Self-determination in rehabilitation: a qualitative case study of three young offenders on community orders

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to consider how male young offenders on community orders made sense of their offending behaviour as well as considering the extent these views aligned with traditional stereotypes of masculinity.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The research adopted a qualitative approach, using semi-structured in-depth interviews followed by interpretative phenomenological analysis to identify themes within the participant's narratives.*

Findings – *Two master themes were identified; ''dissociating from an offender identity and authoring a new non-offender identity'' as well as ''masculinity as multifaceted''. These themes were interpreted using self-determination theory, highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation and specific environmental conditions in enabling change and exploration of new identities.*

Research limitations/implications – *This work was based on a small sample size. Whilst this permitted an in-depth analysis it is acknowledged that this may have implications for making generalisations across the youth offending population.*

Practical implications – *This study identifies that the principles of autonomy, relatedness and competence, as outlined in self-determination theory, potentially offer fruitful areas to be implemented in community orders. Such conditions can help to harness intrinsic motivation to change and self-regulated behaviour.*

Originality/value – *This paper is of value to those working and holding an interest within the criminal justice domain. Its adoption of a qualitative approach, considering a UK sample of young offenders on community orders at the time of the interview is unique. This study allows practical recommendations to be made to those engaged in youth rehabilitation.*

Keywords *Young offenders, Community orders, Tagging, Self-determination, Masculinity, Criminals, Young people, United Kingdom, Rehabilitation, Gender*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

In 2008, 216,708 males were under the supervision of the probation service compared to 26,725 females (Ministry of Justice, 2008), with exaggerated masculinity held to be especially pivotal to understanding young offenders (Abrams *et al.*, 2008; Copes and Hochstetler, 2003; Evans and Wallace, 2008; Farr *et al.*, 2004; Gold *et al.*, 1992; Jewkes, 2005; Johnston and Morrison, 2007; Messerschmidt, 1993; Mosher and Sirkin, 1984; Parrot and Zeichner, 2008; Woodall, 2007). Whilst the use of community rather than custodial sentences for young offenders has attracted some controversy and criticism in the UK (Allen, 2008; Hucklesby, 2008), evidence has mounted suggesting that custodial practices could reinforce rather than rehabilitate masculine identities (Morgan and Hawton, 2004; Smart Justice, 2008). On the other hand, little is known about the rehabilitative potential of young offender community programmes (Johnstone, 2001).

The aim of this work is to look in-depth at what it means to be an offender on a community order, with the view of generating insights into effective rehabilitation. To do this, a qualitative psychological approach known as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

Since this paper was written Lynne Millward is no longer with us. An endlessly kind and caring lady who enriched the lives of those she met, she will be missed by so many. Surrey Youth Justice Service are acknowledged for their help in facilitating this paper.

(Smith, 1996; Smith and Osborn, 2003) was used because of its epistemological focus on sense-making and identity. IPA has roots in three epistemologies: phenomenology (i.e. subjective experience), hermeneutics (i.e. meaning) and idiography (i.e. individual perspectives) (Smith and Eatough, 2007). The aim of IPA is to produce a theoretical narrative that captures each and every individual's experiential account whilst also being sensitive to the idiosyncratic nature of their stories. IPA also assumes that individuals derive meaning through social interactions, and in this way meanings are shared, influenced by discourses available in society. Our approach thus contrasts with one that begins with predictions and aims to identify causality from an ''outsider'' perspective (Millward, 2006), and provides a compliment to important quantitative findings on young male offending. As such we aspire to theoretical – rather than empirical, generalisability (i.e. across different samples and contexts), which can be used to inform the design of bespoke psychological interventions. Secondarily, the study will also shed light on how young male offenders understand and manage their masculinity in the context of their community orders.

