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Creating shared meaning:  
Narratives of youth violence, mindfulness,  
and counselling psychology

By

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*Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of:*

Doctor of Psychology

City University, London

Department of Psychology

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# Table of contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Declaration</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Preface.....	7
<b>References</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Part One: Research	
Exploring narratives of youth violence and antisocial behaviour	
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Overview.....	14
Delineating the focus.....	15
Constructions of youth misbehaviour.....	16
Theoretical understandings of delinquency.....	18
Traditional sociological understandings of delinquency.....	18
Traditional psychological understandings of delinquency.....	20
Interactionist understandings of delinquency.....	22
Review of relevant literature.....	24
‘Outside’ attempts at understanding delinquency.....	25
‘Inside’ research on youth understandings of delinquency.....	30
Rationale for the study.....	39
<b>2 Methodology</b> .....	<b>40</b>
Overview.....	40
Research aims.....	40
A qualitative approach.....	40
Epistemological positioning and theoretical perspective.....	41
Symbolic Interactionism.....	42
Methodology.....	43
Narrative Inquiry.....	43
Narrative analysis.....	46
Methods.....	47
Recruitment.....	47
Interviewees.....	48
Interview settings.....	48
Narrative interviews.....	49
Data storage.....	51
Narrative analysis of the interviews.....	52
Ethnographic data.....	56
Methodological reflexivity.....	57

Ethical issues.....	58
Ethical considerations in narrative research.....	59
The status of the text.....	59
Sensitive research with young people.....	60
Limits to confidentiality & data protection.....	60
Evaluation of methodology.....	61
Validity in narrative research.....	62
Methodological issues.....	62
<b>3 Critical narrative analysis.....</b>	<b>65</b>
Overview.....	65
Critique of the illusions of subjectivity.....	65
Introducing the narrators and narratives.....	67
Analysis of the narratives.....	72
‘On road’: A (different) way of life.....	72
Rules.....	79
Stigma.....	82
Emotions.....	88
Reflections.....	92
<b>4 Discussion.....</b>	<b>100</b>
Overview.....	100
Synthesis and discussion.....	100
Internalising and countering dominant narratives.....	101
Transient identities and limiting constructions.....	104
Antisocial behaviour as expressing identity & managing emotions.....	107
Stigmatising approaches, defiant reactions & a need for boundaries.....	110
The pain of thinking, establishing responsibility & allowing healing.....	114
Evaluation of the study.....	118
Applications to counselling psychology.....	118
Limitations of the present study.....	119
Ideas for future research.....	120
Conclusion.....	121
<b>Reflexive Statement.....</b>	<b>122</b>
Researcher reflections.....	122
Theoretical reflections.....	124
<b>References.....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>Appendix A: Participant information sheet.....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Appendix B: Consent form.....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>Appendix C: Narrative interview guide.....</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>Appendix D: Debriefing sheet &amp; Resource list.....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Appendix E: Transcription symbols.....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>Appendix F: Model of CNA.....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Appendix G: Extract from Tanner’s transcript.....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Appendix H: Initial analysis notes for Tanner.....</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>Appendix I: Initial thematic analysis for Tanner.....</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>Appendix J: Individual narrative construction for Tanner.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Appendix K: Reflexivity questions.....</b>	<b>177</b>

## Part Two: Critical Literature Review

### Mindfulness and the work of the counselling psychologist

<b>Prologue</b> .....	<b>179</b>
Introduction.....	180
Mindfulness and the therapeutic encounter.....	181
Mindfulness-based client interventions.....	182
Mindfulness in the therapist.....	183
Studies on personal mindfulness practice in the therapist.....	185
Studies on cultivating mindfulness in the therapist.....	187
Studies on the influence of therapist mindfulness on client outcomes.....	189
Conclusions and future directions.....	191
<b>Epilogue</b> .....	<b>194</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>197</b>
<b>Appendix: Journal publication</b> .....	<b>204</b>

## Part Three: Professional Practice

### Working with beliefs: The importance of validation

<b>Prologue</b> .....	<b>213</b>
<b>Introduction to the therapy</b> .....	<b>214</b>
Setting and referral.....	214
Client profile.....	214
Presenting problem.....	214
Theoretical framework.....	215
Initial assessment.....	216
Case formulation.....	217
Contract and therapeutic aims.....	218
<b>The development of therapy</b> .....	<b>218</b>
The pattern of therapy.....	218
Key content issues and therapeutic techniques.....	219
Therapeutic process and struggles encountered.....	223
<b>Discussion and evaluation</b> .....	<b>227</b>
The end of therapy and evaluation of the work.....	227
Use of supervision.....	228
Professional and personal learning.....	228
<b>References</b> .....	<b>230</b>
<b>Appendix: Cognitive formulation</b> .....	<b>232</b>

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## Declaration

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# Preface

This portfolio comprises three pieces of work. First and foremost it presents a narrative research study, which explores young people's understandings of their violent and antisocial behaviour. The second piece is a critical review of existing literature, aimed at exploring the construct of mindfulness, and its impact on the work of the counselling psychologist. The final piece is an account of therapy I conducted with a client, which critically explores our process of developing a shared understanding of his struggles. Each piece may be viewed as distinct in evidencing core competencies required to practice as a counselling psychologist (British Psychological Society, 2006), and have been chosen for this reason. However they also fit together as a single body of work, linked through a theme of *creating shared meaning*. This theme represents the endeavour that I see as central to counselling psychology; that of attempting to truly understand another, to see the world from their perspective, to appreciate their experiences from within their systems of meaning, in the hope that in doing this we bring them too to a place of understanding.

In conceptualising the research project and the portfolio, the same broad themes were always woven through my thinking; meaning, culture, human connection. Where do people get a sense of meaning in their life, and in what ways do they construct this meaning? How do groups of people differ in their meaning construction? What role do human relationships play in fostering this meaning? What role might counselling psychology play?

The research study used a narrative inquiry approach to explore how young people who have engaged in violent and antisocial acts understand and make sense of this behaviour, and how these understandings relate to their views of themselves and the worlds they live in. My ambition with this study was to prioritise the voice of these young people, to focus on their lived experiences, and to situate their understandings of their behaviour within the context of their social worlds. I have always been drawn to broader social aspects of psychology, to understanding human experience within the context of the social world that we exist in, and the ways in which this world and others in it influence our experience of our own life. Counselling psychology distinguishes itself partly through its holistic view of the person, and it was a desire to understand in a fuller way a little-understood group that motivated this study. It is necessary, I think, to explore life outside the therapeutic encounter in order to fully appreciate how this impacts and influences the work that takes place inside it.

A narrative inquiry approach seemed to embody everything I wanted to achieve with the study. First, to allow individuals to tell the 'stories' of their lives, and to do so on their terms, which I hoped would reduce the possibility of their views being misrepresented. Secondly, I was interested in how they created meaning in their lives and from their experiences, and the meaning that much judged but little understood behaviour might hold for them. An ongoing struggle I encountered throughout the research process was how to represent, to name, the focus. I describe it here as violent and antisocial behaviour, and yet this does not capture the essence of the study. I felt this difficulty to be meaningful in itself, indicating the limited nature of language and constructions, and supporting the need for research such as this, that aims to explore situated meanings and so build better understandings.

My motivations in exploring this topic were varied, and both emerged into awareness and evolved as I journeyed through the research process. An ostensible starting point was the reported increase in youth violence and antisocial behaviour in the UK over recent years. Perhaps especially as I had just moved to London and found myself living in an area frequently making headlines for these reasons. Alongside this, I was struck by the intense media reporting, and the seeming moral panic surrounding media representations of the youth 'gangs' responsible (Bullock & Tilley, 2008; Hallsworth & Young, 2004, 2008). This formed the backdrop to my own memories of the client group that had most intrigued me in my training thus far, on my first placement in an adult probation service. Working with young adults here, some of them still teenagers, I often pondered the discrepancy between their violent and prolific offending behaviour, and the more prosocial, empathic and compassionate behaviour that they both recounted and demonstrated to me. What was it about these young people that allowed them to engage in such contradictory behaviour? What was it about certain social environments that allowed their offending behaviour to have a normative quality? What was the impact for the young person's sense of self when this behaviour routinely harmed others? Lastly, what was the impact of media labelling and stereotyping on a group of people still stepping into their social roles as members of society?

The second piece of work included here is a critical review of literature exploring the concept of mindfulness, and its potential impact on the work of counselling psychologists, through cultivating therapeutic presence and an ability to 'be with' the client. Chronologically, this was the first piece to be written. I discovered the concept of mindfulness in my first year of training, and it opened up to me a new way of being, and

a new way of thinking about thinking, both professionally and personally. I was interested in the potential for mindfulness to influence our ability as psychologists and therapists to connect to, accept, and be fully receptive to another. To facilitate both their own and our exploration of their experiences, to understand their meanings, and so bring about healing. Having explored these issues in the review, I struggled to devise a worthwhile empirical research study on the topic. Allowing my scope to broaden, while staying true to that which I wished to understand more fully, I came to my eventual research topic, as outlined above.

The final piece included in this portfolio is an account of a piece of clinical work I conducted with a young man struggling with a sense of self-doubt, and struggling to make sense of his past. This case study comprises a description of our therapeutic work, and of the evolving process between us. Our work together explored themes of morality, being made to feel 'bad', and fear of one's own destructive potential. In these ways it mirrors many of the issues explored in the research study. However I did not select it for inclusion here based on this, but rather to explore the theme of *creating shared meaning* within the framework of therapeutic practice. It does this by exploring the collaborative therapeutic process of re-authoring a client's life experiences, building new understandings for client and psychologist alike.

\*\*\*\*\*

The three pieces in this portfolio were inspired by a desire to understand the human experience, and how we as humans connect and try to understand each other's experiences, how we create shared meaning. This brings it in line with the goals of both the qualitative research endeavour, and the discipline of counselling psychology.

