism, whereas most of the participants had experienced more of the negative consequences of involvement on-road and in gangs.

### 7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter dealt with the narratives at the peak of the participants’ time on-road and gang-involved. Using Connell’s analytic framework enabled the competing power relations at work during this period. One notable distinction was that of the hierarchy of masculinities, in particular the shift from being a man, to The Man. These lay in contrast to the subordinated masculinity that the participants’ inhabited in childhood, as discussed in chapter six. Moving from ‘a man’ to ‘The Man’ was heavily based on the instrumentalization of violence and fear. Moving from subordinated masculinity to protest masculinity was based on the way in which the participants shifted from being in fear of the DVA perpetrator at home, to mastering fear, and ultimately make others afraid of them. This was highlighted in the tension in the ‘nutter’ performance, which was performative violence as a protection strategy, outlining the way the participants discussed needing to make others fear them, in order to lessen their own feelings of fear.

As I presented in the analysis, the power relations involved in protest masculinity on-road was not just between a hierarchy of masculinities but was also affected by the intersections of race and ethnicity. There was a racialised undertone to the claim of status in the gang. Despite gangs being made up of varying ethnicities which seem to some extent reflect the wider community ethnic make-up, the
participants still seemed to be invested with the idea that the gang leadership and power arena was a black space. This could be to do with the development of protest masculinity in the gang context being a space where black males can claim a hegemonic position in a way that is less accessible in the wider society due to the effects of racism. However, it could also be because of the racism of gang labelling itself, that the wider society more easily situates black men as claiming the ultimate criminal position of gang leadership (as discussed in chapter three). This conundrum was reflected in the participants’ narratives and also may have been impacted by them telling me, as a white researcher, their stories of on-road and gang-involvement.

The participants all referred to financial reasons for their initial motivation to become involved on-road and with gangs. This is an important consideration because the reality is that the on-road and gang context does not occur in a vacuum, it is an option which presents itself in areas where there is co-existing poverty and marginalisation. As shown in the discussion in this chapter, protest masculinity is a performance which is situated in locations where men feel they don’t have the options of engaging with the mainstream markers of hegemonic masculinity. At the height of the participants time on-road and gang-involved, they were all able to support themselves financially through the means of the gang. This enabled them to present themselves with the clothes that reflected how they wished to be perceived among their peer group, to show an image that was contrary to the low-income with which they were brought up.

In regard to cathexis, the focus on the emotional charge of relationships during the height of their gang-involvement was described as being mainly centred on the development of affiliation to the gang and the ‘ties’ that this produced. As noted
explicitly in Shaun’s comments about finding love in the gang, the gang functioned for many as an alternative family. Although it did not satisfy all of the needs that the participants had, outlined by Sam and his dual search for a mother figure through the relationships that he had, which focused not mainly on the women who he was intimate with, but rather him finding a place in a wider family context which was the main motivator.

The participants reflections of DVA perpetration, presented a contradictory set of values. There was a contradiction between the espousal of anti-violence against women, as well as respect for women rhetoric, which was part of the narrative of the men’s victimhood in childhood as they were denigrating their own fathers’ behaviour. However, alongside there was a disclosure from Eric of explicitly perpetrating it, as well as an indication from Lester that he was at least coercively controlling the women he lived with, and they accused him of imprisoning them. Lester framed DVA as an instrumental form of power that he didn’t have to use. Whereas Eric shifted the blame onto the women for still hanging around with the gang despite being abused. Neither Lester nor Eric indicated that they had premeditated abuse against women, but rather that it occurred during their pursuit of a protest masculinity within the gang. The women were collateral damage in their pursuit of dominance and power. This fits with the hegemonic masculinity ideal which inherently rests on gender inequality and masculine domination of women.

Ultimately, all of the narratives that focused on the participants’ time being on-road and gang-involved and embroiled in the culture on-road all centred on the pursuit of protest masculinity. The money, peripheral placing of women, and violence were all tools for the participants to seek power and pride amongst their male peers. In this chapter I have explored the narratives of on-road and gang-involvement.
Although all participants appeared to engage and invest in protest masculinities, based on seeking power, securing a means of production and dominance in personal relationships. They spoke about roles that they were trying to fulfil at the time, as well as sharing their vulnerable masculinities. Central to these disclosures was the fact that these narratives were offered in retrospect, and so the participants were able to reflect on their vulnerabilities and fears in a way that may have not been possible at the time. This led to the contradictory juxtaposition between the development of protest masculinity and the inner vulnerabilities that were shared in retrospect.
The previous two chapters analysed the way in which the participants spoke about their home lives and their time on-road. In their life-stories, their masculine biographies broadly seemed to venture from subordinated masculinities at home in the private sphere, to protest masculinities in public spheres (school and on-road). Alongside these masculine identities, I also presented the vulnerable masculinity that the participants inhabited at the same time. These narratives showed that masculinity performance is not a two-dimensional issue, and that acting ‘hard’ and enacting violence were in many cases a protective strategy of men who were fearful themselves.

This chapter is concerned with the way that the participants referred to the development of alternative masculinities during the process of recovery from their on-road and gang-involved period. They all talked at different lengths about their process of desistance from criminality and how they disentwined themselves from their gang-involvement. For some (Dylan, Lester, Shaun) this separation from a gang and on-road focused life was prompted by long prison sentences, which served as a motivating feature of desistance. For others (Sam, Dave) enduring mental health problems initiated a search for help. Jordan and Eric completed a university education and sought to remove themselves from on-road life by seeking new employment opportunities. Research by Mullins (2006) found that most older ex-gang-involved men had withdrawn their involvement due to growing older out of it, as well as incarceration, both of which were significant reasons in my sample.
In this chapter I explore the ways in which the participants conceptualised new masculine selves after being on-road and gang-involved. This was not a linear process, as several of the participants shared the difficulties they faced reconciling new identities with habitual coping strategies still enduring. This led to discussions of their aspirations for non-violence masculinities and an awareness of ‘toxic’ masculinity. To look at this more closely I have used the lens of intersectionality to explore the ways in which race, ethnicity and class intersected with their gender identities.

8.1 Power Relations

In the period after on-road and gang-involvement the participants conveyed the ways in which they gave up the power, achieved through protest masculinity, and instead sought to negotiate new forms of masculine identities drawing on different cultural markers of success. The performance of protest masculinity involved an exercise of masculine power enacted within marginalised circumstances. This protest masculinity performance was abandoned for differing and individual reasons. This included becoming disenchanted with the risks of criminality; the effects of experiencing a prison sentence; or a changing sense of self due to fatherhood. As the participants’ relinquished this old masculinity performance, they had to find strategies to establish new identities and a means to sustain them which drew on different types of masculinity performances, ranging from complicit to marginalised masculinities.


8.1.1 Learning to Let Go of the Protest Masculinity Performance

The issue surrounding power relations when desisting from the on-road life was largely about letting go of protest masculinity as the predominant expression of masculinity. In this section the ways in which the participants described this initial process of separation is outlined. Following on from Chapter six where they referred to a residual sense of anger after experiencing the DVA at home, in their narratives of later life this was still discussed as enduring after their exit from gang-involvement. Eric spoke about how he experienced numerous setbacks after starting his new life at university, calling it his ‘demons’:

Each year of uni[versity] I went to hospital, so you’re down with that life, but there’s still something I haven’t, there’s demons that I haven’t, your parents, what your dad was doing to you, what your dad was doing to your mum, I’m always fighting... you’re angry, it’s like any person disrespects you I end up in a fight especially when you drink and that whole life comes back, everything you thought you left behind comes back (Eric).

At this point in the narrative, Eric’s frustration with himself was palpable. He referred to going to university and spending time with ‘normal people’ yet finding it difficult to disentangle himself from the ‘code of the street’, which prioritises pride and respect as of utmost importance. He said he went to hospital each year of university, referring to getting into fights that end up in him requiring treatment. Eric related this to letting go of the violence tied up with protest masculinity and pride. If he felt disrespected it was challenging for him to not respond violently to
the perceived challenge. This difficulty in changing the habitual responses to being challenged or disrespected was also discussed by Dave. Dave talked in his first interview about his current aim to promote a non-violent message to youths and to set up a campaign to in his local area. He subsequently requested a second interview to focus on the way in which although this was his aspiration, he was struggling to let go of the anger as well as letting go of the tendency towards confrontational behaviour, which would fit in the ‘code of the street’ but not in civilian life. In particular, he had developed a habit of intervening in conflicts of people on the street that he considered bad behaviour, for instance a man hitting a child, or a man acting inappropriately with a child. In these situations, he was able to justify himself as acting as a sort of social policeman, to call out the bad behaviour and challenge the perpetrator. Dave mentioned that it caused issues at work with managers, where he was expected to follow a different social code to that of the street. He noted that he could, ‘just flip with someone’.

Dave rooted his short-temperedness in his childhood experiences and in particular, when he decided not to ‘be a victim’ anymore, referring to this as a powerless position. He had developed a tendency to ‘over-compensate’ for his previous feelings of disempowerment:

*So pride is getting people killed isn’t it, it’s getting people feeling that they have to prove I’m not a little boy, I’m not some little idiot who you can talk to like that, and then if I hear about a pal of mine that has been stabbed or whatever when he didn’t walk away I think ah you idiot you could have just walked away you have kids you idiot. But I know I need to practice what you preach, because I definitely am all*
about walking away, but at the same time I'm quick to snap and I'm not gunna blame everything on my childhood, but I can’t ignore everything either (Dave).

As outlined by Dave above, in his life in recovery from gang-involvement he has been straddling the tension between trying to move forward with a new sense of himself focused on ‘walking away’ from conflict but remaining caught up in the aspect of ‘pride’ and the residual effects of his childhood trauma. Dave commented that although he felt pride was ‘macho bullshit’. This reference is revealing about the way that Dave felt masculine pressure to protect his own pride yet was also referencing it as ‘bullshit’ (rubbish). This aspect may have come from the retrospect nature of the narrative, in that he was looking back over his life and the way that pride had been implicated over the years. Dylan had developed the protection strategy of talking to people about his stresses, rather than ‘bottle it up’ as otherwise;

> When I’m frustrated it’s gunna come out and it’s gunna come out in a way where it might get me killed or send me back to jail so therefore, I’d rather discuss it with somebody’ (Dylan).

Travis also talked about the pressure on men ‘not to speak out’;

> Trying to live up to what society expects from you … The expectations and stuff that you know you can’t reach but you got to try and putting too much pressure on yourself and like the whole thing about recently it changed a lot with telling men
not to speak out and all that, but all the stereotypes, strong male role models, bottling everything up deep in yourself (Travis).

In this passage Travis is referring to the markers of hegemonic masculinity which are propped up by the ‘strong male role models’ who convey the ideal version of masculinity to younger men. He became very emotional when he spoke about the confines of masculinity on him, even talking about how he had felt driven to suicide at times with the pressure these expectations placed on him. Both of the retrospective reflections by Travis and Dylan as presented above show the way that their perspective on masculinity and vulnerability has changed from the protest masculinity performance that was discussed in chapter seven, where there was little space for expressing vulnerability at the time. Gough (2018) noted that there has been a recent shift away from the traditional idealisation of the unemotional man, due to wider recognition that stoicism is not positive or sustainable. This shift has been embodied in mental health campaigns which directly target men and aim to reduce stigma about talking about their feelings, such as ‘Time to Change’ which uses football metaphors to directly target men (Time to Change, 2019).

In the interview Dave focused on his recent discovery of the term, ‘toxic masculinity’. He noted that when he found out about this concept, ‘it all makes sense’. The term ‘toxic masculinity’ has been popularised since the 1980’s when there was an emerging focus on the ways in which aspects of masculinity affected men negatively (see chapter three, section 3.1.3 for more on this). It is a notion that is then pitched against an idea of ‘healthy masculinity’ (Kimmel & Wade, 2018). Although Kimmel (2018) noted the experience of toxic masculinity among men being like, ‘experiencing a conflict, inside them, between their own values and this
homosocial performance’ (Kimmel & Wade, 2018, p. 239). It is the barren emotional
territory of homosocial groups and their conflicts that Dave refers to, noting that;

There’s so much stuff with lads that are told you know if your hanging round the
wrong people it’s all about being tough, it’s all don’t be a pussy, don’t be gay, don’t
be this, don’t be that (Dave).