Method

A small number of intensively analysed cases are typical in IPA work (Smith and Eatough, 2007). Using purposive ''theoretical'' sampling (Smith and Osborn, 2003), three male participants were recruited from one youth offending service (YOS), all 18 years or under (Table I). Each participant was also well known to the YOS, having committed multiple offences (Table II). The two participants on the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) were obliged to be in contact with the YOS for 25 hours during the first three months of their order, decreasing to a minimum of five hours per week for the remaining three months. The third participant was on a more general supervision order involving twice weekly meetings with the youth offending officer (YO). Interviews for the current study took place as part of the offender's contact with YOS, arranged through each participant's YO.

Procedure

A semi-structured interview is recommended as being most conducive to facilitating individual sense-making (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Interviews were thus guided by topics rather than questions, as follows: family and living arrangements, offending history,

Table I Demographic characteristics

Pseudonym	*Age*	*Ethnicity*	*Family/living arrangement*	*Education*
Chris	18	White Travelling	With mum and step-dad, older sister, two younger brothers. Rarely sees biological father	Until age 15 Home educated to GCSEs
Connor	17	Mixed	Previously with mum and step-dad, now with foster mum and five other children. Biological father moved out when age 5; father described as physically abusive towards his mum, now with new partner and two other sons	Until age 15
Josh	18	White	With mum and two younger sisters; father drifting in and out since age 7	Until age 16

Table II Offending profile

Psuedonym	*Index offence*	*Order*	*Tag*	*Previous offences*
Chris	False imprisonment	3 years supervision order plus ISSP	Tagged	No insurance, TWOC, thefts, receiving stolen goods, common assault
Connor	Criminal damage, common assault	ISSP	Previously tagged	Two non-dwelling burglaries, fraud, theft (2), criminal damage (7), resisting arrest handling stolen goods common assault, class B drug possession, failure to surrender public order breaches (2)
Josh	Robbery	Supervision order	No tag	ABH, criminal damage, theft and arson

experiences of role models, friendship groups, and future aspirations. The interview schedule was used as a guide like a ''conversation with a purpose'' (Burgess, 1984, p. 102) such that spontaneously mentioned issues relevant to understanding the motivations of participants could be queried as they arose rather than at a specific stage of the interview. It was important to create a natural-feeling conversation insofar as young male offenders could otherwise start to feel interrogated and defensive. All three interviews were conducted by the second female author, a familiar face at the YJS although none of the participants had been previously known to her. Upon informed consent, interviews took between 1 and 2 hours and were recorded in their entirety on a digital dictaphone, providing a point of reference and to facilitate verbatim transcription for subsequent analysis.

Analytic process

The analysis of transcripts drew on Smith and Osborn's (2003) interpretative advice. Transcription provided an opportunity to re-engage with the interview and annotations referring to body language and tone of voice were included when considered informative in re-creating the interview context. Both[1] researchers read each transcript many times, to create an overall impression of each individual case. From this, initial emergent themes were derived and then discussed, which included considerations that seemed especially poignant and relevant to each particular individual. A story was constructed for each participant and from each story distinct master themes were produced through iterative discussion at all times ensuring that themes could be thoroughly grounded in each transcript. Master themes for each transcript were then tabulated along with pertinent sub-themes. Each theme was illustrated by quotes from the transcript to illustrate their grounding in the text (Johnston and Morrison, 2007). After analysing each transcript, comparisons were made across transcripts which were then discussed to identify an overarching master narrative.

Analysis and discussion

Two overall master themes can be used to capture how the three young male participants made sense of their offending in the context of their community orders:

1. dissociating from an offender identity and authoring a new non-offender, more individuated identity; and
2. masculinity as multifaceted.