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## Part One: Research

Exploring narratives of youth violence and  
antisocial behaviour

## Abstract

This qualitative research study used a narrative inquiry approach to explore how young people who have engaged in violent and antisocial acts understand and make sense of this behaviour, and how these understandings relate to their views of self and the worlds they live in. Narrative interviews were conducted with eight individuals about their lives and their social worlds, with the resulting co-constructed stories analysed using a critical narrative analysis approach, resulting in the construction of five overarching thematic categories. Emergent ideas were interrogated from a symbolic interactionist perspective, and the impact of broader social contexts and dominant cultural narratives were explored. Suggestions are made regarding therapeutic work with young people engaged in such behaviour, and avenues for future research suggested.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the present study I hope to gain some understanding of the experiences of young people who engage in violent and antisocial behaviour. Research in this area is characterised by its cross-disciplinary nature, with literature spread across psychology, sociology and criminology. Emler and Reicher (1995) describe the 'double character' of delinquency research, referring to the need to acknowledge both its social contours and individual behaviour, without succumbing to either social determinism or individual reductionism. This caution formed an important point of reference in the present study as, echoing Emler and Reicher (1995), I sought to understand how broader social structural factors impact on and interact with the contextual and individual processes that influence behaviour. This was supported by a narrative approach, which allows research to challenge the conventional individual- society dualism, constructing both in relation to each other (Andrews, Day Sclater, Rustin, Squire, & Treacher, 2000). It is my hope that approaching the topic from a broad perspective that includes consideration of sociological, anthropological and criminological literature, while ultimately maintaining a focus on psychological understandings and implications, will be a unique and worthwhile endeavour.

### Overview

This chapter begins by delineating the focus of the present study, clarifying some of the relevant terms used (often interchangeably) in the literature. I then provide a brief critique of constructions of youth misbehaviour, followed by an overview of important theoretical understandings of delinquency. I then review relevant literature pertaining to the present research, distinguishing between that which studies delinquency from an 'outside' perspective, and that which explores it from the perspective of the young people in question.

Several points of omission bear specific mention. First, though much of the literature included here refers specifically to adolescence, I will not theoretically explore the construct of 'adolescence'. The individuals interviewed in this study ranged from late teens to late 20s. Some of the youngest were already parents, and many had been supporting themselves for several years. I therefore prefer to consider them individuals, and will refer to them simply as 'young people'. Secondly, though much research in this

area focuses on intervention, I have chosen not to review this here. The focus of this study is on *understanding* behaviour and individual experience, not aiming to reduce certain behaviours. Lastly, theoretical understandings of aggression and violence will not be considered individually (but see Barak, 2006 for a review), rather violent behaviour will be considered under the rubric of delinquency.

### Delineating the focus

The present study is essentially interested in the experiences of young people who engage in behaviour that causes harm to others, or that may be deemed wrongful, illegal or unacceptable by society. Such descriptions are by no means objective, and require some clarification. Speaking generally, such behaviour may be termed 'deviant', defined by Emler and Reicher (1995, p. 6) as that which presents a "danger to orderly social existence". When engaged in by young people, such behaviour is often described by the term 'delinquency', defined not in the legal sense but as a behavioural pattern embracing activities such as aggression, theft and wilful damage (Emler & Reicher, 1995). 'Antisocial' behaviour, defined by the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act as 'acting in a manner likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to other persons', may broadly be conceived of as behaviour that lacks consideration for others, and is in some way damaging to society. This is importantly distinguished from the psychiatric diagnosis of antisocial behaviour disorder. Millie (2009) includes in his working definition that it is aggressive behaviour or intentional 'harm doing', that often occurs without apparent provocation. In reality, similar behaviour is variously labelled depending on the discipline of inquiry; as 'conduct disorder' within psychiatry and psychology; 'aggression' in developmental psychology; and 'delinquency' in criminology and sociology (Farrington, 2009).

I believe the above terms may be most helpfully viewed as social constructions, status applied from external sources for varying purposes. This view has necessitated careful consideration of the language used in the present study. Though any label is ultimately reductionist, I have chosen to use the term 'delinquency' in reference to research in this area, as this seems to most suitably capture what is a broad literature. When referring to the behaviour of the individuals in the present study, I typically describe it as 'violent' or 'antisocial', using Wikström and Treiber's (2009, p. 78) definition of violence as "acts intended to bring about physical harm to other beings". Though antisocial behaviour

has come to be a laden term, not least given its status as somewhat of a contemporary obsession in British politics (Millie, 2009), I believe it usefully captures the notion that the behaviour in question is primarily objectionable to others, and may not be to the individual engaging in it. Of note, when reviewing research I will use the language of the researcher, as I believe how they construct those they study (e.g. as 'delinquents') to be an important context in interpreting findings.

## Part one: Constructions of youth misbehaviour

Youth misbehaviour has long been a subject of fear and fascination, with essentialist and sensationalist images of delinquent youth being portrayed not just in the media (Hallsworth & Young, 2008), but in the academic literature also (Emler & Reicher, 1995). Downing, Stepney and Jordan (2000, p. 71) describe "an inexhaustible capacity for strong moral condemnation combined with historical forgetfulness" in current constructions of delinquency as an unprecedented epidemic. How can we best understand such constructions, and the fear that underpins them? Perhaps we as society challenge the notion of accepting youth misbehaviour as our social responsibility, or perhaps we simply project onto youth our growing concerns around violence and disorder (Daiute & Fine, 2003). As put by Emler and Reicher (1995, p. 1), "youth presents both a promise and a threat"; young people hold the responsibility for maintaining society as we know it, and the power not to. Stanley Cohen (1972), in his seminal text on the subject, outlined how young people have long been positioned as 'folk devils' at the centre of 'moral panics' by feeding into society's wider insecurities. Chomsky (1995) condemns this scapegoating of contemporary youth, and their positioning as 'dangerous others', while Waiton (2001) asserts that inter-generational fear and insecurity has resulted in normal youth misbehaviour being increasingly redefined as criminal.

Constructs of youth 'gangs' have often served as the focal point for delinquency research and theoretical development. Gang research may be traced to sociologist Frederic Thrasher's (1927) seminal studies of youth gangs in the urban US context, culminating in his book *The Gang*. Interestingly, Thrasher's view of gangs, though acknowledging conflict, focused on the development of tradition, solidarity, morale and attachment to a territory (Thrasher, 1927). This has developed into a view, developed by Klein and colleagues in the 1970's (see Klein, 2001), and most in use today, that is

far more focused on delinquent and conflict behaviour. Several typologies of youth groups or gangs have been proposed, typically based on level of criminal involvement (see Gruter & Versteegh, 2001; Hallsworth & Young, 2004; Klein, 2001), and though all acknowledge the difficulty of outlining distinct characteristics, research into gangs continues unabated, with a dedicated journal devoted to the topic in the US. However, studies suggest that similar processes produce frequent and persistent violent behaviour among gang members and others alike (Mares, 2001; Reiss & Roth, 1994; Taylor, Freng, Esbensen, & Peterson, 2008), and several UK researchers caution against a focus on gangs and gang violence as disparaging, misleading, and ultimately unhelpful (Bullock & Tilley, 2008; Hallsworth & Young, 2004; White, 2004). Recommendations have been made instead to focus on patterns of violent behaviour rather than gang membership (Bullock & Tilley, 2008), and on young people's lifestyles and the situations they present, which have been shown to moderate the link between gang membership and delinquency (Taylor et al., 2008). In the present study, literature relating to violent and antisocial behaviour in young people will be considered regardless of whether it refers to gangs or not, though where the latter is the case this will be acknowledged.

The above is not to deny that youth violence and antisocial behaviour are common occurrences, or that they can be of a serious nature. Delinquency increases sharply about age 11-12 years, peaking at 15 and gradually declining after age 16 (Downing et al., 2000; Fonagy, 2003). Young people aged 10-16 years have been estimated to commit between 30-40% of robbery, car theft and house burglary in the UK (Downing et al., 2000). Recent statistics on violence include the 2005 Young People and Crime Survey estimating 1.8 million violent offenders aged between 10 and 25 in England and Wales (Wilson, Sharp, & Patterson, 2006), 70 young people dying in gang-related violence in Britain in 2008, 26 of these the result of knife attacks in London (Home Affairs Select Committee, 2009), and the percentage of young people reporting carrying a knife increasing by about 50% over recent years (Centre for Social Justice, 2009). Such high rates of violence and antisocial behaviour have been linked to issues of impulsivity and risk-taking, identity formation, and peer and social influences relevant to this time period (Tiffin & Nadkarni, 2010), and it is perhaps this 'ordinary' character of delinquency that makes it of particular interest to psychology.

It is important to examine the language used to describe young people in research on violent and antisocial behaviour. Roberts (2011) criticises dualistic language that

polarises young people as 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training), or on the 'right track', as missing the lived reality of most young people. Frequently-used terms such as 'at-risk' have been criticised for being both inaccurate and pathologising (see Astroth, 1993), with Foster and Spencer (2011) concluding that the terms 'risk' and 'resilience' are inappropriate ways of coming to understand young people's past, present, or futures. Moreover, the authors argue that such conceptual language commits a form of symbolic violence against the young people whose lives it attempts to capture and finalize. Instead, Foster and Spencer (2011) propose a focus on narrative, and the futures young people envision for themselves, as a more humane, and indeed fruitful, way of approaching such studies.

## Part two: Theoretical understandings of delinquency

Theories of delinquency may be roughly divided according to whether they look to the external environment or internal processes in understanding its aetiology. Across disciplines, most essentially propose that socially acceptable behaviour depends upon the development of internal structures of control, often relating this to modern society and the decrease in external controls. Psychology's traditional approach has been to attribute delinquency to flaws or deficits in these internal structures, while sociology has focused on the role of human socialisation and organisation in managing the internalisation of control. Notable across such approaches is an underplaying, and often total disregard, of the role that the immediate social context and social relations play in shaping individual behaviour (Emler & Reicher, 1995). Interactionist approaches, though emerging from a sociological perspective, focus on the meaning of behaviour within its immediate situational context and have, I feel, gone some way towards filling this gap.