The homophobic culture of gangs was discussed at length by Dave and was the
focus of one of the music videos that he selected to show in the interview (Logic -
1-800-273-8255 ft. Alessia Cara, Khalid). This was an encrypted message really, as
the music track and lyrics are about feeling suicidal, yet the video follows the
persecution of a young man dealing with his sexuality and being ostracised for it.
This double meaning of the song was revealed only in the video. Although he didn’t
disclose at any point that he was himself homosexual, he talked a lot about the
negativity around homosexuality in the gang context and the general narrow-
mindedness that on-road culture offered. In excerpts such as above, being gay is
likened to being a ‘pussy’ (vagina), making a parallel between homosexuality and
femininity, with both being devalued and the antithesis to masculinity. In this way
it is clear that gay masculinities are subordinated, and associated with femininity,
in the gender hierarchy in gangs as in wider society (Connell, 2005).

Reflecting back on their lives led some of the participants to re-conceptualise their
past situations, emphasising the elements of disadvantage and looking at how they
came to perform a protest masculinity. Lester commented on what he saw as ‘the
moral of the story’, which was heavily tied up with an idea that performing a protest
masculinity was in part predictable for young men in certain situations, hinting at the idea of protest masculinity as a rite of passage for young men:

So, the moral of the story is, behind everything what’s negative or what some bad connotations to it ... is coming from these same places and sources of power that be, do you understand? It’s never the culprit or the persons who being painted as the bad guy who is really the bad guy, does that make sense? And that’s the facts of life. And when you know that to be true its hurtful, it would be hurtful for anybody, but these sixteen-year olds full of testosterone and full of wild, come on, if you give him a gun you don’t have to ask him twice to shoot it. It just fits into the narrative of everything (Lester).

By looking at the past through this lens, Lester was explaining the likelihood of young men committing to a protest masculinity as a likely scenario, relating it to their testosterone and them being ‘full of wild’. Through this, Lester is referencing the inevitability of masculinity as having hegemonic markers, so that if a boy gets a gun then the outcome is inevitable. This association of hegemonic masculinity with testosterone was also reiterated by Dave, who noted that, ‘it’s just this toxic masculinity, alpha, too much testosterone’. By looking at hegemonic and protest masculinities as inherently linked with male biology, the participants were not only naturalising their former behaviours but also suggesting a limited capacity to change.

8.1.2 Guilt, Self-Forgiveness, and Self-Acceptance
... So, I went from that to my release date actually coming, went to the gate, the out station and handcuffs and then they kept me there till 1 o’clock and my cousin met me ... we went to McDonald’s as I had McDonald’s in my head ... so, I went to the hostel, so the next day I woke up, saw the squirrels in the garden, that blew me away and I went to get a coffee to go to my Gran’s and I started crying in the fuckin coffee shop it all just overwhelmed me (Lester).

This excerpt is Lester’s story after leaving prison after a twenty-year sentence for attempted murder. Prison was a significant experience for Lester, particularly because he ended up doing a sentence in excess of twenty years. He refers to the prison space as a ‘cage’ and a ‘box’ to signify how restricted he felt there. In the excerpts below, he looks on the prison experience as his chance to ‘analyse things’, noting that he is ‘lucky’ that he has had more chance than most to both observe and critique mainstream society. He centred on his self-judgement;

Right, so then first you go through a process that, you first have to judge your own self, you have to go to yourself that certain things you were doing was wrong, and atone for that, genuinely (Lester).

Lester discusses the power of forgiveness as an important part in his recovery. He noted that he has judged himself and apologised for what he did, which was powerful experience he felt. In Lester’s comments above it seems significant that he talks about how he had to honestly judge himself and admit that some of his actions were wrong. Forgiving these transgressions would have been difficult, as he was entrenched in gang life for decades. Judging himself rather than referring to
being judged externally from the police and courts was significant here. This refers to the importance for him of reintegrative, rather than disintegrative shaming, deployed in restorative justice (Braithwaite, 1993; 1989). Judgment mattered most when it is brought on from people valued and respected by the perpetrator, which can often be outside of the criminal justice framework. To explain his recovery and the formation of a new masculine identity, Lester noted, ‘I used to be an idiot, but I’ve evolved that’s the difference’. Ascribing his recovery to his own personal evolution rather than as a product of the external fact of being imprisoned. Evolution as a concept implies progress and advancement. Despite this sense of change, Lester highlighted the importance authenticity:

*I know, I’m genuine, and I know I’m not working coz I learnt from a long time ago and lies and deceit it doesn’t work, you can’t keep that sham up forever coz it’s not gunna happen, you’ve got to be yourself, consistent* (Lester).

The notion of *being yourself* indicates that there is an inner essential self which endures through time. Lester showed a value-based constitution of the self, based on idealised notions of being a morally upstanding person in a way that now fits with wider society, rather than the ‘code of the street’ morality he spent his earlier years living by. This idea has been explored in depth by Maruna (2004) who found that the establishment of a ‘true self’ or ‘real me’ was an essential part to every desistance narrative. This genuine inner self is conveyed as, ‘deep, unsocialized, inner feelings and impulses and not in institutionalized roles or professional identities’ (Maruna, 2004). This sense of a true inner self that continues as the positive aspects of a person through desistance and recovery was reflected in the
participant’s narratives in this study. Mirroring Maruna’s (2004a) findings, was that instead of discovering new selves, the participants’ reached back to their past former selves in order to desist and recover. However, this idea of being their ‘true self’ is somewhat in conflict with the notion of stripping away previous masculinity performances. Instead, it can be seen as returning to the prior vulnerable masculinity, which the participants’ referred to in their histories, which were previously hidden due to the pressure that they felt to perform a type of protest masculinity. In doing this, they stripped back the desire to perform a type of hegemonic masculinity and instead centred a more genuine and muted sense of masculine self, which foregrounded authenticity and vulnerability over exaggerated traits in protest masculinity.

The notion of there being a genuine inner self which has endured throughout one’s life yet hidden to varying degrees was also referenced by Eric, who described the way he dealt with his past as adopting the ‘bad boy story’ as opposed to ‘the other one’, which was the more authentic one. Eric said that he ‘went with the bad boy story’ as underneath it all he was hurting and seeking love and belonging. Eric discussed the tension between his inner desire for ‘love’ and the way that he behaved in an oppositional way (by adopting hegemonic masculinity persona) because he felt it wasn’t available for him. The tension between his inner world and his outer world was typified in the comment that he felt he had ‘worn a mask’ throughout his life, highlighting that he is making a distinction between his self underneath the mask and the outer performance. He stated that;

*I feel like for me ... to accept to be an outcast, than to be, if it’s like to take the other side you have to admit that they don’t love you or you don’t know certain things,*
the outcast bad boy thing, it’s a good story, it sounds good, you go with that because boy if you go with the other one, it took me a long time, the depression the smoking, I mean it took me a long time to get to this point, it’s very hard to admit to yourself that I wanted that. It’s admitting to yourself I wanted that love. I wanted that there. And I didn’t get it and I didn’t get it and then I did and then I feel like there’s a part where it’s like I didn’t get over it, I yearned for that and you don’t wanna admit that to yourself because being me and then the next person was like where you at right now [laughs] I’m learning how to love other people and loving me coz you know loving me erm, I mean I love myself for me to get muscles all of this... I’m learning to love myself. I’m still struggling with it, it’s like stuff like this you don’t talk to people about it, your pushing a different, I don’t know, I don’t know that person you know? (Lester)

Eric’s use of the term ‘story’ here conveys the artifice of his narrative. It is an alternative story or tale, one adopted to avoid admitting the alternative. He noted that ‘it sounds good’. This indicates that there is an ease to which the bad boy narrative is easier than the good story, particularly as a young black man, than the less heard and more vulnerable story of a yearning for love. Eric then switched to talk from his current perspective and noted that it has taken him a ‘long time to get to this point’ where he admitted to himself that ‘I wanted love...and I didn’t get it’.

He presents this as a development project, that he has had to learn to love other people and himself. Eric situates proof of the development of self-love in an embodied way, by noting that for him to focus on his body, to ‘get muscles’ is evidence of this. Again, Eric notes the tension that this contrasts with the different person he is ‘pushing’. This term emphasises the forced nature of his alternative self, the bad boy image that he has been portraying, being ‘pushed’, again a term
conveying a physicality to his struggle. Overall, in this part of his narrative Eric positioned himself considering his recognition that he has craved love throughout his life. By positioning himself in this way, he is foregrounding this vulnerable self as the *real* one, in opposition to the ‘*outcast bad boy story*’, which he denounces as a *mask*. Again, this links back with Maruna’s (2004a) notion of there being an inherent self which continues throughout an individual’s life. The concept ‘being yourself’ is one which is also tied up with a wider idea of authenticity. To be seen as authentic, one needs to present themselves as effortlessly presenting oneself. This is in contrast to the significant amount of work that it took the participants to construct protest masculinity performances which required a lot of work and maintenance to be respected and seen as powerful among peers, as discussed in Chapter seven.

### 8.1.3 Self-Understanding Through Psychological Concepts

In the same way that Eric can be seen in the prior discussion to have looked back retrospectively in his life in order to understand it, similar can be said for some of the others (Sam, Dylan and Dave). There was a tendency for the participants to describe their past lives using popular psychology and self-help therapeutic discourse as a way to explain to themselves. For instance, Sam told me he had ‘*studied his life*’ to understand what had happened to him. At different points in the interview they referred to their own situations through phrases which have their origins in psychotherapy but have since become more mainstream. It was only Sam who explicitly mentioned accessing inpatient psychiatric support. I assume the others may have received prison, probation, or community-based
support/therapeutic interventions in order to gather these understandings of themselves through this lens. Examples include Dylan noting in the past it was ‘learned behaviour’. Sam conveyed several points drawing on therapeutic language. He noted ‘you become what you’ve been labelled’, he had become, ‘desensitized’, ‘labelled’, ‘dehumanized’. Sam also drew heavily on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs at several points in the interview as a way to explain his past behaviours, namely, ‘he says when your basic needs aren’t met your likely to go elsewhere to find them’, in particular he was looking for a ‘mother figure’. These examples show how the participants had sought theories to explain the paths that their lives had taken, outside of the realms of structural inequality. Instead these reasons are focused on individual and family deficiencies, which result in the personalisation of the problems they faced.

8.1.4 Finding God

I'm Sorry

Joyner Lucas (2016)

I'm depressed as fuck

Stressed as fuck

Ain't no medicine that could cure what's the test as drugs

I mean, I need extra love

And that ain't even enough

'Said that ain't even enough

And where the fuck is God?

Damn, maybe I ain't believing enough
A different way that some of the participants referred to shifting power relations in the formation of their new sense of self was through their finding a place within a religious system. In this way, there was a relinquishing of power to an external God. This also gave an opportunity for a different type of understanding of their past behaviours, as well as the adoption of a new framework through which to construct both a self-forgiveness as well as an external forgiveness. Deuchar (2018) explored the function of religion and spirituality in the recovery of formerly gang-involved men. He found that engaging with spiritual endeavours offered ex-gang-involved men ways to develop alternative masculinities in the process of recovery. He noted that religion offered men the opportunity to move from ‘masculine criminal distinction’ to ‘masculine spiritual distinction’, meaning that through this shift men are able to avoid their ever-present fear of emasculation in the process of recovery. By adopting new identities through spiritual pursuits ex-gang-involved men were able to find new means of achieving status and capital which offered a chance to adopt a new code, distinct from the code of the street.

Dave, Lester and Sam all described religion playing a role in their lives and in their recovery, but in different ways. Sam was approached by a street pastor who made it his business to reach out to him as well as listen and answer his questions. Sam shared the moment he turned to religion:

Then one day he [preacher] came and I just said, do you know what, coz you ain’t gunna stop, so I’m gunna sit down, so talk to me and he throwing all these crazy,
these things at me and I’m throwing back at him questions like so why this then, why that then, why why why and why why why, and I’m just why why why why why why why … And they just popped up with their things and I was like woah this is crazy and they were talking to me and they was like take this book and I was like no I’m not gunna take this book I’ll probably just throw it away, and they were being really nice and I liked it as well, I started to like it coz they was really nice and I never really had that, people didn’t really talk to me like that either because they was half scared of me (Sam).

Recognisable here was the element of someone being ‘nice’ to him, which Sam had not experienced before. This was coupled with a persistent offer to help, as well as patience to listen to the many ‘why’ questions that Sam had asked. The kindness alongside the listening of a stranger was a powerful combination and it appeared to give Sam the external validation of himself as an individual worth listening to, as well as a sense of belonging to something bigger, outside of the gang framework. Jordan emphasised the role of grace within the Christian faith. Grace is the concept of love and forgiveness provided unconditionally and regardless of past transgressions. He described how he had been carrying the ‘condemnation’ that he described as being, ‘clogged up in my heart, shame and guilt and so much things that I went through’. Religion offered him a way both to understand and to repent the past, which enabled him to understand his past in light of the adversity that he had experienced.