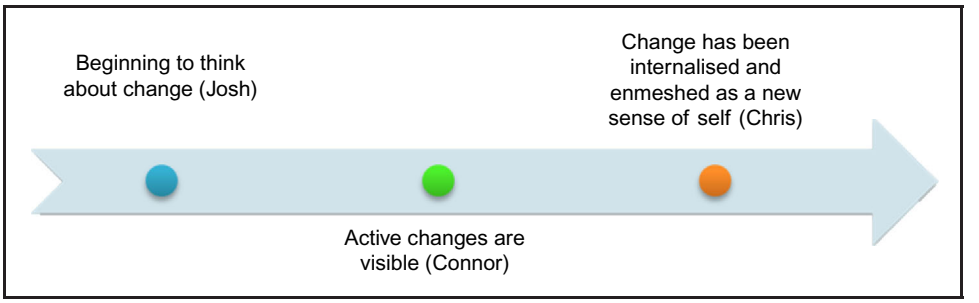
Illustrative examples will be used to demonstrate theme derivatives whilst also keeping the themes grounded within the distinctive narratives of each individual participant. Themes are discussed in logical order: theme one is presented first on the assumption that learning to appreciate the self in a more personalised way permitted young offenders to explore new more multifaceted less stereotypical forms of masculinity, as described under theme two.

Authoring a new identity – dissociating from a criminal past

This theme pertains to the identity of participants as undergoing transformation from a category-based identity normatively rooted in ''offending'' toward a more individuated identity, which disconnects them from their ''offending past''. In all three cases, participants talked about being previously consumed by their offending, as a way of life, in Chris's case being carried through the paternal generation. All also indicated how minded they were of their dependency ''as offenders'' on local peer culture and of the need to free themselves up to author a new way of being and behaving. Each participant explicitly differentiated their past ''offending'' and present ''non-offending'' self, reflecting seriously on who they had become and why, relative to how they aspired to be. Chris articulated a completely transformed identity, actively rejecting any form of offending. Connor was still in the midst of identity change, whilst Josh was beginning to think about, though not yet committed to personal change. Whilst the specifics of each case are unique, the overarching journey towards identity change is consistent, as shown on the continuum in Figure 1.

The identity re-authoring process would appear to be highly conscious and reflected, although for Josh there was still much confusion surrounding what his future non-offending

Figure 1 The continuum of change



self might look like, relative to the pull of offending. Two sub-themes are pivotal to understanding the process of identity change discernible in the transcripts of each of the three young men: extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for change and clarity of identity: ''Who am I?''

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations to change

This sub-theme pertains to varying degrees of ownership participants demonstrated in relation to their change and in particular whether it could be attributable to an *extrinsic* catalyst (i.e. the electronic tag or community order) or an *intrinsic*, internally driven motivation. In the latter, Connor keenly emphasised that ''the tag'' was not the cause of his decision to change: it was his *own* choice, having internalised the need to change. Chris also displayed a confidence in marking change as his own decision and demonstrated pleasure from having instigated it, which was self-reinforcing:

> Yeah I've changed a lot while I've been on tag, like I dunno I used to be like cos obviously like I had a bit of a reputation, um like when I was at school I was, like people used to talk to me often because they felt they had to cos they were scared of me sort of thing but now people talk to me because they want to and I dunno they just like the way I am I suppose.

Contrastingly, Josh was still very much in ''compliance'' –, i.e. he felt he had no choice but to change or he would end up in prison. For all participants, looking to the future as part of which meant keeping out of trouble appeared to be a strong motivator to change:

> I didn't stop everything because the orders or nothing I just stopped because I didn't want to go to prison myself and then like I want to be driving next year and if I've got a criminal record they'll put my insurance up and I need to start saving up more money as well cos I've lost loads cos of all fines and that so I basically just decided myself I didn't want to be getting in trouble and that.

Connor's explicitly declared ownership of the decision to change contrasts with Josh who appreciated the need to change but was confused about what this would entail. In the following narrative, Josh is referring to his best friend who does not get into trouble and has a job:

> I still class him as my best mate over the ones that I hang around with now because they're just, I always get in trouble with them, and I don't really like it but it's fun at the time.
>
> *Would you like to stop getting into trouble?*
>
> Yeah.
>
> *What do you think needs to change for that to happen?*
>
> Need to start hanging around with new people to be honest. Still hang around with the people I do now, just on a less basis really . . . . If I got a job then it would be more likely that I could hang around with him [best mate] because I could go out and do all the shit he does instead of hanging around with mates I hang around with now and cause trouble.