### **Traditional sociological understandings of delinquency**

The basic premise of most sociological theories of delinquency is that human behaviour is socially determined, shaped by the external conditions in which it occurs, leading individuals to conform or deviate. Such theories are underpinned by a functionalist view that society's structure makes sense, so that maintenance of the social order is seen as desirable, and deviation as wrong (Emler & Reicher, 1995). Though there is not space to develop them here, notable challenges to this view include the Marxist perspective that 'delinquents' are actually struggling against an

oppressive order (see Humphries, 1995), and the Foucaultian argument that delinquency be considered a social construction, linked to power divisions (see Foucault, 1977).

Sociological theorising on delinquency may be traced to Durkheim's 1897 *La Suicide*, a treatise on alienation and loss of attachment to social norms, which coined the term 'anomie', a sense of personal normlessness. Durkheim (see Durkheim, 1952) proposed that a lack of rules of conduct and moral guidance led to unrealistic personal aspirations and moral dysregulation. Another influential early view was of delinquency as resulting from social disorganisation or a lack of norms. This approach is epitomised by the 'Chicago school' tradition of research, beginning in the US in the 1920's, which explains crime and delinquency as a response to adversity and deprivation (Downing et al., 2000). Proposed ideas within this tradition include the effects of rapid migration leading to competitive social relations (Emler & Reicher, 1995), breakdown of parental and community supervision leading to out-of-control children (Downing et al., 2000), and shifts in social structures, including de-industrialisation, unemployment, and eroding of traditional working class values, marginalising British youth (Mares, 2001).

Another prominent sociological view is of delinquency as a commitment to unconventional norms, a pattern described by Thrasher (1927), and seen in Sutherland's 'differential organisation theory' (Sutherland & Cressey, 1970), discussed further below. Subculture theories of delinquency fit into this category also. In his version of subculture theory, Cohen (1955) proposed that delinquent culture is an inversion of the dominant culture, formed in opposition to it. Youth who do not have the means of achieving success through conventional methods will suffer from 'status frustration', leading to a process of 'reaction formation' where everything accorded value by society is rejected. This is related to Merton's (1938) strain theory, which proposes that delinquency results from an inability to succeed in terms of dominant cultural norms. While Cohen (1955) focused on the destructive nature of delinquent subcultures, Merton (1938) stressed their value, in that even in delinquency, people remain committed to social norms. Similar to Merton's (1938) strain theory, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) proposed that delinquency may represent a different means of achieving a commonly desired end, in line with dominant norms. By proposing that individuals are following different norms rather casting them aside as normless, such approaches paved the way for studying the subjective world of such individuals.

## **Traditional psychological understandings of delinquency**

Research from a psychological perspective has focused on areas including individual differences, cognitive and developmental processes, emotion regulation, and moral development and emotions in attempting to understand delinquency. Daiute and Fine (2003, p. 2) note that “research has typically investigated these constructs as stable traits, rather than as integral to ongoing histories, injustices and social relations”.

Early theories of biological determinism, though acknowledging environmental conditioning to varying degrees, essentially proposed that deviant individuals are in some way different to others. One influential early theory was Eysenck’s (1964) theory of crime and personality, linking genetically determined personality traits to cortical arousal and conditioning processes that serve to restrain antisocial impulses. A contemporary research focus on individual pathology remains, with the unifying assumption that genetic disposition in some way affects interaction with the environment. Notable here is Gottfredson and Hirchi’s (1990) influential ‘general theory of crime’, which asserts that an essential element of criminality is the absence of self-control, and the impact of this on consideration of consequences.

The focus of psychoanalytic endeavours to explore delinquency has typically been the early social development of the individual and its impact on later functioning, and the problem of internalising moral standards from indifferent, harsh or absent parents. Important in this tradition is Bowlby’s (1969) work linking insufficient early attachments to later deficits in relating and empathy, which he explored specifically in relation to delinquency (Bowlby, 1946). Drawing on Bowlby’s (1969) insights around the importance of early emotional care, Winnicott (1965, 1984) proposed a direct relationship between deprivation, both in an emotional and socioeconomic sense, and what he termed ‘the antisocial tendency’. Importantly, Winnicott (1984) suggested that under adverse environmental conditions, a manifestation of distress such as delinquent behaviour is *expected*, and potentially a healthy response. From this perspective destructive behaviour may be viewed as a search for environmental stability, for something to bear the strain of impulsive behaviours. More recent psychoanalytic understandings have similarly viewed delinquency as a tendency to ‘act out’ internal conflicts and tension, essentially replacing thought with action to reduce feelings of distress (Munroe, 2006; Waddell, 1998).

Fonagy and colleagues (Fonagy, 2003; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004; Fonagy & Target, 1997; Fonagy, Target, Steele, & Steele, 1997) have developed a theoretical account of the role of early attachment relationships in later violent behaviour, using the notion of mentalisation. Fonagy (2003) defines mentalisation as the capacity to understand others' subjective experience, and to represent behaviour in terms of mental and emotional states, positioning this as a product of the quality of early attachment. Thus failures in mentalisation resulting from a lack of meaningful early attachment relationships can lead to reduced self awareness, and reduced personal responsibility for behaviour, which the authors link to propensity to commit violence towards others (Fonagy et al., 1997).

Issues of morality have been investigated in several branches of delinquency research. Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek (2007) distinguish between moral cognitions, moral standards, and moral emotions. Taking the first of these, theories of cognitive and moral development have sought to link moral judgment and reasoning to delinquent behaviour, with the structuralist contribution of Kohlberg (1984) particularly important here. Building on Piaget's (1932) work on cognitive development, Kohlberg (1984) addressed the development of moral cognition, proposing three broad periods of moral reasoning, and within these, six stages. Kohlberg (1984) posited that developmental lags at each stage were responsible for delinquent behaviour, with greatest tendency to break rules occurring in the early (preconventional) stages. Such lags were suggested as the product of cognitive limitations, limited social experience, or the failure of institutions to provide appropriate moral choices. For example, Kohlberg (1984) criticised the principle 'obey the rules or be punished', for reinforcing early moral reasoning.

Moral standards may be described as an individual's knowledge and internalisation of moral norms and conventions. Bandura (1999) defines them as fixed internal regulators of behaviour, which function only when self-regulatory mechanisms have been activated. Bandura and colleagues (1999, 2002; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996) have developed the concept of 'moral disengagement' to denote the psychological processes that can function to prevent such activation, allowing a person to view normatively immoral behaviour as excusable or justifiable. Bandura (1999) describes various forms of disengagement, including reconstructing behaviour to allow justification, displacing or diffusing responsibility, disregarding or misrepresenting the consequences, and blaming or dehumanising the victim.

More recently, what have been termed moral emotions, namely shame, guilt, embarrassment and pride, have been suggested to influence the link between moral standards and moral behaviour. Tangney et al. (2007) propose that such emotions arise when reflecting on one's self, and evaluating that self in relation to values and standards thus, importantly, these emotions are evoked by self-reflection and self-evaluation.

### **Interactionist understandings of delinquency**

The theoretical perspective of Symbolic Interactionism proposes that people live in a world of objects, which includes themselves and others, and are guided in their actions by the symbolic meaning that these objects have for them (Blumer, 1986). The title thus encapsulates the idea that we interact with each other on the basis of meanings. These meanings are formed through interactions between people and objects, for example by observing how somebody else defines something, and are interpreted in light of the immediate situation (Blumer, 1986). In this way meanings are viewed as evolving social creations, with social worlds existing only in terms of what has been given meaning. Importantly, different (groups of) people may thus live in different worlds while existing side by side (Plummer, 2000).

An early exploration of delinquency that adopted an interactionist approach was that of Matza (see Matza, 1964), which took several important steps at the time. First, it normalised delinquency, proposing that the difference between delinquents and 'respectable' members of society was not so great, and that young people 'drift' between conventional and unconventional behaviour. Second, Matza (1964) proposed that analysis should centre on the meaning of actions to the actor, to begin to understand their purposes. Matza (1964) proposed focusing on the immediate context of the behaviour, advocating a naturalistic perspective in order to accurately describe phenomena in their own terms.

Sykes and Matza (1957) demonstrated that young people engaged in delinquent behaviour are in fact often guilty and ashamed of their behaviour, that they do demonstrate some desire to conform, and often distinguish between those they can and cannot victimise. They concluded that such young people remain within society's normative bind, this contradiction being possible due to the ambiguity of society's norms, which often seem to sanction delinquency (e.g. need for excitement). Though initial socialisation leads to guilt at such behaviour, Sykes and Matza (1957) proposed

a series of cognitive 'neutralisation techniques' that temporarily neutralise the internal moral standards or values that would normally prohibit such behaviour. Five types of neutralisation were identified; denial of responsibility, denial of harm caused, justification of behaviour through discrediting the victim, condemning the condemners, and appealing to higher loyalties (Sykes & Matza, 1957). There are clear links here with Bandura's (2002) techniques of moral disengagement, and Ribeaud and Eisner (2010) recently empirically combined the two, resulting in their derivation of a unified scale of 'moral neutralization' which they have validated in relation to aggression.

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1959), with its focus on face-to-face or microsocial interactions, proposed that social interactions typically follow certain scripts, much like theatrical productions, with individuals as role-taking actors. In this way individuals are expressing themselves to an audience at all times, both in their behaviour, and through trying to influence the impression others are forming of them. This necessitates constant adjustments to present desirable selves and preserve 'face', particularly in difficult situations. Goffman (1959) viewed the 'self' as simply the set of characters that are performed in various situations. This is echoed in differential association theory (Sutherland & Cressey, 1970), which proposes that individuals learn deviant attitudes, values and behaviour through 'differential identification' and interactions with others, positioning the 'self' as a social construction that is continuously being reconstructed through such interactions.