Engagement in religion not only offered the opportunity for self and external forgiveness, but also presented a different moral code to the ‘code of the street’. This was indicated by both Sam and Lester, who found comfort in the behavioural
prescriptions of religion. Sam noted that since finding religion he just ‘goes by the bible’, which clearly demarcates what are the ‘right things’ to do. Lester described the role of religion in his life being predominantly about the way that he constructed a morality which transcends judgements from his peers and is instead founded on a relationship with God. Lester noted that he is most afraid of people who say they don’t have religion, because in his eyes they do not have a moral code to prevent them doing the most harm. Dave focused more on the practical support that he had received by engaging in the church. He discussed that he had been helped by the church in recent years. He had gone to a local church when he had been struggling financially and they had helped him and his children with a grant for essentials.

Ultimately, engaging in organised religion at the point of recovery from their prior lives offered various benefits to the participants. It offered a way in which to relinquish the power that was concentrated and manifested in protest masculinity performance, to cease to seek to be ‘The Man’ within the gang, but instead to become one of a wider community who all recognize the external power of a male God in place of a traditional male hierarchy. These findings are consistent with Deuchar’s (2018) assertion that ex-gang-involved men move from ‘masculine criminal distinction’ to ‘masculine spiritual distinction’ through this shift. This was supported by the way the participants’ depicted the adoption of different codes of behaviour once engaged with organised religion, they indicated that having an alternative model of life on offer made this shift clearer for them as they exchanged their old lives for new ways of being. Situating this discovery of religion through Connell’s framework, it actually affected all areas of the gender order. It was
uniquely successful in addressing production relations (gave money when needed), power relations (deference to the Almighty) and Cathexis (feeling soulful).

Through situating this within Connell’s discussion of power relations, I am framing the adoption of religion as a strategy to relinquish the type of power that was sought when aiming to be ‘The Man’, which typified the expression of on-road protest masculinity. In terms of masculinity analysis, all the participants that turned to spirituality found a patriarchal religion with a male God. Perhaps this made for an easier exchange, as it is still remaining within a framework of masculinity, albeit with a different type of revered masculinity, more akin to the traditional hegemonic model. However, this observation is taken with the caution that the majority of major world religions adopt this structure.

8.2 Cathexis

The element of cathexis surfaced in the participants talk about their recovery and how it was centred not on intimate relationships with partners, but by a changing self as they became fathers. This was a contrast to the interpersonal relationships that were foregrounded at other points in their lives. This represented a shift in the way that the participants’ perceived themselves in the nexus of their personal relationships. Starting to see themselves as important to dependants was a part of the development of a different identity, based on interrelatedness rather than independence.
8.2.1 Fatherhood and Family

Forging a new sense of self around the prioritisation of their role as fathers, brothers and sons, was transformative for some of the participants. In this way they looked to the wider repercussions that their behaviour had on those around them. Fathering as an identity can provide opportunities for men to develop different masculinities and, ‘expand their repertoire of emotional communication, while distancing themselves from a mothering or feminised position’ (Gough, 2018, p. 42). Thus fatherhood presents novel opportunities for men to enhance their ‘caring masculinities’ through nurturing (Gough, 2018, p. 58). Some of the participants had shifted from being an uninvolved absent father during the height of their time involved in gangs and on-road, which has then shifted through their recovery as they centralised this role in their lives. As the research method was an unstructured interview, I did not systematically take data on which participants were parents. Instead I relied on them foregrounding this issue in the interview, however half of the participants discussed it, with the exception of Travis, Jordan, Lester, Shaun.

Dylan very much centred his current masculinity as being focused on his role as a father. On his past parenting, he noted that he used to ‘throw money at them’ whereas now he values the time he has to spend with them instead, particularly in contrast to the lengthy prison sentence that took him away from them. Dylan conceptualised a new sense of pride, which is distinct from the pride that he felt during his time gang involved;

*Nowadays they [children] don’t have to say thanks for possessions now*
they say thanks for being with us and they are proud of the work that I do (Dylan).

I made a promise to my daughter and my mum, do you know, thank God my mum lived long enough to see me turn my life around (Dylan)

As is seen in Dylan’s comments, he is making a distinction between his role as a father at the height of his time on-road and gang-involved, to his current identity. Grundetjern et al., (2019) carried out an exploration into ‘marginalised fatherhood’, by looking at the ways that drug dealing fathers assigned their identities as parents. They found that in recent years, new paternal identities have come to the fore, where fathers are increasingly expected to play a more active role in their children’s lives. However despite this, there is still a tendency to focus on mothers rather than on fathers, which has left a less clear ‘cultural content ascribed to fatherhood’ (Grundetjern, Copes, & Sveining, 2019, p. 2).

Shaun referred to the process of realising how much he missed out on in regard to his family whilst he spent five years in prison. It seemed easier for him to appreciate the losses through looking at his family and in particular his mother’s suffering during his time incarcerated:

It’s heavy, it’s your family, you look at your family when you’ve gone to jail, and having to go on visits and see your mum stressed out and sad and my sister [pause] And sometimes they’ll be crying, and things and, you know what I mean, missed my niece being born, my sister started to need me and I missed them both ... I’m very
close to them now ... missed so many Christmasses, birthdays. I was in jail for the best part of my life (Shaun).

This passage reveals a sense of remorse over the lost time, for himself as well as in relation to his family. Realizing that he was ‘needed’ by his sister indicates that he was forging different types of ‘ties’ than the gang ties as described in chapter six. It was a process of shifting the affiliation away from the gang and back to family which enabled him to achieve a different sense of belonging after his experience in prison.

Dave recounted an incident where he had been attacked publicly and then vowed to get revenge. However not long after Dave became a father himself, he saw via social media that the perpetrator had become a father. These shifts made Dave consider the issue differently, as if both their lives had become more important through their relation to others:

I could see him one day and punch him and think that was deserved but I thought I could give him brain damage, I could get myself locked up, he’s got a daughter to think of who yea her dad in my eyes is a dickhead but that’s not her fault but I don’t wanna get myself locked up so I just left it in the end but it did eat away at me (Dave).

As the stakes got higher once Dave had children, it has since caused him to be scared of bringing his children to where he lives, as it is still a gang affected area. He noted that he was, ‘scared for my son, and for myself as well, because where I’m living’. He says the next generation of gang-involved young men spend time on the
streets close to his house and he has been mugged and had a knife pulled on him since desisting from gang activity. Returning to be a ‘civilian’ in the area after being gang involved caused a shift in his own perception of risk and safety. Jordan described being scared of becoming a father, as if his relationship broke down, he would not want to be the ‘weekend person’, referring to a part-time parent with joint custody. He noted that, ‘It must be quite heart-breaking ... It sorts of puts me off having children’. He shared his desire to ‘be proper’ as a father and the weight of it felt considerable to him.

8.2.2 Role Models for Different Masculinities: The Role of Music

Somewhat separate to the other frames through which I have explored the changing masculinities the participants referred to, there was also a distinct thread around how they used musicians as malleable role models. The musicians the participants described were able to draw on the wider cultural capital of both hegemonic and protest masculinities as they rapped about (and sometimes were involved in) life on-road. However, as musicians and artists they were also able to be role models of artistic sensitivity, sharing vulnerable feelings through their music. This was shown in the tracks that the participants brought to the interview space which varied from those which talked positively about protest masculinity and gang-involvement, yet by far the majority of songs were those which revealed emotions, insecurities, and tales of adversity.

Several of the participants referred to the role models within the music that they selected for the research interviews. A central reason cited was that rappers (in
particular DMX and Tupac) offered the participants an alternative model of masculinity. Eric noted that they showed him that men could be open with their emotions. There were two DMX songs and two Tupac songs chosen during the fieldwork. They offered a dual masculinity, one where they had street capital but also were able to articulate their emotions and show a sensitive side:

*I think for me coz its always been about DMX and Tupac, for me they did it for me and they’re like one of the two rappers were these hard guys but they’re very very soft and very open about their emotions (Eric).*

The rappers had street credibility as well as pursuing creative outlets. One participant explained how Tupac’s music played a big role in his youth, from being a role model that he looked up to which gave him the confidence to pursue education as well as manage the street life at that time. His explanation of why he chose the song really highlights the use of music as a support and coping mechanism as a young person as he noted that listening to Tupac allowed him ‘to go to school instead of crying’. He noted that Tupac, ‘played a big role in my life’:

*I literally researched him. I was crazy about Tupac. He made me realise I could be both, I could be out here doing whatever and still be educated, I can go and read a book, he allowed me to go and spend time in a library actually, let me go find a book to read, let me go find this and this, let me educate myself (Eric).*

The element of permission is evocative in this passage. Tupac offered a model of performing a type of protest masculinity, living on the margins and gang involved yet highly successful, whilst also offering a sense of permission for the artistic and sensitive outlets that Eric so deeply wanted to express. Jordan also felt an affiliation
with Tupac as a role model. Interestingly the two participants that mentioned Tupac were the two that had managed to have a period of life in a gang-involved/on-road life, but also had managed to gain University degrees at other times. Tupac offered that positive role model and was perceived by these two men as offering a model way of being that balanced the street life and an educated and/or artistic life:

So that’s one of my all-time favourite songs by the artist called Tupac whose been very big inspiration not only on a musical term, but as a person, as a survivor, as a black man, as a man on the streets and the roads, and as a role model, just for what he stood for, the content of his lyrics and his perspective and vision and how real he kept it and the same struggles that I believe I have lived to face (Jordan).

Here Jordan is explicitly referring to the multi-faceted dimensions of Tupac as a role model which inspired him. Tupac is a complex public figure because in some senses he performed protest masculinity through emulating, ‘the mob image of power, toughness, ruthlessness, elite, ruggedly classy, wealthy, and womanizing ways’ (Iwamoto, 2003, p. 46). Iwamoto noted that he presented an idealized model of on-road protest masculinity, due to the lack of male role model in his own life. This idealised version was characterised by, ‘exaggerated toughness and physical strength that equated to respect and power- all characteristics of what he considered as defining a real man’ (Iwamoto, 2003, p. 46). Iwamoto noted that this performance of ‘hyper-masculinity’ is attractive to young black men, who adopt these behaviours, ‘to combat the degrading effects of racism on their self-esteem’ (Iwamoto, 2003, p. 45). He goes on to say that there is a dearth of positive role models for young marginalised black men.
Due to poverty and neglect, black youth are often deprived of and under-exposed to cultural influences that differ from those of the mass media, which often negatively or one-dimensionally depict black men as villains, murdered, gang members, boxers (Latinos), and martial artists (Asians). These one-dimensional portrayals are indicative of the limiting stereotypical attitudes, beliefs, and values of the larger society (Iwamoto, 2003, p. 45).

In this discussion Iwamoto analysed the lack of role model options for Tupac to choose from, and in turn he himself became a role model for the men to whom I spoke. Tupac also conveyed positive messages about being black in his music. Tupac felt a sense of ‘pride, empathy and appreciation for black culture’ (Iwamoto, 2003, p. 48). Tupac was not only about promoting gang stereotypes, however. Iwamoto noted that his music often had an empowering stance, for young black men as well as for women. His music often portrayed, ‘narrations of the struggles and intense hardships people in poverty face on a daily basis’ (Iwamoto, 2003, p. 46).

8.3 Production Relations: The struggles of Earning Money Outside Criminality

Changes

2Pac (1998)

We gotta make a change

It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes.

Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live

And let's change the way we treat each other.
You see the old way wasn’t working so it’s on us to do

What we gotta do, to survive.

*Music Track selected by Eric*

The production relations that were revealed in the narratives about desistance and recovery were very much centred on the ways in which men attempted to reconfigure their means of production away from gang criminality. However inherent in this process is the conundrum that protest masculinity is often formed due to a sense of marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream means of production. At the time of interview most of the participants were facing not only the personal challenge of changing their lives but had to face the existing structural inequalities that excluded them in the first place. The intersections of race and class were particularly salient here and are a focus throughout this section.

The production relations changed enormously when the participants described ending their gang involvement. For several of the participants the process of leaving was more of a gradual process and one which was fraught with trying to find alternative ways of earning money and supporting themselves away from crime. Dylan in particular, noted that, ‘the easy way [to make money] is criminal’, despite the ‘occupational hazards’ of the threat of prison or harm, it is easier because, ‘you’re always going to make money’.