For Josh, awareness of the need to change has not yet shifted from ''I should'' to ''I will''. Connor on the other hand, provides an example of the transition from Josh's position on the continuum to the more internalised achievements of Chris. Looking at his status as ''in transition'', we can see Connor's battle with his inner interests in criminality and his awareness of the ''greater good''. His interview is littered with examples of efforts at self-constraint in fighting his urges:

> . . .something that looks fun and everything, but I'd probably stay away from now, cos obviously it looks like they're about to get in a load of trouble but it still looks like a fun night out . . . . I don't know. . . but if I saw that down the road I'd follow that to see what's going on. . . well not so much now, I'd keep my distance, but I'd want to anyway.

In comparison to Josh, Connor is aware of the pull into offending but he evaluates the costs and benefits of giving into this. Internalising his decision, he thinks of the wider implications and recognise that he has much more to lose than to gain by getting involved. Furthermore, Connor can also identify triggers like alcohol that entice him into losing sight of his goals and can resist them:

> *So you think alcohol makes you sort of lose your focus a bit?*
>
> Yeah. Like you don't think of things properly like all the way through. Like I'd just be thinking of that night, I wouldn't be thinking of what would happen the next day. . . I wouldn't be thinking ''oh yeah tomorrow I'll get arrested, I'll be in a cell for ages, I might get an extra month on tag. . .then it puts me even longer away from like going out and everything, partying and stuff cos there's no point risking one night and then going two weeks on tag when you could just miss that one night and then you've got those two weeks extra partying and everything''.

The difference between Chris and Connor relative to Josh is that their intrinsic ownership of change afforded them confidence in their decision to author a new identity. To summarise, this sub-theme pertains to participant's intrinsic (relative to extrinsic) effort to move away from the criminal past towards achieving a new identity away from criminality (Table III).

Clarity in identity: ''Who am I?''

Making either an extrinsically or intrinsically led decision to author a new identity allows participants to control who they are and in particular who they want to become. Josh displays the least clarity in his identity: this in itself could be blocking Josh from internalising the need to change or alternatively, his thoughts surrounding the difficulty of change have created insecurities of identity. When asked about how his friends would describe him, Josh struggles to answer the question ''Probably more . . . .I don't know really, I'd describe myself as in like. . . I don't know''. However, he later insightfully comments on himself in an assertion that he would like to be a famous scientist rather than a famous boxer. In explaining his choice he says:

> Because I don't really like fighting, I fight when I have to and I think it's probably be more, I'd probably feel better about myself if I was known for being a famous scientist.

Chris likewise states:

> Like there's no need to fight but that's what we do anyway.

Josh clearly recognises the senselessness of fighting, and conveys self-conscious admission of his reputation as ''trouble maker'', battling perhaps with his current identity in which fighting has long been pivotal. He is aware that his behaviour aligns with what peers expect of him, but moving on is complicated because his identity as ''offender'' is all he is currently clear about, despite his distaste for this and the sense in which he could make more of his life. Josh differs from Chris and Connor in this current reliance on peers to guide

Table III Connor – case in focus

Connor regrets past behaviour that now restricts his activities, now motivated by the prospect of financial gain in an occupational context rather than through offending. Whilst he has a strong incentive to keep out of trouble, he still feels urges and desires to drink, attend ''wild parties'' and follow trouble. Although his anger is now actively self-constrained, he recognises that it can be triggered by certain people like his girlfriend and mum. Although external catalysts are behind his decision to change, such as moving out of home and being placed on tag, Connor now takes responsibility and ownership for his decisions – in part because he takes issue with authority and external control. Connor has made sacrifices in his home life to keep out of trouble: living with his foster mum is not as comfortable as living at home but it helps him maintain his new trouble-free outlook. Connor resents his father for not being a permanent feature in his life discredited him from having any rights to prescribe to him what to do: respect is something that he says must be earned

his path rather than standing his own ground. In contrast, Connor has developed the strength and courage to step back from peers and say ''this is who I am, I don't associate with trouble any more'' – even if they continue to do so:

> Is this like arsonists and just going round in a group? Err, I'd say it was probably more like me in the past before I was on tag and everything but definitely not no more like if all my mates were doing that I'd definitely stay away. I'd be like running home so I wouldn't get in trouble for it.
>
> *Now you would?*
>
> Yeah like I definitely wouldn't be doing any of that stuff now.