Goffman (1963) extended the dramaturgical approach to focus specifically on the notion of stigma, which he defined as "the process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity", citing as an example those engaged in socially unacceptable behaviour. Goffman (1963) proposed that heightened contemporary demands for normalcy have resulted in growing sections of society being stigmatised, and that for those who are, coping with everyday interactions is fraught with complexity and ambiguity. Similarly, Howard Becker's 'labelling theory' (1963) proposed that the application of a negative status or stigmatising label to an individual on the basis of their behaviour, once assigned, becomes integral to that behaviour. The basic assumption of the theory is that perceived negative societal reactions lead to the development of negative self-conceptions, and an increase in the deviant behaviour (Becker, 1963). Though labelling theory has been criticised for being both highly specialised and insufficiently detailed (e.g. Scheff & Retzinger, 2001), and by Becker (1971) himself, its ideas remain important.

The role of identity and self-presentation is centralised in Emler and Reicher's (1995) model of delinquency, their 'theory of collective reputation', which examines the social dynamics of delinquent behaviour from a psychological perspective. Essentially, they propose that behaviour is motivated by reputation, and that the pursuit or avoidance of delinquent behaviour is a choice of social identity and moral reputation (Emler & Reicher, 1995). The authors highlight the social nature of reputation, asserting that "reputations are moral labels attached by communities to individuals" (Emler & Reicher, 1995, p. 115).

A focus on the context of behaviour has led to several researchers supporting the notion that violence plays an important and acceptable role in certain social environments. Both Katz (1988) and Felson (1993) identified two important causes and goals of violence as the escalation of disputes over goods or status, and competition for status and social identities. Wikström (2010), in his recent 'situational action theory' emphasises the necessity of micro-level analysis of violent encounters, examining how personal factors, such as moral rules and self-control, interact with situational factors, such as level of law enforcement. Further, Wikström's (Wikström & Treiber, 2007) theory proposes that concepts such as self-control are best analysed as situational rather than as an individual traits.

### Part three: Review of relevant literature<sup>1</sup>

As outlined above, the topic of delinquency spans several disciplines, and a huge amount of literature makes some reference to the subject. Much falls into either rut of the individual-social dualism, positioning delinquency either as reflective of individual deficits, or as essentially 'society's fault'. I agree with the argument made by Wilkinson and Carr (2008) that the disparate sociological and psychological literatures have much in common, and that cross-disciplinary consideration is needed to integrate these often isolated bodies of knowledge. In the following review I have not divided the literature along these lines, but rather according to whether it looks at delinquency from the

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<sup>1</sup> The literature reviewed was obtained primarily via psychological search engines such as PsycINFO, Psycarticles and Psychology & Behavioural Sciences Collection. Search terms used included 'delinquency', 'antisocial', 'violence', 'young people's perspectives', 'morality', 'emotion' and 'narrative'. Research reviewed was predominantly from the last ten years, although research up to 80 years old was reviewed if relevant to the present study.

outside, using primarily quantitative measures, or from the perspective of the young people in question, using primarily qualitative measures. Much of the literature relates to violent behaviour, as this has often been the focus of such research. Of note, Capaldi and Patterson (1996) conclude from their longitudinal research that violent offending in adolescence is part of a general pattern of high-rate antisocial behaviour. Research from Europe, the US and elsewhere will be considered where relevant, though the focus remains primarily on the UK context.

### **‘Outside’ attempts at understanding delinquency**

Research on delinquency has typically sought to elucidate risk and protective factors for youth violence and antisocial behaviour, including individual, family, peer, school and community factors (Alvarez, 2008; Beniart, 2002). Over the past decade in the UK, owing to a growing concern around youth antisocial behaviour, a host of reports have been commissioned on the topic. With an agenda of intervention and crime reduction, such research has tended to be statistical and survey-based, focusing on ‘gangs, guns and weapons’ as the remit is often referred to. This has included gathering data on youth violence (Bullock & Tilley, 2002), use of knives and weapons (Lemos, 2004; Marshall, Webb, & Tilley, 2005), and gun crime (Golding & McClory, 2008; Hales, 2005; Schneider, Rowe, Forrest, & Tilley, 2004). It has frequently been typology-focused, preoccupied with delineating the distinguishing characteristics of ‘gangs’ (Crime Concern, 2005; Hallsworth & Young, 2006; Kennedy, 2007; Smith & Bradshaw, 2005; Young, Fitzgerald, Hallsworth, & Joseph, 2007), and linking these to violence (Taylor et al., 2008; Taylor, Peterson, Esbensen & Freng, 2007). Jacobson and Burrell (2007) provide a comprehensive review of this UK research literature on gangs.

### **Individual differences and self-control**

Despite early theories of biological determinism fading in the face of criticism, research into biological underpinnings of delinquency continues unabated, often hinged on the construct of psychopathy (see Hare, 1993; Kellerman, 2003). Studies have linked deficits in the prefrontal cortex to disinhibition (Gorenstein, 1990), amygdala deficits to problems with emotion recognition (Carr & Lutjemeier, 2005), even identifying propensity towards delinquency at a molecular level (Guang, Roettger, & Tianji, 2008). Research on interpersonal style has related individual differences in sensation-seeking, narcissism and guilt to delinquent behaviour (Baumeister & Campbell, 1999; Miller,

1999; Saelen & Markovits, 2008). Robinson, Roberts, Strayer, and Koopman (2007) found young offenders responded with empathy less often, described less intense emotional responses, and reasoned in more self-referencing ways on questionnaire measures, while others have demonstrated a focus on self-interest and retaliation in violent youth (Tisak, 2005; Wainryb, Komolova, & Plorsheim, 2010). Research suggesting the presence of a callous and unemotional interpersonal style - e.g., lack of guilt, absence of empathy, callous use of others (see Frick & White, 2008 for a review) - suggests such traits are relatively stable across childhood and adolescence, designating a particularly severe subgroup of antisocial and aggressive youth. Carr and Lutjemeier (2005) have linked offending with deficits in perception of emotion in others, linking reduced detection of fearful expressions to less empathic responses. However, other studies have shown no association between self-reported empathy and delinquent behaviour (Lardén, Melin, Holst, & Långström, 2006), while Robinson et al. (2007) found only slightly less guilt experienced by young offenders compared to community youth.

Moffitt's (1993) developmental theory of antisocial behaviour, supported by Rutter and colleagues (Rutter, Silberg, Tracy, Maes, & Eaves, 2007), distinguishes 'life course persistent offenders' from 'adolescence limited offenders', offering a neuropsychological interpretation of the former, and a rather unconvincing 'mimicking due to immaturity' explanation for the latter. Similar research has linked childhood impulsiveness to later violence and antisocial behaviour (see Farrington & Darrick, 2009 for a review). Research in this area has supported Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) theory by demonstrating a link between low self-control and violent and antisocial behaviour (Entner Wright, Caspi, Moffitt, & Silva, 1999; Welsh, Tittle, Yonkoski, Meidinger, & Grasmick, 2008), though problems with this proposed link have been documented (see Pratt, 2009).

### **Cognitive processes and emotion regulation**

Research has often focused on measuring social-cognition and affective processing in relation to delinquent behaviour, typically documenting deficits across these areas. Fontaine (2007, 2008) conducted a series of studies investigating social information processing and decision making in antisocial youth, resulting in his 'instrumental antisocial decision making framework'. With its proposed aims of differentiating between what he terms instrumental and reactive antisocial behaviour, and developing antisocial conduct styles, this research is typical of much being done in the area.

Similarly, Loney and colleagues (Loney, Frick, Clements, Ellis, & Kerlin, 2003) suggest different patterns of emotional reactivity may distinguish between subgroups of youth with antisocial behaviour problems, such as those meeting criteria for psychopathy, or problems of impulse control.

Studies have linked emotional dysregulation and negative reactivity on the one hand, and deficient affect (low levels of affect and emotional reactivity) on the other, to delinquent behaviour, with Penney (2008) proposing that these represent separate routes to such behaviour. Plattner et al. (2007) found delinquents to experience higher levels of negative trait and state emotions, such as fear, sadness and anger than controls. They further report that delinquents respond to stressful situations with a greater range of emotion and with a confluence of sadness and anger, inferring from this impairments in emotional differentiation, which they link to childhood experiences of trauma (Plattner et al., 2007). Wilkowski and Robinson (2008) demonstrated that emotional clarity, the ability to detect subtle differences between emotions, allowed individuals to down-regulate anger through internal emotional control techniques. Such effects were seen only under conditions of low cognitive load, leading the authors to conclude that emotional regulation is dependent upon the availability of limited-capacity cognitive resources (Wilkowski & Robinson, 2008). Trentacosta and Shaw's (2009) longitudinal study demonstrated that effective emotional regulation in childhood was linked to less later peer rejection, and lower levels of adolescent antisocial behaviour. Similarly Nas, De Castro and Koops (2006) found delinquents exhibited deficits in emotional attribution and regulation compared to their peers. However though delinquents showed more proactive and reactive aggression than higher educated peers, they showed no more so than lower educated peers (Nas et al., 2006), indicating the important potential influence of other variables on such findings.

### **Moral emotions and sociomoral reasoning**

Stuewig and Tangney (2007) review research investigating the relationship of guilt and shame to antisocial and risky behaviour, proposing that guilt serves a protective function owing to its association with responsibility-taking and empathy (see also Cimborá & McIntosh, 2005), while shame has been linked to increased aggression, supported by others (Scheff & Retzinger, 2001). Cimborá and McIntosh (2003, 2005) demonstrated that youth with conduct disorder report lower level of guilt and fear, and higher levels of excitement and happiness in response to reported transgressions, which they link to literature on sensation-seeking. However, Cimborá and McIntosh

(2003) were surprised that such youth did not endorse more anger on the vignettes, and that anger did not differ across conduct disorder youth and controls, as was expected.