Eric talked at length about his journey away from gang involvement as a long process where he lived in homeless hostels and committed crime in the evenings, but then also attended college or university in the day times. Eric outlined how he negotiated this shift, from being around ‘homeless hostel people’ and considering
himself an ‘outcast’, but then integrating with the new peer group of ‘normal people’ at university who he realised he shared a ‘mind-set’ with. However, at that time Eric hadn’t understood the process of student finance and so was stealing laptops from fellow students and selling them to get by. This was until one girl reached out to him and told him ‘you don’t have to do that, your money’s coming in’. She explained the process of the loan and Eric was able to stop the criminality.

8.3.1 Marginalised Masculinity, Structural Inequality and Access to Means of Production

The main theme that ran throughout Lester’s narrative was his concern with structural inequality in society. Throughout the interview he linked societal inequality, in particular those determined by race, money and power. One of his key phrases was to say that everything is ‘stacked’, which refers to the structural inequality and the way in which he regarded economic success are largely pre-determined, by those who were ‘born lucky’ with fathers who were ‘money men’. Lester focused on the vast societal inequalities which mean that;

_Only a certain amount of people gets the good spots and the good jobs and the good money ... And all the people with all the good spots make sure all their cousins, their friends they get it’ (Lester)._

Lester felt particular disdain for the superficial rhetoric of meritocracy; ‘what about best man for the job, all of it stinks, you understand?’. He noted, ‘everyone’s battling
for the same crumbs. And there should be no battle for crumbs, it should be all inclusive’. Lester’s frustration refers to the barriers he has faced when finding work in his new capacity as a freelance gang consultant. He is network-poor due to his significant time spent in prison and so is unable to pull the strings that are needed to break into a new commercial industry. The entrepreneurial skills that he acquired on-road do not transition to recognised skills of the conventional workplace, so he seeks to financialise his gang experience.

Lester was insistent about foregrounding his racial identity in the interview. In many ways Lester’s interview was constructed on his political commentary about structural inequality. To describe his view of racism more clearly Lester used his song choice of Bob Marley, Natural Mystic, to describe the ways in which he experienced a feeling of being an outsider due to his racial identity.

**Natural Mystic**

**Bob Marley and the Wailers** (1977a)

There’s a natural mystic
Blowing through the air
If you listen carefully now you will hear
This could be the first trumpet
Might as well be the last
Many more will have to suffer
Many more will have to die
Don’t ask me why
Things are not the way they used to be
Lester used the analogy of the ‘natural mystic’ to describe the ever-present element of both racism and racial awareness. He likened it to the feeling that his dog gets when he smells the air to ‘pick up everything that is going on’, then decides if he feels peaceful or uncomfortable. Through this analogy Lester is conveying a sense of race as a haunting presence, that is part of the environment and atmosphere but is invisible. One becomes aware of it by sensing it. This notion of the natural mystic that Lester discusses is strongly reminiscent of Avery Gordon’s (2008) sociological analysis of haunting. Gordon denotes haunting as, ‘one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied’ (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi). This fits well with the racism that Lester is referring to as in the air. Gordon uses the term haunting not to refer in particular to the experience of being oppressed, exploited, or other forms of ‘social violence’, but rather it is the haunting that is produced by them (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi). The imagery of haunting also conveys the way that discrimination is hard to grasp, talk about, or get rid of, as like a ghost, it is an experience few may believe or understand.

8.3.2 Charity Work
A common career trajectory in desistance was as an expert-by-experience in the field of gang prevention and/or anti-youth violence initiatives. In some cases, this was as a main role, whereas for others it was conveyed as a passion in addition to their other work. Making money from this type of gang consultant and campaigner roles was referred to as difficult by all the men concerned, however they were clear that money was not a key motivator. Becoming a moral expert by drawing on their past experience was developed as a tool for their new sense of themselves as reformed men. It enabled them to retain some of the symbolic markers of their former gang lives, by emphasising their former toughness and street credibility, whilst simultaneously constructing a superior achievement in that life through being a survivor, when so many others are not. This echoes the findings in Maruna’s (2004) exploration of desistance narratives, where he found that the motivation of ‘giving something back’ to society as a form of reparation was pertinent. As noted in the passage below, Dylan framed the charity work that he does now as both giving back, as well as mitigating against his former badness:

_I don’t think there is such a things as a bad kid, people think there is bad kids, but kids are kids, and kids make bad choices, do you know, and take bad options, I don’t believe there is any bad in any kid, do you know, because I’ve done more probably, most of the bad, more bad than anybody in this country, I’m not saying that being flippant with it, I know that I must have done a lot of bad, as much as the next person, but I know I’ve also done more good than anybody in my community (Dylan)._
In this short passage Dylan repeats the term ‘bad’ eight times. He initially is using to talk about young people (and thus forgiving his former younger self), much in the same way Lester did in his talk about helping young people (see chapter eight, section 8.2.2). Dylan is clear to separate young people who ‘make bad choices’ from being actually bad themselves. He then changes to refer to himself directly, where he outlines that, although he has done ‘more bad than anyone in the country’, this has been outweighed by his subsequent charity work. This excerpt reveals the way in which Dylan uses his current work to neutralise his past. Dylan was also clear in the interview to point out that there was not a financial incentive for him to do his charity work. He noted that;

95 per cent of my work I do for free, do you know, I really struggle at times (Dylan).

This again foregrounds a sense of selfless charity, rather than opportunism. Lester recounted that he earned small amounts for his charity work, however was more explicit about wanting future profit. He lamented the difficulties with making a freelance type organisation without having the ‘machine’ (infrastructure) behind him. He held faith that the ‘big money would come’ and ultimately felt that young children who were at risk of being gang involved would be ‘ten times more likely to listen’ if he had a Mercedes to jump into after. Through this, Lester is navigating how to form a new non-violent masculinity through charity work, yet also recognising that the younger men that he seeks to influence will be impressed by the markers of hegemonic masculinity as he was.
There is clearly a large part of the motivation for this work to ‘give something back’ to society and help young men who will be in a similar situation. However, it is also important to consider that it is a function of enduring structural inequality against marginalised, ethnic minority ex-gang members with a criminal record, that mean that it is less than easy to shake off the prejudice and seek employment in a conventional way after recovery. In a way the participants who adopted the idea of experts-by-experience as ex-gang members were still capitalising on their previous protest masculinity success yet inverted the marginalization of their criminal record and gang-involved pasts by reclaiming them as positive experiences that they draw on to inspire change and promote non-violence.

8.3.3 Being a Positive Role Model

When focusing on narratives of self-acceptance and self-forgiveness, one that really stood out was Jordan’s narrative thread of ‘shining’ through (and despite of) his past circumstances. Jordan made a strong case throughout that he was different, stood out from his peers, which is why he has succeeded in life. In different ways all three of his music choices were exploring this theme. The first track showed vulnerable children which he identified with, but then in contrast with a ‘suave’ rapper that he identified with as well. In the second track the rapper was talking about a lucky escape from a shooting. Jordan used this track to convey his own sense of feeling ‘bulletproof’ and ‘blessed’. Lastly, he chose a Tupac song, and Jordan told me how much respect he had for him as a black man who had been involved in street life but was also an entrepreneur. Although Jordan chose three songs which represented his life chronologically, describing his youth, his
adolescence, then his twenties, overall it was a unified narrative of his life with a clear moral message about survival and redemption. One example of how he did that, was through using the music video to explain what he meant:

![Figure 4: Music Video stills from WestSideGunn ft. Tiona D- Never Coming Home (2014)](image)

In this passage Jordan is referring to the parts of the music video shown above, in particular the rapper having an umbrella held for him on the street, which is otherwise a neglected area. This help Jordan convey his core message of the very

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3 Abandoned House
4 A house used for the production and distribution of crack cocaine
‘gritty’ childhood contrasted with the rapper who is ‘shining’ despite his circumstances. This is an example of the effectiveness of music elicitation.

In the below excerpt Jordan really goes into how he perceives his past and how he locates himself someone who is different from his peers. His high self-esteem and confidence are clear here and he does embody it in his persona. As I listened, I wondered if it was something to do with his age, being in his mid-twenties, that he had an enthusiasm for life, or whether he was just so pleased that he had survived his past and was a successful entrepreneur. I think it is also worth considering that, as branding himself as a role model, the consumer of his product is buying him, his story, his own persona. So, in that way he is embodying his message and product, which is a successful ex-gang member, a ‘positive role model’ like he says:

I feel bullet proof you know physically mentally and spiritually I really do, I feel I’m blessed and that’s one of the reasons why I made the transition from being on the streets into kind of not even kind of, getting a degree setting up a business, going into the other side of life, you know the other side of the fence, the reverse side of the coin, I started to grow through faith in god and faith in myself, going through lots of trials I do feel bulletproof, whatever I face it’s only a matter of time before I crack it ... And that song as it says is 100 shots and I’ve had more than 100 shots at me and I’m still here, still excelling, still outshining myself, in every move that I make, I always surprise myself as the years progress. Every year more achievements, more goals are being accomplished. And that’s what it’s about. It’s being a positive role model and that started to occur in that part of my life towards the end of my life the violence (Jordan).
When explaining this part of his life he again conveys a sense of standing out among his peer group. I think his comment here really conveys the sense that being positive and internalising this survivor narrative has been an active choice by Jordan as a way to make sense both of his own physical survival when some of his peers did not, as well as a determination to survive the gang life and see his life turn into something different. Drawing on the symbolism of survival is a movement that has been part of feminist domestic violence discourse, but in slightly different ways. I wonder if there is a similarity there, that concentrating on your own survival is more positive than wondering why the bad things happened to you.

8.3.4 Giving Blood

Dave found an alternative means of production, as he had turned to blood donation as a way to exhibit a new type of masculinity. This masculine expression was centred on helping people, ‘giving something back’ and finding a resource that he could offer. At the point that we met Dave had completed sixty blood donations and was completing a double session of platelets, so he could go every two weeks. He described a new type of pride that he gained (in contrast to the pride in the context of the gang) as he received certificates from the blood donation service thanking him. Dave noted that giving blood provided him with a good opportunity to feel a new positive sense of pride as he conveyed the impact of his donations; ‘one donation could help 12 babies!’:

If you’re like me and you’re not feeling really proud of yourself do something good, there’s no guilt in doing something positive, it’s not like, you can’t be proud of this,
it’s not like saying your perfect. When you’ve got people who hate you, that’s what tricky, I know I’ve got people who hate me, so when I put out something positive, I’m like well look at him pretending he’s a nice guy, but actually I will be honest, I’m giving something back (Dave).

There is something beautiful in the simplicity of blood donation as a form of new pride. Dave searched resources literally from within himself and used it as a way to produce something he could be positively proud of. He planned to get to one-hundred donations and then give the certificate to a deceased friends mother, in his friend’s memory. This is another example of the ways in which prior on-road experience, such as seeing friends die through gang violence, can be inverted to look for the ways in which a positive can be now found in contrast.

8.3.5 Complicit Masculinity: ‘Growing up in a corporate world’

There was a tension throughout the narrative between Eric identifying himself as a someone who is inherently a gang involved man or as a professional man with little knowledge of violence. In the latter part of his narrative Eric positioned himself as an educated professional. The way that Eric contrasted his current contemporary ‘young professional’ identity with his historic gang identity by comparing a violent response to an issue with ‘going to HR (Human Resources)’. He referred to this as a contrast several times, which illustrated his now conformity with a professional way of dealing with issues. Eric mentioned that he ‘grew up in a corporate world’, despite only working in a professional environment since after he graduated from
university, is revealing. It is like as his professional identity developed it was a second adolescence where he ‘grew up’ in a different way, moving away from his old gang identity. In the following passage he switches from referring to other ‘guys who have been in gangs’ as ‘they’ then ‘we’. This evokes the tension that exists between his identification as one of them, or as a member of the different group who would use HR. Here Eric talks about how sometimes he walks past gang members in the street, and he felt that they can immediately tell that he was once involved:

I’ve got so far in my life I think to prove a point to these guys, to my friends or to myself. Oh, you can disrespect me if it makes you feel better… you’re lucky I’m not at work or I’d call HR [human resources] [laughs] I’ll call HR on you… I think how I dress and how I walk they see you, I feel like guys who have been in gangs and whatever, they know each other, we know each other and how you look, coz you look at someone in the eye and you won’t look away, someone I catch myself ill look at him, guys are looking at me and they’re like ‘bruv what you saying’ and I’m like ‘I’m not your guy, I’m just coming from work are you alright?, and then he don’t know what to say and he’ll come like I’m not your guys, if you guys are about to come and beat me, you’re probably about to do that, you’re about to beat me your definitely going to win, this is not me guys, I’m not a dickhead I’m not a prick like that, maybe you catch me when I’m drunk and boy your gunna wish your didn’t do that, or maybe your gunna catch me with my boys, they’re gunna wish you didn’t do that, but my guy but that’s past me cuz, that’s not me (Eric).