Connor is not ashamed of his re-authored identity, indicating a clear transition from past to present along with a confidence and clarity in his new sense of self. Chris also articulates a changed identity, no longer viewing himself as a thug but, on the contrary, not afraid to show a softer side, as evident in his choice of music:

> *If you were with your friends would you listen to choir boys?*
>
> Probably not but I have their CD and I like to listen to it at home.
>
> *Do they know that you like Choir boys?*
>
> Oh yeah if they come round and they'll be flipping through my CD's and like they chuck a few CD's in and like my selection I'll be like ''put it on its good, put number three on'' and then they'll listen to it and be like ''what?!''
>
> *You don't feel embarrassed for them to. . .*
>
> No I don't need to. It's a CD. I like it.
>
> *That's good. . .*
>
> I wouldn't go round their house, flip through their CD's and be like, ''oh you like this'', so I wouldn't expect them to be like that with me. You know they do have their little giggles with themselves but at the end of the day, I don't moan about what they like.
>
> *So you're your own person?*
>
> Yeah. Course it is.

Although Chris knows that his peers might laugh about his musical taste behind his back he is still not shy about revealing it to them. To summarise, this subtheme pertains to the degree of confidence and clarity the young offenders have in their new found self (Table IV).

Masculinity as multifaceted and contextual

All participants talked about their offending in the context of masculinity. However, far from endorsing stereotypical machoism (i.e. being aggressive, disrespectful to women and disgusted by males in ''feminine'' occupations), the young offenders demonstrated complexity in the way they do masculinity. Two sub themes will be used to explain this: the changing meaning of masculinity and the use of role models as basis of safe exploration.

The changing meaning of masculinity

Offender ''masculinity'' is rooted in local male peer culture, involving ''proof'' of physical strength (especially self-defence) when competing for ''macho status'' and ''pulling stunts'' which push the boundaries of the law. Thus, in the words of Chris:

Table IV Josh: case in focus

Josh presents as more disorganised than Chris and Connor. He knows what must be done to achieve change, motivated in part by reducing the strain on his mum, but cannot yet seem to translate this into actual change. Josh appears to struggle with his identity: he cannot answer questions about how his friends would describe him and is unsure of what ''being Josh'' actually means. Although he verbalises dissociation from ''Josh the arsonist'' he is still ''Josh the trouble-maker'' and his reluctance to submit this identity is indicative of his internal struggle. When he imagines himself as a security guard or prison officer, he finds it difficult to foresee what side of the law he would potentially be on. He is able to reel out socially acceptable scripts about domestic violence and arson but how much he truly believes them is a different issue

> Yeah like I'll spark them and then they'll hit me a couple of times and then I'll just go straight in. Like, I let them think they're winning, let them get the upper hand and that's when I just pounce.
>
> *Why do you do that? Why do you employ that tactic?*
>
> Cos it makes me fight better, if I let them give me a couple of shots it does give me adrenalin like it's just it's weird. It likes gets me buzzing and that's when I sort of attack, once they've had a couple of shots, knackered themselves out, just a good rota, a good routine.

All, however, unanimously displayed abhorrence towards rape and domestic violence; although attitudes of respect towards women varied. Whilst Chris believed that all women had the right to be respected, Connor and Josh felt it was more conditional on being earned. Additionally, both Chris and Connor spoke warmly of their girlfriends (with whom they had a monogamous relationship) and a nurturing attitude towards younger siblings, suggesting that they had no problem declaring their more sensitive sides.

The idea of having a more sensitive side became most strongly apparent when envisaging how they would feel if they ended up in prison, indicating a discrepancy between private feeling and public action. Josh acknowledges how scared he would feel but also emphasises that he could not show his vulnerability to prison inmates:

> Well I wouldn't go in and be like proper scared and shit and show my weakness to people but I wouldn't go in thinking I was all hard and everything. I'd just go in all casually.