Moral attitudes, moral values and maturity of socio-moral reasoning have all been identified as potential predictors of delinquency (Tarry & Emler, 2007). Such research typically supports immaturity in moral judgment, and more self-serving cognitive distortions (Lardén et al., 2006), positioning delinquents at pre-conventional stages characterised by self-interest and the endorsement of retaliation (Wainryb et al., 2010). Chandler and Moran (1990) found delinquent youth to show developmental delays across multiple dimensions of self-report moral-cognitive processing as compared with non-delinquent youth. The authors conclude the usefulness of distinguishing among subgroups, such as more psychopathic delinquents evidencing the lowest levels of sociomoral development. Forney, Crutsinger and Forney (2006) found egocentric, hedonic and apathetic emotional responses in adolescent offenders in their study, which they took to reflect immature moral development, however more than half of the emotional responses of the offenders in their study indicated normal moral development.

Several studies have questioned the validity of considering moral attitudes as stable traits, supporting the notion that the role of morality in delinquency is more complex than much research allows. Eighty years ago, Yoshimasu (1931) interviewed 119 young offenders about their crimes, demonstrating that moral attitudes and reasoning differed significantly before and after crimes were committed, which supports the variable and contextual nature of these constructs. Bergman (2002) centralises the role of self-identity in moral decision-making and action, pointing to adolescence as a period in which identity and morality become progressively unified. In investigating moral attitudes towards social limits in young offenders, Grietens, Rink and Hellinckx (2003) concluded that they demonstrated significant deficits with regard to knowledge about behavioural alternatives, indicating the importance of considering other variables in findings on moral attitudes and delinquency.

Research has further questioned the significance of moral reasoning in understanding delinquent behaviour. Niles (1986) found a moral development discussion group with delinquent boys had a significant effect on their moral reasoning scores, but that gains in moral reasoning did not necessarily lead to improved self-control or self-discipline in the classroom. Using data from a study with 172 young men, Emler, Tarry and St.

James (2007) challenge the validity of Kohlberg's stages in relation to delinquency, with Tarry and Emler (2007) concluding that the link between moral reasoning and delinquent behaviour is weak at best. They investigated moral attitudes (attitudes to institutional authority), moral values and sociomoral reasoning using self-report measures with a sample of 789 boys from London schools, and found delinquency to be significantly and independently predicted by moral values and attitudes to authority, but not by a structural measure of moral reasoning (Tarry & Emler, 2007). In fact, the strongest correlate of delinquency was young people's attitude to formal authority (Tarry & Emler, 2007).

### **Moral disengagement and adaptive violence**

A well-established literature demonstrates that exposure to violence is associated with a range of negative psychological and behavioural outcomes for young people (Colley-Quille, Boyd, Frantz, & Walsh, 2001), including increased aggression, depression, anxiety, PTSD symptoms and substance abuse (see Wilkinson & Carr, 2008 for a review). Further, research has shown violence exposure in youth to be significantly related to acceptance of violence cognitions and violent behaviour (Allwood & Bell, 2008). However, contrary to a view that violence is necessarily a sign of dysfunction or maladaptation, recent research proposes that violent behaviour in young people who are exposed to violence may be viewed as an adaptive and functional strategy, that seeks to order dangerous and unpredictable environments (Anderson, 1999; Latzman & Swisher, 2005; Ng-Mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Stueve, 2002, 2004).

Ng-Mak et al. (2002, 2004) outline what they term a 'pathological adaptation theory', in which exposure to violence leads to moral disengagement, which can then lead to increased violence (pathological) but decreased psychological distress (adaptive). In this framework, violence in young people is viewed as being protective within violent contexts, a way to survive in difficult environments, albeit with maladaptive consequences (Garbarino, 1999). In two concurrent studies of 500 New York adolescents, Ng-Mak et al. (2002) found that exposure to community violence predicated normalising cognitions around violence, which in turn predicted aggressive behaviour. However exposure did not predict lower depression scores, failing to support the 'adaptation' aspect of the theory. However other studies have demonstrated low rates of depression among self-professed violent youth, leading them to conclude that youth cope with repeated exposure to violence by becoming emotionally numb (Latzman & Swisher, 2005; Ng-Mak et al., 2004), which Latzman and

Swisher (2005) suggest may increase their sense of efficacy over their environment. The researchers call for further studies to clarify these contradictory findings (Swisher & Latzman, 2008).

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The above 'outside' research has typically drawn its conclusions from approaches including quantitative survey methods, self-report measures, and lexical and priming tasks. It usually attempts to determine links between the variables in question and delinquent behaviour, and the temporal order of such links. Another focus has been on typology and categorisation, attempting to distinguish between and categorise various delinquent subgroups. Further, it typically assesses constructs such as emotional processing and moral reasoning in relation to vignettes, scenarios and hypothetical situations, rather than exploring the actual experiences of the young people in question.

### **'Inside' research on youth understandings of delinquency**

As illustrated above, much of the delinquency literature fails to grasp the lived experience of young people, with researchers calling for investigations of delinquency from the perspectives of the young people involved (Bailey & Whittle, 2004; Daiute & Fine, 2003; Zimmerman, Morrel-Samuels, & Wong, 2004). Several studies are embracing this perspective in attempting to understand the meaning of such behaviour.

### **Youth perspectives on delinquency, violence and morality**

One early such study was by Goldstein (1990), who conducted qualitative interviews with 250 delinquent youth in residential facilities to obtain their perspectives on juvenile delinquency. Goldstein (1990) reported that youths' views often contrasted sharply with professional perspectives, and included perceptions that dysfunctional families, peers, and drugs were causes of their delinquent behaviour, and that interventions should include parent training, improving family communications, and changes in schools. Interestingly, youth also advocated stricter parenting and schooling, and harsher punishments by the criminal justice system to prevent recidivism, with Goldstein (1990) citing research demonstrating the negative effects of punishment as evidence that these latter views be rejected. Though this study was important in its approach, it fell

crucially short of attempting to appreciate the meaning of the information obtained, instead simply discarding that which did not correlate with previous findings.

More recent research has continued to seek young people's perspectives on the causes of youth violence (Zimmerman et al., 2004). Echoing Goldstein (1990), in interviews with youth gang members Lafontaine et al. (2009) reported views such as the importance of family health initiatives, and police presence to provide safety and security. The authors conclude that such young people are in a constant struggle to find security in a world that tends to isolate and marginalise them (Lafontaine et al., 2009). Lien (2001) conducted field research on violent youth in Oslo, and found violence justified through moral disengagement processes, such as claiming that the other deserved to be beaten, or that they were acting in self-defence. Lien's (2001) findings further support the idea of violence being used as a communicative tool, substituted for verbal communication owing to its ability to "instantly reverse a position from inferiority to superiority" (Lien, 2001, p. 170). Violence was also viewed as fun by many informants, creating meaning in an otherwise dull life (Lien, 2001). Porteous, Chatwin, Martin and Goodman's (2009) study with young people in East London highlighted victimisation as a source of strain and stress on young people.

Some more recent Home Office research on delinquency, such as that by Hales, Lewis, and Silverstone (2006), has moved away from a focus on statistics, prioritising instead the perspectives of the young people in question. Hales et al. (2006) interviewed 80 offenders aged 18-30 years across 14 UK prisons about various facets of gun use and gun crime, seeking further information on personal background and experiences of victimisation. Their report, including extensive interview extracts and case studies of individuals from their sample, indicates a focus more centralised on the meaning making of the individuals in influencing policy.

Several studies have conducted participatory action research with groups of young people in an attempt to understand how they construct meanings around violence, positioning them as 'experts' on their own lives (Mahiri & Conner, 2003; McIntyre, 2000). McIntyre (2000) describes the worlds of the young adolescents in her study as characterised by a need to survive violence, and negotiate the many borders; race, class, economic, that inform and influence their lives. McIntyre (2000) asserts that by listening to young people's stories about their lives, and by collaborating with them in designing plans of action to address their concerns, we can more effectively frame research questions around their understandings of violence and urban life.

Thomson and Holland (2002) explored young people's accounts of school, parenting and bullying to examine the factors that contribute to the legitimacy of moral authority in their eyes. Findings indicated that traditional authority figures such as the police did not receive automatic respect, but rather "respect must be earned, authority won and merit proven" (Thomson & Holland, 2002, p. 107). This ethic of reciprocity was particularly applied to school rules and teachers' behaviour, with accounts critical of teachers who exceeded the legitimate boundaries of their authority, or treated young people with disrespect or in an unequal way. In contrast to this, parents (and particularly mothers) tended to be a relatively unquestioned source of authority. Again echoing Goldstein (1990), central to the moral learning process was the need for a person with strict moral boundaries, and the power to punish (Thomson & Holland, 2002). The authors note the ubiquity of violence in the accounts, which was viewed by young people as undermining moral development, through leading to escalation and loss of control. Thomson and Holland (2002) understand findings in relation to shifts from traditionally ascribed authority to its negotiation and location in the individual in late modernity, and the increased moral dexterity needed to manage this, though highlighting the less democratic forms of obligation and negotiation that persist. Such research is important in shedding light on the ethics that youth people are guided by, rather than assuming that such moral guidelines simply don't exist when behaviour does not conform to expectation.

### **Understanding the social meaning of delinquent behaviour**

A 'transactional approach' to the study of delinquent behaviour views it as contingent upon the interaction between personal characteristics, internalisations of violent scripts, and situational factors (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Felson, 1993; Luckenbill, 1977; Wilkinson & Carr, 2008). As put by Wilkinson and Carr; "when violence is viewed at the event level, its functional or purposive aspects are revealed" (2008, p. 1046). Recent research has explored young people's descriptions and accounts of the interactions that form the immediate context of delinquent behaviour, in an attempt to greater understand the meaning of such behaviour. Such research has often emphasised the social and symbolic functions of violence, situating its understanding in issues of identity (Artz, 2004).