A feature of this passage is the conflict between two distinct masculine codes of performance. On the one hand there is the protest masculinity of the streets, which is defined by the codes of respect and power sought through violence. The
challenge is made when he noted he will see gang involved men and they would look at each other and not look away. The reference to being ‘seen’ by other gang involved men is also powerful, suggesting that even though Eric’s clothes and demeanor have changed, he cannot shake the on-road based protest masculinity within. The confrontational nature of that exchange is clear. Eric also made thinly veiled threats, that if the opposers caught him drunk, or with his ‘boys’ they would wish they hadn’t. This protest masculinity performance is then contrasted with his complicit corporate masculinity which he developed whilst working in a professional role. In a complete contrast to the provocative language used referring to protest masculinity he instead notes that if he was at work he would go to human resources (although laughed to make this a joke with an undertone of reality). This is the polar opposite in terms of defending oneself, as even in a corporate context referring a complaint to HR rather than deal with it directly emphasised extremely non-confrontational behaviour. This also signifies living by a different set of mainstream/corporate rules as distinct to the ‘code of the street’. Overall this passage shows how he is continually navigating a complex position between having street credibility and identifying as a naïve professional. He switches between threats and the claim that ‘that’s not me’ as he deals with the juxtaposed social codes and masculinities that he has been involved in.

8.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter was concerned with the participants’ lives after being on-road and gang-involved. In varying ways, they had all gone through a process of disillusionment with inhabiting a protest masculinity and this began a period of
reflection and rebuilding of their masculine identities. The ways in which power relations changed among the men at the stage of recovery was centred on them talking about how they gave up the power that the protest masculinity performance had afforded. Their perspective on their power changed when looking back on their lives retrospectively. Several participants mentioned that in retrospect the power that they had found through this means was not real power, but symptomatic of being embroiled in the code of the street, to act tough and respond to disrespect violently. As noted in the previous chapter, both pride and respect were significant pillars in the code. These were difficult habits to break, as outlined in the narratives of the struggles that they faced. Dave in particular had started to call out toxic masculinity, as it was a lens that proved useful for him to understand the constraints on him as an individual and the pressures that he felt to perform outer toughness. Other participants had studied their lives in order to make sense of their past, as a way to work through and see another way was possible, this was reflected in use of therapeutic concepts to explain their past needs and desires that had led them on-road and gang-involved. Understanding themselves more through these ways proved an important part of their healing process, as did developing a sense of self-acceptance and forgiveness for what had gone before.

The production relations in this chapter were all focused on how the participants navigated removing themselves from gang criminality and finding alternative means to gain esteem from their differing forms of production. All of the participants’ noted how criminality provided the type of income streams which, when tied up in the other parts of on-street protest masculinity, also gave access to cash and women (both commodified). Thus, letting go of these resources from
gang activity involved much more than just seeking employment, but was centred up on forming a new sense of self in terms of masculinity. As Lester noted, the civilian world of work is rigged with structural inequalities that mean that there are significant barriers for marginalised men, never mind those with significant criminal records and histories of gang involvement. Thus, the participants referred to the ways in which they sought to navigate this. One strategy was to develop employment through moral earnings, sharing one’s own story and campaigning as anti-gang activists. Several were pursuing this goal. This was an astute strategy in some ways, as it relied on the cultural capital of former gang involvement, which relied on the code of respect for protest masculinity performance. Through this the participants also gained recognition for being the survivors and reformers of their past criminality.

Eric reinvented himself over some years to ‘grow up in a corporate world’. However, in this chapter I have highlighted how this was not a linear process as the conflicts of these two spheres occasionally collided in his personal life. An alternative means of production that was discussed by Dave was in giving blood. This was a charitable move in which he found a sense of pride which was a very different type than he had felt in terms of gang pride. Through this action he was literally unmaking and remaking a different masculinity through replacing one form of pride with another.

Overall, I noted in this chapter that the participants were able to form a new marginalised masculinity in recovery. They still found themselves on societies margins in many ways, due to the intersections of race, class, as well as the enduring presence of criminality and lack of cultural capital. Thus, they attempted to create a new persona that worked positively with this marginalised position, which often centred upon capitalising on their past time on-road and gang-
involved. One exception to this was Eric who managed to develop a new life and hid his past. Through this he performed complicit masculinity in a corporate context, however the threat of marginalisation haunted him, as shown in his narratives about being found out by gang-involved men in the street.

In the analysis of cathexis in this chapter, I extended the meaning from being just intimate relations to incorporate the ways that the participants constructed their relationships within their wider families as they moved on from gang-involvement and on-road life. There was a shift in the personal relationships that the participants referred to occurring as they went through their recovery. They focused more on the interrelatedness of their roles in their wider families. Relating themselves in this way at times made them de-centre themselves and consider the impact of their behaviour on loved ones. Fatherhood in particular affected some participants, who spoke about a desire to protect their children and to be a good example to them.

Ultimately, this third stage of their narratives was about the remaking of masculinities in light of new self-identities which were defined not by violence and the code of the street, but instead centred on finding new strategies to find pride and respect in other ways. Part of this was looking to alternative role models for work and family life. As well as adopting new codes of morality, through religion, to achieve a new sense of masculinity. However, their experiences of trying to fit in with wider society from a position of being (in many cases), ex-prisoners, with criminal records, and difficult habits, led them to occupying a marginalised masculinity upon exit in the most part. Even Eric, who managed on the surface to find a professional work and hide his past, felt ‘seen’ by other men on-road in the street- as if it was an identity he could never completely shake off.
The participants shifted their identification in a gender order previously determined by protest masculinity. This involved protest against and rejection of the malevolent patriarchy of their domestic circumstances. While their re-entry was marked by shifting their emotional investments towards new family structures. Through viewing themselves through their inter-familial roles primarily, rather than as independent from it, they were moving into a gender order that was previously separated off as a feminine space. To prioritise a more traditional model of fatherhood refers more to the fundamentals of hegemonic masculinity, with the father as the benign head of the household, rather than the protest masculinity which defined their earlier years.
9 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

9.1 Key themes: Masculinity, Vulnerability and Violence

The overall aim of this study was to explore the narratives of men who had experienced DVA in childhood and had also been involved on-road and with gangs. The focus of the research questions was on the ways in which their own sense of masculine identity changed, resulting in their masculine biographies shifting through the life course. These were revealed in the participants’ narratives of their lives, as they spoke about their childhood, adolescence and then their recovery to bring them to the present day. The findings chapters went chronologically through the participants’ life-histories, using Connell’s (2005) method of analysis to explore the power relations, production relations, and cathexis that the participants referred to at these different periods in their lives. Layered with this approach was an intersectional focus on the ways in which masculinities were constructed and negotiated with interpersonal relationships. Drawing on the key concepts of masculinity, drawing largely from Connell’s (2005) work, I have developed a model to visualise the broad masculinities that the participants performed in the study. It is split into three broad chronological areas, which match the three findings chapters.
As outlined in the above figure, in this thesis I have drawn on Connell’s (2005) distinct types of masculinities. This has been developed in an iterative process with the data in the study, which has resulted in the labelling of vulnerable masculinity as a distinct type. I developed this to extend and make explicit the concept of vulnerability which I see as inherent in Connell’s protest masculinity.

9.1.1 Protest Masculinity and Vulnerable Masculinity: A symbiotic relationship

Connell’s conceptualisation of protest masculinity has been a central idea throughout this thesis. Considering how well-theorised this concept was, it has been markedly under-utilised within research into gang masculinities thus far. Existing research tends to characterise men’s engagement in protest masculinity on-road in different ways, including ‘street masculinity’ (Mullins, 2006) or ‘hyper-masculinity’ (Glynn, 2014). I chose to use Connell’s typography of ‘protest
masculinity’ to describe this period as I found this to be the most theoretically developed conceptualisation of what emerged in the narratives. However, what became clear in the participants’ narratives is that although the protest masculinity could be used to conceptualise the main, externalising parts of the participants’ behaviour whilst gang involved, it did not account for the co-existing vulnerable masculinities that the men discussed in retrospect. This is significant because without looking at the emotional aspects of the men’s inner worlds protest masculinity alone can be seen to merely reinforce a marginalised pursuit of hegemonic masculinity. However, this does not tell the whole story about the ways in which protest masculinity is an expression of men’s underlying vulnerability and insecurity.

To theoretically frame vulnerability, I used Gilson’s (2014) work to focus on vulnerabilities and how these are exposed through threatened or actual violence. I assert that where there is protest masculinity, which is an exaggerated and aggressive form of masculinity performance developed as a response to marginalisation, there is also a vulnerable masculinity that co-exists. This was exposed in the participants’ narratives throughout my research. Protest masculinity is constructed as a response to insecurity, whereas vulnerable masculinity is where the underlying insecurities are expressed differently. Protest masculinity arises out of a sense of vulnerability. Therefore, there can be no protest masculinity without vulnerable masculinity; they are in a symbiotic relationship. In this way I have expanded Connell’s conceptualisation of protest masculinity in this thesis.

9.1.2 Invisibility of Victimhood
At the root of the tension between protest masculinity and vulnerable masculinity is the way in which the participants in this study always occupied an invisible space between victim and perpetrator/child-in-need and young offender discourse. They did not fit the ‘ideal victim’ typology and thus outlets for them to claim this identity have been limited. As noted in the literature (see chapter two, section 2.3.2), the concept of the ideal victim is often feminized and infantilised in a way that excludes young marginalised men, especially those such as the participants in this study, who were enacting violence, drug dealing, and becoming increasingly on-road and gang-involved from a young age. That is without mentioning the other intersectional aspects whereby the participants were structurally disadvantaged such as race, ethnicity, class. All of this created a context where they, when experiencing DVA at home, were not able to find a space to be recognised as victims, or to even recognise themselves as such. This was indicated in the way that referring to their own experiences of victimisation (through DVA, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation) did not come easily to the men that I spoke to. None of the men referred to their experience of DVA as a way that centred their own experiences of victimisation, nor had any been offered support to counter this perspective. Despite several talking about their own transition to life on-road as being implicated in the DVA that was ongoing at home, many rejected the idea that there was grooming involved. The ways in which they navigated this was to emphasise personal agency in the decisions, despite being children who were essentially fleeing violence. This is because the concept of grooming by definition situates the victim as vulnerable and exploited, which was a position that the men were reluctant to adopt, despite talking about their experiences in retrospect. However, as also outlined in Chapter six, Sam did explicitly talk about his experiences of sexual exploitation at the time that he initially became involved in
life on-road. When disclosing this experience, he framed it as an issue that women face as victims before then talking about his own experience. This pattern was similar when Travis discussed child sexual abuse. These suggest that the men did not have the language or external recognition of their issues to claim their experiences of victimisation at the time (or since in some cases). Which alludes to a lack of available language to conceptualise issues that are currently framed as forms of gender-based violence as affecting boys. This can be linked to wider discourses on these issues in wider society, highlighted in the government's current language around the Violence against women and girl's strategy (Home Office, 2016). This strategy includes work around childhood experiences of DVA, as well as sexual exploitation of children and sexual abuse. Despite there being numerous references to the phrase ‘children’ within the report, the overarching discursive framing is centred on female victimisation. This is despite the fact that prevalence of children who experience DVA at home isn’t a gendered issue in the same ways as other forms of victimisation.

9.1.3 Vulnerability, Violence, Agency

In this thesis I propose that there was an ongoing relationship throughout the participants’ narratives between vulnerability and violence. This began with their experiences of DVA, which I outline below as itself an expression of the pursuit of power in marginalised circumstances (again, relying on the symbiotic relationship between protest masculinity and vulnerable masculinity). As shown in the thesis, the participants inhabited subordinated masculinity in relation to the DVA perpetrator. They then sought spaces through which to seek power over
vulnerability, through the use of their own violence in agentic ways, at school and on-road. Part of the attraction of these public engagements in violence was to portray perceived markers of successful masculinity, respect and pride, that was denied for them in a home where DVA was being perpetrated. Experiencing DVA at home engendered a specific discourse on masculinity and violence, which the participants’ sought to redress by regaining respect outside of the home. As they became further gang-involved their violence increased, as did their vulnerabilities, although these were often expressed through looking tough and engaging in further violence (for protection as in Dave’s case, or as self-harming in Sam’s case for instance). Several of the participants alluded to a desire to engage in public violence from a young age, as a way of coping with the DVA as well as establish the sense of dominant masculinity. They highlighted the way in which violence was used in an instrumental way and fights were engaged with as a strategy to regain a sense of personal power and individual masculine identity.