Similarly, Connor noted the need to balance carefully his inner sensitivity and overt displays of masculinity. Both Connor and Josh indicated that it was important to know when it was ''safe'' to be sensitive. Whilst it was clear to them that a prison setting would not be the place for this, other contexts were considered more acceptable. Chris, as part of his new identity, had been enjoying the process of exploring this aspect of himself:

> Just the weirdest thing happened the other day like I've been seeing this girl for like a week and like she's really pretty and that and then well basically I didn't think it would be such a be such a big deal, she gave me her friend's number because she introduced me to her. . .and she was like ''oh you met my best friend'' and she got in a big tit so I felt like a right sop I went to the flower shop, I spent I think it was forty eight quid on a bunch of pink and red roses and it just said ''forgive me'' on a little card and I took it to where she works and like one of her workmates was outside and she was like ''ah are they for Helen?'' and I was like ''yeah'', I was like ''oh no here we go'', I just felt really embarrassed, I've never done anything like that in my life. . .

To summarise, this subtheme refers to the fact that masculinity has different facets, which appear to be context specific, even for those who are otherwise considered stereotypically macho.

The use of role models as a basis of safe exploration

All three participants described problematic relationships with their biological fathers. Josh did not have a permanent father figure in his life, either paternal or step-related whilst Chris and Connor reported the long-term presence of influential step-fathers. Chris had limited contact with his biological father but described a relationship with a step-father who in his eyes, played a significant role in socialising him into ''masculine rules of engagement'' through activities like boxing and fighting. On the other hand, Chris is also proud to attribute his strong stance against domestic violence as coming directly from his step-dad:

> *And what kind of things did your dad [referring to step dad] tell you were important and what would you like to pass on to your younger generation?*
>
> Never raise your fist to a woman. Just like simple things really, like obviously stay protected, whatever a dad would teach you and like he has taught me a lot about, well he has taught me some bad things, like he was the one that taught me about letting them up but like my grandad taught him and he changed it, cos my grandad taught him, my grandad used to be a bit of a scrapper as well, so it's like come sort of like gone down sort of thing my grandad taught him, when they're down keep them down but then he changed it, he said no, when they're down let them up sort of thing so I prefer to do that and like really just generally things what a father would teach you really. . .

Clearly, Chris is now comfortable enough to challenge and select ideas from his step-father, shaping them to better suit him and what he stands for. Referring to his fighting tactics:

Did you get taught that or did you come up with that yourself?

I come up with that myself I think. Cos like when I was young, watching, my [step] dad used to, I'm quite like, not fit but like I can move around quite fast, my dad used to teach me to dance around until they get knackered let them keep giving you shots, dance around and then, um, pounce on them and attack them and that's probably where I got it from, but. . .he did like try loads of different things with me and that just seemed like the best one. . .

Neither, Josh or Connor, by contrast, could explicitly attribute any of their behavioural attitudes and norms to any particular ''role model''. Both on the other hand, conveyed a sense in which their fathers (i.e. through their strategic absence) had demonstrated how *not* to be:

I don't really like seeing him [his father]. If we get invited out to sleep round his house, then I'd say no. But he come back and was here every weekend, and then it got to every fortnight and every month and now, it's like I saw him 6 months ago before Christmas, basically special occasions and stuff like that. It's annoying. It's ridiculous; he can't even make time and effort to see us. It's stupid.

Would you like to be a dad like him, or do things differently?

Different.

Are you similar to him in any way?

Personality wise I am, but nothing like. . . dad. . .and stuff like that no I couldn't.

Witnessing the disengaged behaviour of their fathers' appeared to provide participants with a template of how not to be and how they would like to do things differently (Table V).