Several studies have examined the narratives young people create about their violent worlds, and what these tell us about the meaning of the violence to them. Honkatukia, Nyqvist, and Pösö (2006) conducted focus groups with 38 young people aged 12-17 on

their views on violence, focusing on the narrative means they employed to describe violence. Findings indicate violence was viewed both as instrumental and as expressive, while its collective nature was emphasised (Honkatukia et al., 2006). The authors highlight the importance of such a methodological approach in enhancing understanding, pointing to their findings challenging traditional views of individual pathology (Honkatukia et al., 2006). Jones (2004) analysed the narratives provided by two young women on how they negotiate high levels of community violence in their daily lives. Jones (2004) highlights the role of violence in identity-building, protecting self and others, and managing situations to prevent escalation. She calls for a reconsideration of current discourse on violent youth that tend to pathologise those who use violence, while ignoring the structural and cultural context within which they negotiate conflict, and the variety of creative strategies they use to do so (Jones, 2004). Artz (2004), in her exploration of girls' narratives of their aggressive behaviour, found that the use of violence was not desirable, but felt to be a moral imperative, in line with social rules and obligations.

Rich and Gray (2005) conducted narrative interviews with 49 young black men, victims of violent attacks, to understand their experiences of violence, and shed some light on recurrent violent injury among this population. Findings from the narratives indicated; the importance of retaliation to preserve 'respect', and also to prevent repeat victimisation; a profound lack of faith in the police, linked to harassment and racial profiling; and PTSD symptoms leading both to substance use and increased reactivity to perceived threat (Rich & Grey, 2005). The authors conclude the importance of cultivating alternative ways of establishing masculinity and self-esteem, and a focus on improving police interactions with such populations (Rich & Grey, 2005). Caldwell and colleagues (Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Schmeelk-Cone, Chavous, & Zimmerman, 2004) similarly found experience of racial discrimination was a strong predictor of violent behaviour among a sample of African American young adults.

Elijah Anderson's (1999) ethnographic study of a disadvantaged urban environment, *Code of the Street*, illustrated the adaptivity of violence as it relates to reputation. Anderson (1999) proposed that poverty, lack of opportunity and lack of role models create a context for a 'street code' to govern behaviour. Within this, maintaining a violent identity decreases the probability of victimisation, preserves self-esteem, reputation within the community, and sense of control in a dangerous environment (Anderson, 1999). More recently, Garot (2007) interviewed 46 young people in an

inner-city setting over four years, to explore the intricacies of face-to-face interactions among gang members and other youth. His analysis indicated that the behaviour of young people in such situations is strategic and context sensitive, and that the resourcefulness needed to develop appropriate repertoires helps to mould identity in these settings. Garot (2007) suggests that such interactions provide opportunities to demonstrate identity and allegiance, establish and maintain friendships, imbue a dull environment with action and excitement, and invoke the emotions that legitimise violence, calling for their consideration as cultural resources that are strategically used by young people in certain environments.

Stretesky and Pogrebin (2007) conducted in-depth interviews with 22 offenders convicted of gun violence, with findings indicating violence to be expressive in nature. In particular, Stretesky and Pogrebin (2007) suggest that issues of identity were central to understanding the violence, with violent encounters providing defining opportunities to be perceived in a certain way. Accounts supported the idea that threats to status became an attack on the self, and on masculine identity. Issues of disrespect, and not losing respect by not responding, formed the core causes for violence (Stretesky & Pogrebin, 2007). Findings further point to the importance of guns as instrumental and expressive tools of impression management, helping to build identity and project a tough reputation. Stretesky and Pogrebin's (2007) study illuminates the expressive nature of violence in certain contexts, demonstrating a strong link between violent behaviour and identity development.

Several other studies support the importance of identity and reputation in delinquent behaviour. Hughes and Short (2005) analysed data from field observations made of twenty Chicago gangs between 1959 and 1962. They categorised dispute-related incidents as either 'order violations', 'identity attacks' or 'retaliation', and found that the most cited cause of violence was status, identity or respect being challenged (Hughes & Short, 2005). Further, level of violence depended on the extent to which status concerns were likely to be outweighed by such situational constraints as a close relationship between disputants and audience intervention (Hughes & Short, 2005). Mares (2001) conducted an ethnographic study of Manchester street gangs (though he concluded that the term 'gang' was unhelpful and inaccurate), which included interviews with the young people. Findings indicated that attaining respect and having a rough reputation, by proving oneself in fights and delinquency, were important features of being accepted by peers.

Building on earlier work using data from the *New York City Youth Violence Study* (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Wilkinson, 2001), Wilkinson and Carr (2008) examined reports from 416 active violent offenders aged 16-24, to explore the rationales that young people gave for violent events. Specifically, they analysed event narratives to identify the schemas that young people exposed to high levels of violence brought to violent encounters, defining schemas as organising structures for procedural knowledge stored in memory, that shape behavioural repertoires when activated (Wilkinson & Carr, 2008). Wilkinson and Carr (2008) argue that exposure to community violence familiarises young people with how to react to threatening situational or contextual cues, essentially violence scripts. Involvement in violent behaviour then shapes self-image and perceived status among peers in ways that further promote violent action. Findings indicated that the most powerful transactional script for violence related to how youth responded to insults, identity attacks, or issues of disrespect, and what other youth would think of them if they didn't respond aggressively (Wilkinson & Carr, 2008). Wilkinson and Carr (2008) found that youth do enact conflict management strategies, but typically only when the opponent is an associate or friend, and that gun events were less likely to reach resolution than fights without weapons. The authors conclude that much violence actually occurs as part of an emergent situation that is fluid and dynamic (Wilkinson & Carr, 2008).

Using the same data set, Wilkinson, Beaty and Lurry (2009) analysed young people's narratives on personal safety, the effectiveness of criminal justice and police approaches to violence, and self-protection. Findings indicated that young people felt that police in particular and the justice system more broadly did not recognise their grievances, describing experiences of police brutality, profiling and harassment, overt racism, and corruption (Wilkinson et al., 2009). Additionally, young people reported that social status among their peers would be challenged if police were called, leading to a reliance on self-help in dispute resolution processes. Interestingly, youths' disdain and mistrust of the system did not undermine the belief that their neighborhoods needed more police officers to reduce youth violence and related offences (Wilkinson et al., 2009).

### **Impact of engaging in delinquent behaviour**

Qualitative research on the impact of delinquency on young people has focused primarily on exposure or victimisation effects, rather than the impact of engaging in delinquent behaviour. However the following studies all make reference to the self-

perceptions and experiences of young people who have engaged in violent and delinquent behaviour, and further, young people who have been negatively labelled or stigmatised as a result of this.

In a self-report questionnaire study of 131 teenagers, Greene (1995) found that exposure to violence or crime left them feeling more vulnerable to harm and death, and more prone to engage in risky behaviours. Challenging the notion that youth engagement in risky behaviour is facilitated by feelings of immortality, Greene (1995) saw this risky behaviour as a product of living in the conscious awareness of a time-limited existence. This notion is supported by Sauma's (2008) ethnographic research with violent street children in Brazil. She notes that "these children and teenagers fight and kill. This is a group whose members must establish a conscious relationship with death, and therefore with life, early on in their lives" (Sauma, 2008, p. 33).

Schoepp (2000) conducted interviews with eight young people aged 15-18 diagnosed with adolescent-onset conduct disorder, with the aim of getting what he terms an 'inside view' on their school experiences. His thematic analysis revealed several interesting findings not highlighted in existing literature on antisocial behaviour. These included a common experience of the devastating consequences of antisocial behaviour, the self-destructive effects of worsening behaviour, and a painful awakening to wasted time. Striving for a better life arose from growing regret and disappointment over past experiences, and renewed hope and anticipation (Schoepp, 2000).

The role of morality in delinquent behaviour has tended to focus on quantitative determination of level of moral development or moral emotions as *precursors* to such behaviour. However several recent studies offer qualitative explorations of moral reasoning and emotions in the aftermath of such behaviour. Green, South and Smith (2006) found techniques of neutralization to be widely used in their interviews with 26 violent offenders, particularly denial and externalisation of responsibility. Importantly, the 'true self' was framed as essentially good and moral, and distanced from offending behaviour in order to present an acceptable and credible self. Presser (2004), again in interviews with violent offenders, highlighted how the interview process itself was incorporated into their narrative construction of themselves as moral people, such as by distancing themselves from other offenders, and soliciting positive evaluations from her as interviewer.

Wainryb et al. (2010) compared the narratives of 40 violent youth offenders and 28 high school students created about incidents of harming another, examining the organising patterns in their narratives to determine how they made sense of their violent behaviour, and integrated it into a view of themselves as moral people. Wainryb et al. (2010) report that violent youth made far less reference to both their own and their victims' internal states (emotional and psychological states), leading them to conclude that such youth possessed a deficit in their capacity to reflect upon internal states, which they link to Fonagy's (Fonagy et al., 2004) work on mentalisation, and further Loney and colleagues' (Loney et al., 2003) work on sociopathy. Wainryb et al.'s (2010) study is important in its move away from hypothetical dilemmas and self-report measures, and its focus on how young people apply moral understandings to their own violent behaviour. However, it has several important limitations. They compare significantly different incidents (students spoke of making insensitive remarks, excluding peers, lying and breaking promises, while offenders spoke of physical fights, and using weapons including knives and guns), but fail to acknowledge the potential implications of this. For example, they report that offenders referred to known victims in more psychological terms than unknown victims, and may likely construe positive encounters in more psychological terms than negative ones, both of which are very relevant to their comparison (i.e. students likely knew their victims and the incidents described were arguably much less negative). Further, they ignore the possibility that offenders' lack of reference to internal states may be 'purposeful', i.e. defending against potential guilt or shame by providing sparse details, rather than reflecting some cognitive or emotional deficit.

Apena (2007) investigated self-perception, related specifically to racial identity, in young black male offenders in a London youth offending service. Using semi-structured interviews with eight participants aged 15-17, Apena (2007) explored how the young men felt society regarded them, and the impact of these perceived representations on their offending behaviour. Findings indicated that participants were aware of negative societal representations of black criminals, and of police discrimination towards black youth, leading them to feel victimised and disempowered, with Apena (2007) concluding that this made it difficult for them to maintain a positive social identity. Participants further highlighted how insufficient resources within the community led to further unhelpful stereotyping of young people spending time on the streets in groups as 'gang culture' (Apena, 2007). However, participants appeared to have high

collective self-esteem, which Apena (2007) suggested may serve to protect them from institutionally and externally imposed stigma.