DVA perpetration on the surface indicates a sense of masculine power and domination, expressed through violence. As shown in the findings (chapter six), this was certainly how it was experienced by the participants when they were children living with DVA and its effects. In this context DVA can be framed as an attempt of an overt expression of patriarchal power in the domestic setting. In the Duluth model, DVA is framed as an instrumental violence which is centred on the perpetrators’ desire for power and control in the domestic setting (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programme, n.d.). However, the need for violence as a way to both express this control, as well as gain power over close intimate partners has been framed as an expression of, ‘threatened masculinity’ and ‘resented dependence’ (Ray, 2018, p. 125). Gelles (1997) asserted that DVA perpetrators often have low
self-esteem and have a deep sense of vulnerability and powerlessness. Framed in this way, DVA perpetration can be seen to have similarities with Connell’s (2005) notion of protest masculinity, which has been threaded through this thesis in partnership with my assertion that vulnerable masculinity is an essential partner of it. I propose that these two aspects of identity are in a symbiotic relation with one another.

Anderson’s (1999) notion of the ‘code of the street’, was pertinent to explore the journey from incomprehensible violence of DVA to the more knowable code of the street. In this part of the discussion I add to this, by exploring that alongside the changing codes to violence, there was also another shift that the participants experienced, moving from victimisation of violence (in the case of DVA), to a more agentic relationship to violence. As explored in the findings chapters, the participants’ experience of DVA was typified by powerlessness and a resulting subordinate masculinity. The only constant code that exists within DVA is that the perpetrator makes the rules and can change them at any time. As outlined in the literature review, the element of coercive control that is present in DVA is the primary way abuse is used. Ganley (1995) noted that perpetrators of DVA use a range of tactics that can include imposing rules on the victims, then monitoring them for compliance, whilst punishing them for any infractions. As the perpetrator seeks ultimate control these rules tend to change and shift, as a way to justify the perpetrator’s violent or abusive outbursts. These create a climate of fear and loss of power and control for the victim. For children living in this climate, the rules can be less knowable and understandable, as they are not necessarily privy to the dynamics between the adults in the relationship. Thus, their sense of powerlessness can be compounded further by the lack of a code to the violence.
This was expressed in several ways in the data, as the participants’ conveyed both a sense of the lack of understanding about the way (and why) DVA was being carried out. They also conveyed a sense of powerlessness at experiencing the DVA and not knowing how to stop it.

This powerlessness at home was contrasted to the sense of power (albeit in a marginalised field) and an associated protest masculinity whilst on-road and gang-involved. One of the key drivers in the move between parental home to on-road was that, despite both being inherently violent and unsafe spaces, the violence of the street is demarked by a knowable code. This code was relatively straightforward compared to the DVA context, where central to the DVA is the holding of power and control by the perpetrator. The gender dynamics are further amplified as in the participants’ stories the primary perpetrators were all men, which somehow left the children as boys subordinated. By engaging in the code of the street the men were able to redefine themselves and thus gain power, respect and the sense of achieving a type of successful street masculinity, none of which was available at home under the perpetrators reign.

9.1.4 Music as a Vehicle for Masculinity and Vulnerability

As discussed in Chapter four, and evidenced throughout the data analysis, the two theoretical approaches that have been intertwined throughout the thesis are both masculinity (in various forms) and vulnerability. The way in which vulnerable masculinity was expressed in the narratives around childhood was in discussions around the coping strategies that the participants utilised while experiencing and often living with DVA. In this context the music that they brought to share in the
interviews became a prompt for discussions around memories of coping in childhood. It became evident that music was a vehicle through which the participants were able to express their vulnerability in their past, and use the artists, lyrics, and videos as a source of solace and comfort at a time when there was little available elsewhere. This also transferred to the present time, as talking about music seemed to allow the participants to refer to more vulnerable aspects of their identity, triggering references to forms of masculinity that were not all powerful or dominant, but more vulnerable and about coping with adversity. Les Back (2015) has explored the way that music can evoke a form of ‘planetary humanism’. He focused in particular on B.B Kings prison performances, focusing on the ways in which these reached the souls of incarcerated men, giving hope and catharsis.

As shown in the findings in chapter eight, the participants also looked to the musicians themselves as role models for masculinities. These was pertinent in the rap music genre in particular, where there is a fascinating juxtaposition between artists who outwardly conveyed the markers of protest masculinity, through the perpetuation of the ideals of power, pride, respect alongside the commodification of women, wealth and resources. Bell Hooks has written about the way in which this type of emotional outlet was found historically in blues music:

Black men created the blues, articulating in song their pain, their sense of hopelessness, their lamentation. For those individual creators the blues was a way out of the pain. It let them express their sorrow without shame. For men who listen while denying their own anguish, the sense of hopelessness remains. Young black males tend not to want to hear the blues. They do not want to hear an honest emotional expression of black male vulnerability. They would rather hear rap music
Discussion and Concluding Remarks

with its aggressive presentation of invulnerability. If the choice is between exposing the true authentic self and clinging to the false self, most males maintain their fantasy bonding rather than seek the real (Hooks, 2003, p. 93).

There was a range of musical genres that were shared in the course of this research that included rhythm and blues, pop, reggae, rap, grime (see chapter five, section 5.1.2 for a full track list). Looking to the way in which the participants’ used music in my research, I have to disagree with Hook’s point that rap music doesn’t provide the vulnerable catharsis that blues does. I would suggest that the exterior ‘aggressive invulnerability’ of rap music reflects the protest/vulnerable masculinity symbiotic relationship that I have found throughout the narratives in this study. The aggressive exterior, which can be found in the extreme in drill music, provides a boundary which means that the more emotive rap music is overlooked by the wider public. The participants discussed how musicians such as Tupac offered a model to be both hard and soft as men, tough and yet creative (see chapter eight, section 8.2.2 for more on this). Musical subcultures offered both opportunities and outlets for diverse masculinities. In Hook’s passage above she focuses on the way that black men hold onto the mirage of invulnerability through rap, however I also question whether that is not revealed due to the way that vulnerable masculinity is often hidden by men and was revealed to me in retrospect as it did not risk their current masculinity performances.

As displayed in the lyrics throughout the thesis, the music tracks selected were incredibly emotive and used rap as a medium to talk about very sensitive topics such as suicide, homophobia and sexual abuse. This is part of a genre of political rap, which is sometimes referred to as conscious hip-hop. This movement is an,
‘oppositional African-American cultural form that critiques and encourages resistance to cultural and socio-economic domination’ (Beighey & Unnithan, 2006, p. 33). The way that hip hop music often contains, ‘phatic, rhetoric, affective and dramatic modes of communication that may be of value to democratic public discourse’ (Nærland, 2014, p. 473). A pertinent example of this type of conscious rap that dealt directly with DVA was released as I was writing up this thesis, which was recommended for me to listen to by Travis in his interview. I have ended this section with it as it is such an astute example of the use of rap as advice, guidance, commentary and advocacy:

**Leslie**

**Dave** (2019)

You see this time that I’m taking out to tell you the story is more than a song or track

   It’s a message to a woman with a toxic man
   I’m begging you to get support if you’re lost or trapped
   I understand that I can never understand and I ain’t saying that it’s easy but it must be right

   Some of your sisters, aunties, mums or wives
   Are fucked aside and they will never touch on why
   I’m touched ‘cause I’ve seen women that I love though like-

   Cry little red tears through a bloodshot eye
   This shit’s awful, no matter what culture it ain’t normal
   Men try and twist it, make it seem like it’s your fault
   In that train full of people that you’re taking
   How many Lesleys are running from their Jasons?
9.1.5 Section Summary

The three key thematic areas that emerged throughout the thesis were masculinity, vulnerability, and violence. In this discussion I explored the ways that these three areas intertwined in the analysis. The first area that I explored was the symbiotic relationship between protest masculinity and vulnerable masculinity. I posit in the thesis that these are directly related, and that through the combination of Gilson’s work on vulnerability with Connell’s work on protest masculinity it shows that the protest is present when men feel their masculinity threatened. In this way I expanded the notion of protest masculinity to have a wider focus and through this process has re-invigorated the exploration of protest masculinity as a specific response to marginalisation. In feeling marginalised the vulnerable shadow masculinity was ever-present. The second area that I worked through in this discussion was the way that the presence of vulnerability, and vulnerable masculinities, was both revealed and negotiated through violence. Violence was the constant through the lives of the participants, starting in the early years through the DVA to the period when they were on-road and gang-involved. I have looked closely at the ongoing tension that was ever present between victim and perpetrator, as well as victim and agency. Violence was the means through which the men negotiated their position between these poles. Violence was both an expression of vulnerability, as well as an assertion of agency. In this way it was an expression of both sides. This discussion has emphasised the close inter-relatedness of the key themes of masculinity, violence, and vulnerability.

9.2 Synthesis of the Findings and Contributions of the thesis
9.2.1 Research Question 1

*How did the participants express different types of masculinity throughout their lives, as told in their life story narratives?*

As shown in Chapter six, when the men (as boys) lived with the DVA it caused conflicting feelings. They were living in a patriarchal environment where the perpetrator of DVA was enacting a type of masculinity which drew on distorted markers of hegemonic masculinity. As the boys were living with DVA they had only this as a model for masculinity. For some of the men there was a perception of DVA being commonplace within their communities or within their families, which conveyed a sense of normality about these behaviours as well as underlying gender inequality in families. The men described living with DVA as an experience of being rendered powerless, due to an inability to protect their mother, as well as to provide financially for their families. At this time there was a conflict, as some of the men mentioned being very against violence against women, however, were also seeking ways in which to enact a sense of powerful masculinity. For several of the men this initial foray into seeking power was enacted through using violence and domination over peers within the school context, where their disempowerment and subordinated masculinity that they felt at home was inverted, as their desensitisation to violence became a strength which made them ‘tough’ and ‘hard’ to peers.

At the point of on-road and gang-involvement the men alluded to the formation of a protest masculinity, which aspirational hegemonic masculinity in a frustrated
environment, where the traditional masculine milestones were unavailable (including domination, power and respect). When the routes to these were inaccessible in a traditional way, due to reasons of intersecting race or class reasons, then they reacted in an oppositional way. This transition to develop an emerging protest masculinity on the road, in contrast to the subordinated masculinity at home, was also characterised by a shift in production relations. There was a range of economic backgrounds, from low-income households to living in relative poverty. There were various motivators to making money at a young age, from trying to keep up with peers in terms of clothes and pocket money, to the pressure to provide for their single mother. These reasons, as well as being approached by older peers from the local area to be offered the opportunity to sell drugs, acted as a push to engage in drug dealing to make some money. The money that they gained through this way supported them to move from a subordinated masculinity to an emerging protest masculinity. Power was gained through both the change in power relations as well as production relations that were altered as they moved between the private and the public spheres. In this way I have added a gendered understanding to Merton’s Strain Theory (1968), which has before now offered a generic understanding of the links between poverty, production and crime. Using Connell’s analytic lens of production relations to the narratives showed the gendered pressure the men were responding to.

Understanding the multiple masculinities that were at work reveal much about the way that the men both experienced this time in their lives at the time, as well as how they make sense of it in retrospect. It also helps us understand the competing pressures of masculinity; to be tough, yet protective; to be heroic and respected. All of these are embroiled in the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, the markers
of which were not accessible to these marginalised men, who then were left with
protest masculinity, defined by its marginalisation and limited resources to draw
on. Existing at all points of the men’s journeys was also a shadow self of vulnerable
masculinity. It would not have been clear at the time however, but in retrospect
some participants described the ways they enacted toughness through personal
presentation and engaged in violence as a form of protection. They referred to the
emotional pain they were going through, as well as the anger that they carried from
the experience of DVA. All of these elements should raise our awareness to the co-
existence of protest masculinities and vulnerable masculinities which were
entwined and co-existing.

Utilising Gilson’s (2014) work was central to gaining this understanding throughout
the thesis, as she makes clearer the ways that violence and vulnerability are so
interconnected, that protest masculinity and vulnerable masculinity are two sides
of the same coin. The vulnerable masculine identities became more foregrounded
in the process of desistance and recovery from the on-road/gang-involved lifestyle.
In this part of the narratives, the participants referred to the strategies which they
employed in order to recover from carrying the anger resulting from DVA and the
various enactments of violence, as well as the difficulties they encountered in
developing alternative masculinities.