General discussion

Empirical contribution

Two key empirical findings can be highlighted from this study. First, the community order was clearly instrumental to instigating personal change, but each participant varied in how far they took ownership of the decision to change from offender to non-offender. Being placed on an order may be necessary but not sufficient to motivate transformational change. Chris had internalised change in a fully self-regulated sense, whereas Connor was still in the process of becoming internally regulated. Josh however was at a much earlier stage of recognising the need to change prompted by having to comply with the order. Whilst reports indicate that intensive probation orders are effective in diverting young people from custodial sentences and recidivism (Brownlee and Joanes, 1993), our findings suggests that ''extrinsic'' motivators (e.g. tagging) work best when accompanied by internalisation of the decision to change.

All participants were grappling with the question of who to become, in relation to what, and with achieving some sense of personal esteem outside and beyond the hyper-masculine norms attached to the ''offender'' identity. Although identity dilemmas during adolescence are not an issue exclusive to young offenders (Erikson, 1971; Widdicombe, 1988) the community order did appear to provide a personal ultimatum to disengage from offending and associated category norms.

Second, all participants acknowledged that their offending had been inextricably linked with a particular way of being and ''doing'' masculinity and were clear of the need to find more

Table V Chris – case in focus

On paper it could be deduced that Chris is an overtly aggressive and difficult individual. However, at interview he presented as a mature, polite young man who since being on tag has proactively made significant changes in his life. Coming from a travelling background, Chris has been socialised by his step-father into a world full of rules and regulations, codes that dictate acceptable male behaviour. In particular, in terms of fighting, Chris is clear that you must never kick a man when he is down; fighting should be bare fisted with bare chests. Now Chris says he is reluctant to seek trouble, but he is clear that if necessary he could seriously defend himself. However, he has actively moved away from positioning himself in contexts in which this could happen. Chris could be summed up as the ''good bad guy'' who acknowledges he has not behaved in an exemplary fashion in the past but who appreciates good facets to his character, something he aims to build on now and in the future

constructive masculine identities. This was difficult for them all, especially Josh, who consciously battled with the pull of hyper-masculine activities, unclear about who he could meaningfully become outside of what he was most familiar with. In managing to break away from offending, Chris was comfortable exploring his masculinity in a more unique way; as part of this he was able to display his more sensitive side to his peers. As Jewkes (2005) also found, all were also astutely aware of contexts in which it was or was not ''safe'' to reveal their vulnerability, managing their ''front stage'' identities very carefully (Goffman, 1990). However, they had also become aware that they had to remove themselves from these kinds of macho peer contexts in which they had to ''prove'' themselves. For Chris, a positive male role model (i.e. step-father) was integral to this masculine reformation; but like Connor and Josh not all offenders have such positive role models (Evans and Wallace, 2008; Frosh *et al.*, 2003; Jarvis *et al.*, 2004).

Theoretical contribution

The three cases represented above can be most parsimoniously located on a continuum anchored by externally regulated behaviour at one end, through to internally or self-determined behaviour at the other (Figure 1). Shifting the basis of motivation from externally to internally driven is explained by self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000). At the ''external regulation'' end, Josh's behaviour is regulated by compliance to his community order through the threat of further punishment. By contrast, at the ''intrinsic regulation'' end Chris owns the decision to change from ''offender'' to ''non-offender'' and gains pleasure from this. Connor, however, is what can be described as mid-way on the continuum, a theoretical position labelled by Deci *et al.* (1994) as ''identified regulation'': whilst he accepts personally the need to change, he is still experiencing some internal conflict. In short each participant is theoretically at a different stage of development in the shift towards increasing self-determination.

SDT recognises the crucial role of context in facilitating a shift towards self-determined behaviour, moving away from the idea that individuals simply vary in their degree of internal or external loci of control (Rotter, 1954) towards an explanation of *how the loci of control can be shifted* (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In particular individuals must feel that they have autonomous support from others to assist in shifting them psychologically from being extrinsically to intrinsically regulated. Integral to this is the involvement of an individual in developing a meaningful rationale and focus for their behaviour (Deci *et al.*, 1994). In the current context, part of forming a clearer, positive identity involved testing and exploring the limits and boundaries of what being male means.