Several authors note a recent renewed interest in the contribution of labelling theory to the study of delinquency (see Adams, Robertson, Gray-Ray, & Ray, 2003). Adams et al. (2003) demonstrated that youth who have formal contact with social control agencies report greater subsequent delinquency (see Adams et al., 2003). This is supported by Bernburg and Krohn (2003), who reviewed data on urban males in the US juvenile justice system, concluding that considerable support exists for what they term a revised labelling approach. That is, that official intervention increased probability of involvement in subsequent delinquency, as such interventions triggered exclusionary processes that had negative consequences for conventional opportunities (Bernburg & Krohn, 2003). Adams et al. (2003) measured incarcerated young people's perceived negative labelling from parents, teachers and peers, with findings indicating that young people who chose more negative labels for their self-concepts report more frequent delinquent involvement. Teachers and peer groups in particular were identified as important sources of negative labelling that might lead to the adoption of a deviant self-concept (Adams et al., 2003).

Using a Foucaultian perspective, Kelly (2003) examined the psychological impact for young people of increasing societal anxiety around their behaviour, leading to a raft of interventions, strategies and programmes targeting young people. Kelly (2003) concludes that there is a growing institutionalised mistrust, surveillance and regulation of contemporary young people. Based on interviews conducted with 36 urban young people on their negative experiences with authority figures, such as police, guards and educators, Fine et al. (2003) found that young people reported a strong sense of betrayal by adults, and feeling mistrusted by them. In an examination of media discourses in the UK, Osler and Starkey (2005) report findings indicating a shift in policy discourses from social inclusion to the need to combat crime. The authors concluded that violence and disadvantage have been effectively institutionalised, with opportunities for young people to participate in decision making severely limited (Osler & Starkey, 2005).

## Rationale for the study

Researchers have called for “creative and thoughtful research” into delinquency in the UK context (White, 2004, p. 48), which explores the issue from young people’s perspectives (Daiute & Fine, 2003; Yackley, 2003). The present study explored young people’s understandings of their violent and antisocial acts, in an effort to provide an insight into what this behaviour means to them. In line with recent recommendations (Hughes & Short, 2005; Tiffin & Nadkarni, 2010; Wilkinson & Carr, 2008), it was felt that this might best be achieved by analysing young people’s narrative accounts of such behaviour, against a backdrop of their broader social and life experiences. The study was also interested in the impact of engaging in this behaviour, i.e. behaviour that harms others or that is deemed unacceptable by society, on young people’s developing sense of themselves, and their views of the world they live in. The study hoped to provide narrators with a forum and opportunity to voice their understandings, aspirations, and experiences of life, using this to meaningfully contribute to the delinquency literature.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### Overview

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the research process in the present study. I begin with a statement of research aims. I then position the research epistemologically, and outline the theoretical perspective that shaped both the information I sought and how I understood it. I situate and discuss narrative inquiry as my chosen research methodology, outline the methods employed in the study, and provide an account of the blended form of narrative analysis that I used to explore the interview material. I then present an examination of methodological reflexivity and ethical issues, and to conclude an evaluation of the methodology.

### Research aims

This study aims to explore how young people who have engaged and continue to engage in violent and antisocial acts understand and make sense of their behaviour. Further, it aims to explore how they integrate these understandings into their views of themselves and the worlds they live in. These aims are achieved through analysing the narratives that eight young people construct about their lives and their social worlds.

It is hoped that the experiential findings from this research may add to the understanding and sensitivity of psychologists and others who work with young people engaging in such behaviour. It is further hoped that findings may expand the focus in this domain to consideration of the dominant narratives that interact with and influence young people's understanding of their behaviour, and the consequences of this for them.

### A qualitative approach

Given these aims, a qualitative approach to the research was deemed most suitable. The qualitative research process centralises the importance of *meaning*, which fit with my own research aims. Willig (in press) outlines the core features of qualitative research as a concern with meaning, capturing such meaning using individuals' own words and accounts, and viewing meaning in the context in which it is constructed.

Other feature of qualitative research that parallel my own aspiration for this study include a focus on researcher reflexivity, on the 'real worlds' of participants' experience, and on allowing understandings to emerge from the data (Willig, in press). Above all else, I wanted to gain an understanding of the lived experiences, the worlds, of the individuals in this study.

## Part one: Epistemological positioning and theoretical perspective

Epistemological positioning should be "the starting point of any research project" (Willig, in press, p. 13). Considering my desire to access the experiential worlds of individuals in this study, and my assumption that their accounts of these worlds would be situated within and shaped by broader social contexts, the study takes a social constructionist stance. Such a position essentially rejects the idea that objective reality exists out there in the world, rather, each individual constructs his or her own reality. However, this broad approach has many strands, and in line with Willig's (2008) positioning of narrative approaches, the present research is felt to take a 'contextual constructionist' view of the world. That is, I do not deny that the world and things in it exist outside of our experience; I believe the world and its objects, its laws of physics, are certainly *there*. What doesn't exist independent of our minds is a meaningful world, at least not meaningful to us humans (Crotty, 1998). Instead, meaning comes into existence through our engagement with our world, arising from interactions with the world in a co-constructive process that is individual to each and every person (Crotty, 1998). Thus, the world shapes the mind of the individual in giving meaning to the world.

A social constructionist view was felt to be more authentic to the philosophical underpinnings of my research aims than a strictly phenomenological position, focused as I was on how individuals *construct* their sense of reality, rather than simply how they experience this reality, or perceive their lifeworld (Ashworth, 2008; Willig, in press). However, there was nonetheless a phenomenological element to my desire to understand (rather than simply deconstruct) the world of the individual (Willig, in press). The distinction between a phenomenological and a constructionist outlook is not absolute (Ashworth, 2008), with Hiles and Čermák (2008, p. 151) supporting this position by stating that narrative inquiry "does have it's roots in a social constructionist perspective, but it does also entail a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive view that

incorporates both a rich description of the socio-cultural environment and the participatory and creative inner world of lived experience”.

This position lies between a realist and relativist ontology; the world of objects is there and in that sense it is real, but this world only becomes meaningful when we interact with it, holding a different (relative) meaning for each of us. The functionality of midway positioning between these two poles is supported by researchers including Crotty (1998) and Willig (in press).

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

From this standpoint, the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism was used as a framework to guide the information sought, and as a lens through which to understand findings. As outlined in the previous chapter, it is an approach centered on meaning, and how we assemble it (Plummer, 2000). It takes a truly social view of the human world, positing that people act fundamentally in relation to one another. It proposes that in order to understand a person’s behaviour, one must first understand their individual world of objects and meanings (Blumer, 1986). This echoed my belief in the need to situate individuals’ understandings of their behaviour within the context of their social worlds. As succinctly summed up by Riessman (2008, p. 106) in reference to interactionism; “what we as members of a culture take to be ‘true’ are actually produced in face-to-face exchanges every day, and the process of reality construction can be systematically studied”. In line with narrative inquiry, and supporting my focus on meaning construction, symbolic interactionism is interested in ‘self-interactions’, the internalised social processes through which we interact with ourselves (Blumer, 1986). I was attracted to the pragmatist philosophy underpinning interactionism, which proposes that “the analysis of meanings is an analysis of certain kinds of actions in certain contexts” (Thayer, 1968, p. 429). Interactionism thus rejects macro-micro, objective-subjective dualisms; to truly study a phenomenon is to study the micro-scale, subjective occurrences of individual experience.

Crotty (1998, p. 78) remarks on symbolic interactionism’s “enviable reputation for being on the side of the ‘underdog’” due to its study of deviance, labelling, and society’s need to exclude certain of its members. An interactionist approach was deemed particularly appropriate in the present study given the unsympathetic status of young people engaging in violent or antisocial behaviour, and the judgement that this frequently engenders. I believe that interactionism works well as an approach in research such as

this owing to its central notion; the need to put oneself in the place of the other in order to understand them (Mead, 1934), and further owing to its centralising the importance of language as systems of socially shared meanings (Ashworth, 2008).

Though the critical narrative analysis approach outlined below is borne of an interpretative phenomenological perspective, I felt symbolic interactionism to be more encompassing of my theoretical stance, and believe my analytic approach sits comfortably within this framework. The positioning between constructionist and phenomenological philosophies described above is echoed in interactionism's view that people's selves are social products, but that these selves are also subjective, purposive and creative (Adler, Adler, & Fontana, 1994; Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1934).

## Part two: Methodology

Turning now to the methodological approach of the present study, narrative inquiry, and the rationale behind this choice. I was drawn to narrative inquiry owing to its focus on meaning making, its prioritisation of the voice of the participant, and its attention to context. This approach fit well within my epistemological and theoretical stance, including interactionism's concern with how we produce, through our interactions with others, "narratives and stories to explain our actions and lives" (Plummer, 2000, p. 194). In contemplating my research aims, I acknowledged dual ambitions of description and interpretation. Fundamental to my aims was a desire to understand the world of participants *from their perspective*, to describe their worlds, in their terms. However, I was aware of a clear interpretative intention in using my psychological knowledge to give meaning to their experiences beyond that which they offered (Willig, in press), and in translating these understandings into recommendations for counselling psychology practice. A narrative approach seemed well suited to these dual aims.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

*She realized that although Mr. Valmik depicted life as a series of accidents, there was nothing accidental about his expert narration. His sentences poured out like perfect seams, holding the garment of his story together without calling attention to the stitches. Was he aware of ordering the events for her? Perhaps not – perhaps the very act of telling created a natural design. Perhaps it was a knack that humans had, for cleaning up their untidy existences – a hidden survival weapon, like antibodies in the bloodstream.*

- Rohinton Mistry 'A Fine Balance'

What is meant by the term 'narrative'? Catherine Riessman, a central proponent of the adoption of narrative methods within social sciences, points to its multitude of meanings and uses depending on the discipline, though these are often synonymous with 'story' (Riessman, 2008). At one level, narrative describes a form of human discourse, one in which "the speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story" (Riessman, 2008, p. 3). Inherent in this definition is the notion of temporality, so that narrative may be taken to mean a temporal sequencing of representations or events (Andrews et al., 2000). Within the realm of narrative research in psychology, Riessman (2008, p. 6) offers a working definition for narrative as "long sections of talk – extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple interviews".