As shown in the section above, the unique contributions around the first research
question exist in the way in which I applied and expanded Connell’s (1987, 2005)
concept of protest masculinity to show how protest masculinity and vulnerable
masculinity co-exist in a symbiotic relationship. To do this I deepened an
understanding in particular of vulnerable masculinity as a specific masculinity
performance drawing on work by Gilson (2014).
9.2.2 Research Question 2

*How did the intersections of race, ethnicity, and class impact on the ways in which the participants’ sought to perform masculinities?*

Using intersectionality as a lens, entwined with Connell’s analytic framework around gender, enabled a deeper exploration of the ways in which race, ethnicity, and class changed and shaped the men’s experiences. The intersections of race and ethnicity are important to understand, as they have great impact on the lives of men on-road and gang-involved. This is due to the highly racialised portrayal of gangs in the media and a targeted (and racially discriminate) police response (Williams, 2015). Thus, although the men in the study came from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, they were aware and implicated by the structural inequalities and interlocking oppressions that surrounds the association of black men and criminality.

The men prioritised their racial identities in different ways as shown in the research findings. Using an intersectional lens showed how different aspects of identity affected the participant’s performance of masculinities. Protest masculinity as enacted on-road and within the gang was heavily influenced by wider structural inequality as well as race and ethnicity. This was the case even for the white men who were gang-involved, as Shaun outlined with his experience of being accused of appropriating black popular culture in his vernacular and dress. In this way the expected gang-based protest masculinity was centred on a hegemonically black masculinity, even for the white and mixed-race men involved. This was partly
externally defined, as in Shaun’s case, but was also described as a deliberate adoption of certain forms of dress and self-presentation. This is reinforced in UK society by the ways that popular culture has drawn on gang culture for capitalist consumption, reinforcing stereotypes of black gangs in rap music and sportswear apparel, which draw heavily on the American context. The men positioned themselves differently in relation to their ethnic identities and used these positions to frame their narratives.

Disenfranchisement and marginalisation are key tenets of Connell’s protest masculinity, as it is defined as a reaction to the inability for some men to aspire to hegemonic or complicit masculinities. Several of the participants’ expressed deep awareness of the way structural inequalities of race, gender and class, affected their experiences of DVA as well as pathways into on-road and gang-involvement. Structural and economic inequalities demarcate that some men need to form a protest masculinity presentation to over-compensate for the lack of resources and capital that they have to compete with the traditional markers of hegemonic masculinity, including acting as a conventional bread-winner head of household.

What the intersectional analysis that has been woven throughout the thesis shows is that the participants’ masculinities were not constructed in a vacuum. As noted in the sections on production relations in the findings chapters, it was evident that the intersection of class and poverty resulted in much more than just financial barriers for the men. They also resulted in a lack of cultural capital to navigate alternatives to criminality at different times, typified in Eric’s example of stealing laptops at university, when he admitted that he was not aware of the student finance support available and how to access it. As shown in the discussions on production relations in the findings, growing up in low-income households affected
the ways in which the men initially sought opportunities to make income from a young age, in order to keep up with peers in terms of clothes and spending money, as well as to supplement their household incomes. This pressure was linked with their desire to integrate with their peers.

The findings in relation to the second research question highlight the novel way in which intersectionality was layered into Connell’s masculinity framework. By focusing distinctly on the way in which race, ethnicity, and class all impacted on the way in which identity was revealed in the narratives. The way in which Connell’s analytic framework was applied using intersectionality garnered a much greater understanding of the ways in which masculine identities are formed in relation to different constraints.

9.2.3 Research Question 3

How did the participants’ experiences of violence change through their lives?

Violence was a constant presence throughout the narratives of the men that I spoke to. What changed was their relationship to the violence as they grew up - moving from and between experiences of victimisation to an agentic position. Threaded throughout the thesis was Anderson’s (1999) notion of the ‘code of the street’. I argue that in the private context of DVA at home, there is an unknowable code for the children who live there. Within DVA the main code is that the perpetrator holds power and control over the family and is able to change the rules as they wish. The way in which the young men resisted the DVA was by physically choosing to leave the private domestic space and to shift to occupy the road. Violence was portrayed
as instrumental on the road and as Sam noted, ‘It became a tool, a language, a currency’. In view of the data, I proposed that as the young men moved from home to the street, both of which were spaces that centred around violence and protest masculinity, the context on the street was somehow more understandable, the rules (or code) more intelligible, and the prizes such as masculinity achievement and respect were more achievable. The findings in the study indicated that the men’s relationship with violence in their lives changed as they went through different transitions through the life-course. Violence was a constant presence, but the dynamics of it shifted in subtle yet significant ways. When the men described living with DVA, home was itself a dangerous and confusing place to be.

The contributions to knowledge as outlined by the third section are around a new understanding of how men experience DVA in childhood, their coping strategies, their emotional responses, and their perceptions of the abuse. The study of this particular group of participants is novel in itself, as no other study has previously focused on the narratives of men who lived with DVA in childhood and on-road/gang-involvement. To understand the experience of violence as a constant presence throughout these changing contexts I applied Anderson’s (1999) model of the ‘code of the street’ to the context of both domestic violence/abuse as well as the on-road and gang context.

9.2.4 Methodological Contribution

As outlined more fully in the methods section of the thesis (see chapter five, section 5.5), this thesis made substantial methodological contributions. I have shown the use of music elicitation (including the use of music tracks, lyrics, and music videos),
as an effective tool in narrative research. This study also makes a substantial contribution to the wider field of narrative criminology research by using narrative interviews as a way to understand men who have been previously on-road and gang-involved.

The use of music elicitation in this thesis was both innovative and effective. As emphasised in my methodological publication (Levell, 2019) this is a technique that has been seldom used in qualitative social science research. Reflections on the use of the method in practice can be found earlier in the thesis (Chapter 5, section 5.5). The inclusion of creative methodology into the interview approach was designed for several reasons. The first was that it was hoped that it would make participation more attractive to the potential candidates. This was indeed shown to be true, as some of the participants’ commented that it had intrigued them and positively affected their interest in taking part. There were also several other benefits to the use of music as an elicitation tool, which have become clear through the use of the method in practice. Many of the participants discussed using music as a coping mechanism in childhood when they experienced adversity and found listening again to the music encouraged them to access memories of listening to it in the past. In several of the interviews, the historical cathartic function of music was mentioned. In some interviews both the music tracks and their associated videos were used as a means of communication by the men, as metaphors, or as illustrations of their past. Some participants used the act of playing the music in the interview as a narrative tool. Their selection often signified a differing chapter in their narratives and in many cases functioned as giving a break from a topic before moving on to the next theme. This gave participants greater control of the interview space, as well as the ability to plan their answers in advance. Ultimately, using music and
music videos as an elicitation tool has shown promising results when used in sensitive research.

9.3 Implications

During the period of this PhD there has been an increasing sense of interest in the findings and recommendations of the study. As this research was directly inspired by my professional work in the charity sector, I have always had a desire to produce impact on front-line practice from the thesis. Improving front-line support for boys who experience DVA and on-road/gang-involvement has been my aim, as well as the expressed aim of many of the participants.

The first recommendation I have drawn from the research is that; I **advocate for DVA organisations to develop gender-specific and masculinity-aware interventions for male child survivors**. My research suggests that there is a need for specific masculinity-aware interventions for young men who have experienced DVA. This needs to be in a way which does not convey an essentialist reproduction of the social learning theories which equate male children with future perpetration (as discussed in Chapter two) yet do recognise that being a male watching a male role model enact protest masculinity ideals might affect the way in which they instrumentalise violence themselves. There is existing research that promotes gender specific work with adult men who have experienced trauma. One particular study by Mejía (2005) focused on the importance of developing gender-specific interventions for men in the counselling context. She noted that society is blind to the male experience of trauma as it is conflicts with the wider ideals of achieved
masculinity. The idealised qualities of hegemonic masculinity are ‘toughness, fearlessness, and the denial of vulnerability’, which create the context whereby men are not recognised as victims of suffering, but also that they themselves will not readily identify their vulnerabilities in therapeutic support (Mejía, 2005, p. 31). Thus, Mejía concluded that the trappings of masculinity affect how men cope with traumatic events in their lives. Mejía’s recommendations are that treatment and support of male survivors of trauma should focus specifically on; (a) redefining masculinity and its legacies and (b) confronting the trauma and its legacies (Mejía, 2005, p. 37).

Using the findings from this thesis, it is clear that a focus of the ways in which masculinities affect self-identity among men who experience DVA is important. As outlined in the literature review, children who have experienced DVA have been historically overlooked and seen as an add-on to the non-abusing parent. Boys who experienced DVA have occupied a space of tension within feminist organising around DVA. In the early days of the second-wave feminist movement boys were seen as peripheral to the women focused nature of the movement and its related interventions. This was reflected in the provision of women-only spaces as well as the enduring age limit on refuge provision for sons of DVA survivors. What these findings show concurs with the recommendations by Mejía (2005), who emphasised the ways in which dominant discourses around masculinity both limit men’s experiences of seeing themselves as vulnerable, but also limit services in recognising their vulnerabilities. Mejía called this the ‘burden of masculinity messages’ which they carry into the therapeutic context with them (Mejía, 2005, p. 35). She noted that support services need to be attentive to the ways in which the
restrictive notions of masculinity inhibit men and may then impede therapeutic support.

The task for front-line provision is to navigate the complexity of the apparent contradiction between protest/vulnerable masculinity and provide space for both. There are existing interventions, mostly for gang-involved men, which seek to work with residual anger. Boxing as a form of gang intervention has been explored in research by Deuchar et al. (2015) who looked the use of traditionally masculine-oriented sports such as boxing have been used by organisations who promote it as a way to channel aggression in a safe and off-street environment. Deuchar et al. (2015) noted that this is often one of the ways in which organisations attract gang involved men to the programmes in the first place, as they use a ‘strategic use of masculinity’ (p. 733), however this leaves the question of how these interventions then use the opportunity to challenge hegemonic masculinities once they have the men engaged. In Deuchar et al.’s study they recommended that organisations need to provide discussions that are offered in a safe context, that, ‘enable some aspects of local versions of reformed hegemonic masculinity to be promoted and upheld and will encourage young men to keep engaging and keep talking’ (2015, p. 739).

In light of my findings I would add to this that there needs to be affordances for alternative vulnerable masculinities, in recognition that are likely to exist as a shadow-self in support settings.

The second recommendation is that; I recommend closer joint work between DVA (and gender-based-violence organisations) with youth offending/gang outreach organisations. The reason for this study in the first place was due to a gap in professional practice and knowledge around the lived experiences of men who live with DVA in childhood and later go on-road and gang-involved. The findings in this
thesis show that there are threads in the life-history narratives around masculinity, vulnerability, and violence, which run through from the men’s DVA experience to their on-road and gang-experience. These findings could be useful for front-line agencies which are currently siloed into different ‘planets’ and are working on distinct constructions of victim/perpetrator, victim/offender, which these men do not easily fit into. This research could open up the conversation around the porous boundaries between these polarised labels and create empathy for on-road and gang-involved men, which (as shown in the literature review) can be a highly labelled and stigmatized group.

The third recommendation is; **Increased recognition of the importance of early identification of DVA occurring at home and suggest that violent behaviour at school as a potential indicator of DVA at home.** None of the participants that I spoke to had been offered specialised support by DVA organisations. In light of the data I suspect this may be related to the difficulty in young men living in gang affected areas to be recognised as anything other than emerging gang-members and perpetrators of violence themselves. The need for agencies to identify DVA earlier in children is not in itself a new finding. However, what this thesis does shed light on is the way in which young men appeared to enact violence in the school and street context from an early age in reaction to the violence they were experiencing at home. Only by more fully understanding their agency in this complex and turbulent time of life, can practitioners offer effective support and interventions, that can get to the root of the ways in which the young men construct their masculine identities as shaped by their experiences of DVA.