The second theoretical consideration pertains to the relative importance of personal over social identity (Turner *et al.*, 1987). All participants had either disidentified – or begun to disidentify, with the category of offender, and therefore also the extent to which they allowed themselves to be governed by stereotypical ''masculine'' norms. In parallel, all had to varying extents begun reckoning with their personal identity or individuality (Reicher and Haslam, 2006). It is important to note that a precondition for being able to differentiate oneself as an individual can only be achieved in relation to the meanings available in the context of wider social categories (Widdicombe, 1988). Everyone, especially adolescents, needs to experience social acceptance through peer relations (Hurtes, 2002). The challenge for all three young offenders interviewed here was to break free of groups where being socially accepted and validated as a ''male'' involves ''offending''.

Practical implications: achieving behavioural change through autonomous support

As well as assuring us of the rehabilitative potential of young offenders on community orders, the findings suggest the following practice implications:

- Tagging is a starting point in the rehabilitation journey.
- SDT provides a useful explanatory framework in which to manage the rehabilitation process over the long term to facilitate and help sustain the journey towards increased ownership and self-regulation of behaviour.

- The rehabilitation process also needs to include discussions about more constructive and socially acceptable ways of being masculine that do not involve offending.

Caveats to the above include the possibility that ''tagging'' will be more successful for some individuals than others: Hucklesby's (2008, p. 68) findings led to a recommendation for pre-sentencing screening of young offenders to ascertain their ''readiness to change'' akin to the stage described as ''contemplation'' (i.e. recognise their behaviour is problematic and to weigh up the pros and cons of changing) in Prochaska *et al.*'s (1994) model of change. Such individuals could then be trusted to comply without strict monitoring. This is an important consideration insofar as SDT assumes some element of perceived choice as a prerequisite to initiating self-determined change. Indeed, all three of our participants denied the role played by their community order in deciding to change, perceiving themselves to have personally instigated the path to their transition. In practice this means that front-line professionals will need to provide ''autonomy support'' (Deci and Ryan, 1987) which involves managing the fine balance between coercion (e.g. the ''tag'') whilst also affording choice to offenders as discussed by Burdon and Gallagher (2002) in their work with sex offenders.

Importantly, SDT also speaks to issues of identity, which in the current context, may be facilitated by some form of constructive reconsideration of what it means to be young and male that does not involve offending (Johnstone, 2001).

Limitations and future research

Although the small sample size permitted an in-depth analysis of each individual case, findings cannot be generalised across the youth offending population. Also, in being female, the interviewer was an audience in relation to whom participants may have felt able to display sensitive sides: all participants clearly benefitted from the opportunity to be listened to and respected as individuals during their interviews. Additionally, a longitudinal study would have produced more robust insights into the transition process, but here we are limited to drawing only theoretical conclusions about the potential for a shift to occur in offenders towards self-determined behaviour. For Chris and Connor, it would for instance have been useful to identify factors associated with change maintenance or retraction such as the presence of positive feedback (Swann, 1987).

Overall however, the results can be conceptualised using a theoretical framework that is potentially generalisable and that has validity as the basis for targeted intervention with offender populations. Future work could also derive and test hypotheses from SDT in other offender rehabilitation contexts, to both broaden and refine its practical merits.

Implications for practice

- Young male offenders are able to offer an insight into their offending behaviour; semi-structured interviews may provide a useful tool to explore this further in a practical rather than research setting. A particular emphasis on individual work and exploration of personal rather than group identity is likely to be useful.
- Community orders, including those which incorporate an electronic tag and curfew represent an effective sentencing option for young offenders, allowing them the space and time to explore more multifaceted identities.
- Community orders and electronic tagging can be an external catalyst to change but youth justice practitioners should strive to create an environment which meets the principles of autonomy, relatedness and competence in order to harness intrinsic motivation and long-term change.
- Community orders should aim to help young people build more constructive masculine identities. The use of positive male role models seems to be an area of need and importance in this cohort, something practitioners should focus on providing.

Note

1. Since an independent reliability analysis is not an issue or indeed possible in high level conceptual work, both researchers were involved at all stages to ensure authenticity of the findings in relation to the data.

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