The fourth recommendation is; **Increased provision of safe spaces for young men who experience DVA at home and live in gang affected areas, with a focus on**
understanding and accommodating vulnerable masculinities. The main theme that came out of the participants’ narratives about experiencing DVA was that it meant that home became an uninhabitable space for them when it ceased to be safe as well as predictable. They often then described congregating on the streets with peers as a way to spend as little time at home as possible. For most of the participants, school became a contested space. It offered an outlet for Eric to stay out of his house for longer and thus he became involved in lots of extra-curricular activities. However, school only offered refuge for him for a limited amount of time in the day. For the rest of the time the participants spent time in public space around their estates as there were no other options in evenings and weekends. As noted in the literature review, the policing of public space in urban areas has become a racialised issue, as Williams’ (2015) research showed that the police, as made evident in the gang’s matrix, police ethnic minority groups more heavily than others, which can initiate the cycle of criminalisation. Thus, the use of public space is far from a neutral issue and can reinforce the stigmatisation and marginalisation of certain young men. This finding could be used to bolster the argument for the provision of safe spaces for young men, i.e. in the funding of youth groups where they can safely go when home is no longer safe. The provision of safe spaces that also offer some protection from the grooming of young men by older gang-involved men is also of utmost importance. The participants referred to the pressure of having little money at home, as well as the lack of safety at home, as two key factors in their initial involvement with gangs. Negating these issues through free to access safe spaces such as youth groups is an intervention that may divert some young men from engaging with on-road life. This in itself is not a new concept by any means. However, in the preceding decade which has been defined by the UK Government’s austerity programme, have resulted in a decimating of youth clubs
for young people. Within the period of 2008 to 2018 council funding for youth services has been cut by almost two-thirds (62 per cent) (Mulholland, 2018). The Local Government Association stated that between 2012-2016, more than 600 youth centres and nearly 139,000 youth service places from across the UK have gone (Mulholland, 2018). My thesis suggests that the lack of provision of neutral spaces which are open outside of school hours could be instrumental in providing young men with a space to be outside of the gang environment. The provision of safe spaces with professionals within this environment who can recognise the signs of young people who experience DVA could also help early identification of children living with abuse. The concept of providing safe spaces for youths facing adversity is not a novel one, yet its importance was highlighted in this study, whereby the men did not have another option to spend their time safely once school ended.

The last suggestion for front-line practice is; I recommend that tools are developed that use the strengths of music elicitation as a novel way to listen to children who have experienced DVA and on-road/gang-involvement. The successful use of music as an elicitation tool in this study showed potential for utility in front-line professional practice. This approach was successful in creating a bridge between the worlds of the researcher and participant in a way that may not have otherwise been possible. It encouraged the participants to consider what they wanted to share, articulate it more fully through the use of lyrics, or music video, or use music to revoke and complement memory. The way in which participation was invited through these means changed the interview dynamic and lessened the emphasis on formal questions, which could transfer very well to support interviews. Using music as this cultural and communicative bridge changed the way that the men were listened to and received. In writing about the process of listening, Bronwyn
Davies (2014) emphasised the importance of emergent listening with experimental openness. She urged researchers to be open to being affected by listening, by actively ‘being there’ in an open way, physically and emotionally (Davies, 2014, p. 23). Music elicitation greatly helps this process, as it is a visceral way to receive participants stories, as much as it is a creative way for them to share them, as shown in the earlier reflections on the method (see chapter five, section 5.5). This approach then may have transferable utility to support work with people who may benefit from a creative way to communicate, as well promote a fresh way to listen to their stories.

9.4 Future Investigations

The key thematic areas that were threaded throughout this thesis, that of the relationship between masculinity, vulnerability, and violence, lend themselves to further investigation. As noted throughout the thesis, boys and young men who experience DVA and then go on to commit violence themselves are among the most unlikely to be offered support and framed as victims themselves. There is potential for greater understanding of the way in which young men instrumentalise violence as a coping mechanism, a form of self-harm, and a form of self-protection. This was pertinent in the school context and there could be further research in school violence as an indicator of DVA at home. There were some seldom heard stories of victimisation in the participants’ narratives which could also warrant further research. In particular this was the effect of rape and sexual violence in the family backgrounds of young men, which clearly had an impact on the affected participants sense of masculine identity. There is also scope for further research
into on-road young men’s experiences of child sexual exploitation and abuse, with links to on-road and gang-involvement. Overall, there is also a need for more research on the intersection of DVA and on-road/gang-involvement on a larger scale. This intersection has been highlighted by Croydon Children’s Services (Davenport, 2019; Spencer, Griffin, & Floyd, 2019) as a key focus and so there is great potential in carrying out a larger study which garners prevalence data to understand this issue on a broader scale. Within a study such as that it would be fruitful to include a comparison with the experience of girls and young women and the impact of DVA and on-road/gang-involvement on their gender identity.

In my immediate next steps for research, I have been awarded a significant grant (£90,000) from the EU Horizon fund to lead a research team looking at interventions with DVA perpetrators. The Other Side of the Story: Perpetrators in Change is a two-year project in partnership with organisations in Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Romania. The ultimate aim of the OSSPC project is to prevent further violence and change violent behavioural patterns by increasing the capacity of professionals to support DVA perpetrators to change. As I embark on this research project I will be alert to issues of masculinity, vulnerability, and violence in the study.

9.5 Conclusion

Central to this thesis has been a desire to explore the way in which men who experienced DVA, on-road and gang-involvement, construct their gender identities. The men at the heart of the study have occupied a contradictory and complex space in professional discourse and academic scholarship. They move between invisibility
(as DVA victims) and hyper-visibility (as embroiled in the moral panic of gang discourse). This dichotomy has also been reflected in the external construction of their masculinities; the foregrounding of protest masculinity (typified by violence and criminality) and the elusiveness of vulnerable masculinity. Upon recognising there was a gap there during my professional work in a DVA charity, I sought to carry out this research to understand what life was like for those boys and men who are absent from support services, who live under the guise of a new folk devil, constructed as violent and criminal, on the margins of society. They then have to work out how to be a man, when the example of manhood that they had experienced was typified by violence and domination. I sought to hear the experiences of these men, in order to hear their stories, to try and understand their pain, and humanise them to the state apparatus that seeks to demonize them. In these aims I feel this thesis was successful. I shared a desire for this research to make a positive difference with the men that I met. They shared their stories with heavy hearts and motivated by the possibility of positive change. I hope they feel this work has done them justice.
Behind the Wall

Tracy Chapman (1988)

Last night I heard the screaming
Loud voices behind the wall
Another sleepless night for me
It won't do no good to call
The police always come late
If they come at all

And when they arrive
They say they can't interfere
With domestic affairs
Between a man and his wife
And as they walk out the door
The tears well up in her eyes

Last night I heard the screaming
Then a silence that chilled my soul
I prayed that I was dreaming
When I saw the ambulance in the road
And the policeman said
'I'm here to keep the peace
Will the crowd disperse
I think we all could use some sleep
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11 Appendices
11.1 Appendix One: Participant Advert

Are you a man who experienced domestic violence/abuse and have you been on road or involved with a group/gang?

If so, we would like to hear from you.

The Road Home Study

Are you a man who experienced domestic violence/abuse at home in childhood?

We would like to listen to what life has been like for boys who have experienced these situations.

By taking part in this study you could help with an understanding of those issues, and how to help boys in similar situations.

All stories will be confidential and anonymised.

You will receive £50 for your time as well as travel expenses. Writings can be carried out at a place local to you.

For more information to get involved contact Jade Lavelle

This research is being conducted by Jade Lavelle for her PhD at the Open University, supervised by Dr. Rhiannon Gooch. It has been approved by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee REC/2016/2438/Level 1

Open University
The Open
Home Study

#TheRoadHome

Twitter: @JadeLavelle
## TheRoadHome Research Project

Finding out what life was like for boys and men who were exposed to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in childhood and involved in a gang or *On Road*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is this research happening?</th>
<th>I would like to understand what life is like for men who were exposed to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) at home when they were children and also became involved with a gang or ‘on road’. To find out what this is like I am asking people who have been through it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is doing this research?</td>
<td>This research forms part of a PHD research project at The Open University. The Open University are funding this research because they too believe this is an important area to know more about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why me?</td>
<td>You have been asked to take part because you have had experience of DVA and involvement with gangs or life on road.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You are the best person to discuss these issues, and it is important that people who try and support young people in these situations hear your views.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will it involve?</th>
<th>You will be offered two separate meetings (around 1 hour each) spaced 1 month apart to talk about your life and your experiences. Total: 2 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can people find out that I have taken part?</td>
<td>NO! All information that could identify you, for example, names, where you live, your family set up, and anything else that might identify you, will be changed. This means that what you say will be anonymised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happens to the data collected?</td>
<td>Once the interviews are over the researchers will look at all of the interviews they have conducted. They will want to use quotes from interviews in the reports, books and articles they will write about this research. When they do this, they will remove any information (names, place names etc.) which could be used to identify you or anyone else you have mentioned in the interviews. The research reports will be used to help those who work in the area of domestic abuse and gangs to better understand the perspectives of young men who have been affected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### What risks are there?

There are two kinds of risk that may take place. The first one is that you might feel upset during the discussion. I will check in with you throughout the session to make sure you are OK to carry on. I will also have information about other agencies I can contact about any issues that arise during the interview.

The second kind of risk is if you tell me that either yourself, or someone else is in danger of serious harm. If this happens, I will talk to you about it, what might happen if you continue to talk about it and how you want to deal with the situation. In an extreme case, where a child is at risk and we cannot come to an appropriate resolution I might have to disclose the information to other relevant agencies.

### What are the benefits of taking part?

It will help people understand how it feels to have been in these situations.

It may help improve support services and how professionals deal with it.

You will receive vouchers as a thank you for your time. Along with reimbursement for any travel expenses you incur.

### What should I do next if I want to take part?

If you are interested in taking part in these interviews you can contact;

Jade Levell, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK76AA
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments, Complaints?</th>
<th><a href="mailto:jade.levell@open.ac.uk">jade.levell@open.ac.uk</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you are unhappy about the conduct of the research and would like to make a formal complaint you can contact; Dr. Rod Earle, Senior Lecturer in Youth Justice, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK76AA <a href="mailto:Rod.earle@open.ac.uk">Rod.earle@open.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Lindsay O'Dell Director of Post Graduate Studies, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK76AA <a href="mailto:Lindsay.odell@open.ac.uk">Lindsay.odell@open.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11.3 Appendix Three: Participant Consent Form

The Road Home Study

It is important I make sure that everyone who agrees to take part in this research has given their informed consent. This means that I have a responsibility to make sure that you fully understand what is involved and you know exactly what you are agreeing to. Please go through the list of statements and answer yes or no. Just ask me if you have any questions about the research project and your involvement in it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have read the information sheet and been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research project. My questions have been answered in a way I am happy with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to take part in an interview with the researcher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I do not have to answer any question I don’t want to, or discuss things I don’t not feel comfortable with, and that I can leave or take a break at any time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give my permission for my interview to be audio recorded and written up by the researcher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I participate in the group interviews (to be discussed individually) then I give permission for it to be video recorded. This is so it is clearer for the researcher to write up and see who said what.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that any audio/video recording and all data will be stored securely, and audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know that my name will not be used and that my identity will be kept anonymous in any publications related to this research project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that what is discussed in the interview will be kept confidential, but that if the interviewer feels that myself or somebody else...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is at risk of serious harm, they may need to disclose this to relevant agencies.

I understand that I am free to choose whether or not to take part in this research project, and that I am also free to withdraw from it at any point both during and after the interview has been completed.

I understand that I can keep a copy of this consent form.

Having read the information sheet and consent form, I confirm that I understand what is required of me for this research project and that I am happy to take part.

Signed: __________________________________ (Participant)

Signed: __________________________________ (Researcher)

Date: ___ / ___ /________

If you are unhappy about the conduct of the research and would like to make a formal complaint you can contact:

Dr. Rod Earle, Senior Lecturer in Youth Justice, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK76AA

Rod.earle@open.ac.uk

Dr. Lindsay O’Dell

Director of Post Graduate Studies, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK76AA

Lindsay.odell@open.ac.uk
11.4 Appendix Four: Coding Maps
### 11.5 Appendix Five: Overview of my Professional Support Skills Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Area</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safeguarding Children who may be involved in Gangs (Level 3 - LSCB)</td>
<td>Brief Solution Focused Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguarding Adults (Level 3 - LSCB)</td>
<td>Creative Techniques for Working with Groups of Young People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguarding Children and Young People (Level 3 - LSCB)</td>
<td>Domestic Violence: Foundation Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 Counselling Skills certificate</td>
<td>Domestic Violence: Skills Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 Domestic Abuse Training</td>
<td>Engaging with Domestic Violence Perpetrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: Risk Taking and Young People</td>
<td>Equality and Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognising and supporting victims of trafficking (Eaves)</td>
<td>Health and Human Rights (British Institute of Human Rights)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and Support Planning</td>
<td>Behavioural Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>