Appreciation and examination of the narrative form may be charted from Aristotle's analysis of the Greek tragedy through to modern literary analysis, with its appropriation by qualitative researchers in the social sciences occurring only within the last three decades, one element of a broader shift towards recognition of the significance of cultural context and subjective experience (Andrews et al., 2000; Hiles & Čermák, 2008; Riessman, 2008). Within psychology, though the case-centred writings of Freud and Jung precede it, Hiles and Čermák (2008, p. 148) attach special significance to the more recent 'narrative turn', heralded by Sarbin's argument for narrative as a "radically new root metaphor for psychology [...] a completely new approach, closer to the way in which historical events are explained and understood".

Central to the significance of narrative to psychology is its position as a fundamental process of human meaning making. Jerome Bruner, amongst others, argues that narrative is a basic property of the human mind (Bruner, 1991; Hiles & Čermák, 2008), a fundamental way in which experience is organised to give it coherence and meaning. Polkinghorne (1988) describes narrative as essential to human meaning making processes through its linking of actions and events into a contextualised and integrated whole. Narrative analysis thus allows investigation of the process of meaning *construction*, through analysis of the narrator's construction of their social world (Andrews et al., 2000). This focus on "the ways in which people construct meaning in their lives" (Willig, 2008, p. 133), as opposed to simply examining such meanings, contributed to my choosing this approach over one based solely in interpretive phenomenology.

Crossley (2000) and Murray (2008) argue that this function of narration in bringing order and coherence to our lives may become all the more relevant and pronounced when faced with non-normative or disruptive experiences that rupture expectation, as we strive to regain a sense of control and make sense of things (Riessman, 2008). And further, in the retelling of transgressive events, as such events require justification and tend to initiate a search for meaning (Bruner, 1991). Research supports analysis of narratives as a particularly useful way of understanding violent behaviour (Winter et al., 2007), construction of self in individuals engaged in violent behaviour (Presser, 2004, 2009), and how young people integrate moral transgressions into a broader view of self (Wainryb et al., 2010). I was interested in how narrators in the present study constructed meaning around their violent and antisocial behaviour, and how they meaningfully integrated such behaviour into other aspects of their selves and lives.

A narrative focus may be especially pertinent when issues of identity are being explored. It has been argued by many authors, notably McAdams (1993), that the construction of narratives is central to our self definition and identity, as we constantly (re)create ourselves through what we choose to tell and how we tell it (Crossley, 2000; Linde, 1993; Riessman, 2008). A particular focus here has been on social identity, that is, how we present ourselves to others. Somers (1994, p. 606) states that “it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities”. Building on Erikson’s (1968) ideas, McLean and Pasupathi (2010) outline the importance of narrative identity development in allowing young people in particular to integrate their past and present, and articulate their futures in unifying a sense of self. Crossley (2000) and others argue that individual narratives be placed within broader structures of discourse and power in this regard, and the impact of societal contexts and cultural narratives on individuals’ personal meanings examined (McLean & Pasupathi, 2010; Squire, 2000). Salzer (1998) proposes that narrative approaches are well placed to examine these interactions between society, community, and the individual.

A narrative approach also allows consideration of the research interview as a place where identities are being performed for an audience. A focus on the performative function of narratives emerges from an interactionist perspective, with Riessman (2008, p. 105) noting that such dialogic analysis “draws on and extends [...] symbolic interaction theory”, drawing particularly on Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach. This focus on interview context and how narrators present themselves allows for a

multilayered understanding of narrators and their experiences (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). Crossley (2000) emphasises that this is an interactive process, acknowledging the role of the interviewer here. As described by Riessman (2008, p. 21), “the researcher does not *find* narratives but instead participates in their creation”. In the present study, I was eager to examine my role in the co-construction of narratives, bearing in mind the power relations between the narrators and me as interviewer. And further, to explore my impact as an audience to these narratives, and the possibility that how they presented to me might reflect how they present to ‘society’. I hoped in this way to situate individuals’ narratives within the context of dominant discourses, and illuminate the impact of these broader social and cultural contexts.

Hallsworth and Young (2008, p. 188), echoing Katz (e.g. Katz & Jackson-Jacobs, 2004), criticise research for “so often failing to grasp the lived realities of violent street worlds”, imposing on them orderly, predictable and ultimately inappropriate structures. Perhaps the most important factor in my choosing a narrative approach was allowing individuals to articulate their subjective viewpoints, and employ their own evaluative standards in telling their stories. A narrative approach allows individuals to develop their points of view uninterrupted, and their stories to be analysed in their entirety (Hydén, 2008). Further, Riessman (2008) and others highlight the potential for empowerment offered by a narrative approach when exploring the experiences of stigmatised and marginalised groups. As put by Riessman (2008, p. 10); “stories reveal truths about human experiences”.

### **Narrative analysis**

As discussed by Riessman (2008), the term ‘narrative analysis’ neatly ties together what is in fact a wide spectrum of methods. Broadly speaking, narrative analysis seeks to uncover the meaning of experience, the ways in which people organise and bring order to their experiences, through a systematic interpretation of their interpretations (narratives) of events (Cortazzi, 2001; Willig, 2008). Depending on research aims, attention is typically paid to one or more of the following; *what* is being told, *how* it is being told, and *why* it is being told, or content, structural, and context approaches (Squire et al., 2008). Riessman (2008) labels these; thematic analysis, focusing on the content of narratives; structural analysis, an exploration of narrative form, including stylistic and linguistic features; and dialogic analysis, how narratives are interactively constructed and performed, as discussed above. A frequent distinction in narrative approaches is between the first two types of analysis, often referred to as analysis of

'content' or 'form'. Further, analysis may take place at both the macro level of an entire research interview, or the more micro level of narratives constructed about specific incidents or events, defined as 'holistic' and 'categorical' analysis by Hiles and Čermák (2008). Another distinction outlined by Hiles and Čermák (2008) is between the 'story context' and 'discursive context', or between the actual story and the occasion of its retelling. The latter perspective is centralised by several approaches, notably Langdridge's (2007) Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA), which prioritises exploration of the functionality of narratives, and their consideration within broader social contexts.

## Part three: Methods

### **Recruitment**

Individuals were recruited via the snowballing technique, purposeful sampling being typical of a narrative approach (Ewick & Silbey, 2003). I began by sending an email to various projects whose details I obtained through the website for the *Connected Fund*, a Home Office initiative providing grants to small, locally managed community groups and organisations tackling gun and knife crime and gang issues. In this email I outlined my research focus and aims, that I was interested in interviewing young people who had experiences of 'gangs' about the stories of their lives. See 'Methodological issues' below for further discussion on this. From this starting point, my email was passed on to various youth clubs and projects in the greater London area. Several responded and I met or had phone conversations with these. It was through three such sources that I obtained my interviews, several months after recruitment began. The first was a youth worker in a social housing project in London. Following an initial discussion with him, I met with a manager at the project to discuss my research, and with her permission began attending their weekly club evenings for older youth, conducting my first 5 interviews here. The remaining three interviewees were recruited through their youth workers in; the same social housing project, a council-funded youth service, and a charity youth project.

Interviewees were not approached directly by me, but by youth workers with whom they were familiar. This approach was based on advice given to me by youth workers and fellow researchers that young people would be unlikely to reply to a recruitment poster, and that the best approach was to have the research presented to them by someone they knew. Youth workers approached young people they knew to be, or to

have been, 'on road', introducing my research and that I was interested in interviewing young people about these experiences. This was a term that I was introduced to early in the research process. Ostensibly, it refers to spending time with friends, however it carries quite a specific meaning, essentially that of engaging in routine violent and antisocial behaviour including fighting, theft, mugging and drug dealing. Issues relating to this process are discussed further below under 'Status of the text'.

## **Interviewees**

Eight individuals, seven men and one woman, shared their stories through narrative interviews. Biographical sketches of the eight individuals are provided in the analysis chapter. Eight was deemed to be a sufficient number to address the research aims, and the maximum that would allow for deep engagement with the interview transcripts within the research timeframe. Interviewees were young people aged between 17 and 27 years, from various ethnic backgrounds, though all were British citizens. Recruitment was limited to individuals aged 17 years and above, to avoid the necessity for parental consent, as outlined by BPS guidelines (British Psychological Society, 2004). Given the nature of the interview material, I felt that potential interviewees might be missed were parental consent required. Further, Bullock and Tilley (2008) suggest that more valid data on violent behaviour is obtained from young adults of this age, rather than under 17 years. The upper age limit was set to individuals still in their twenties. This decision was based on research indicating that over time, memories of emotional events become increasingly reconstructed, and interpreted on the basis of current appraisals of events (Levine, 1997; Schmidt, 2004). See 'Methodological issues' below for further discussion of the gender imbalance and age range.

## **Interview settings**

Interviews were conducted in several locations, reflecting the various recruitment sources. The five interviews conducted at the social housing project youth club presented a special difficulty, as the club consisted of a single hall with no separate rooms in which to conduct the interviews. The youth worker I had been liaising with had assumed it would be suitable to conduct interviews in the corner of the hall with others present, and I had not thought to ask if there were separate rooms, assuming this to be the case. Given these circumstances, and following discussion with the youth worker, it was decided that interviews be conducted in his car outside the youth club, discussed further below under 'Methodological issues'. The remaining three interviews were

conducted in private rooms at a council funded youth centre, the home of a youth worker, and the offices of a charity organisation. In each case staff were present in the building and aware of the interview taking place.

Attention was focused on my safety throughout the interview process, particularly when conducting interviews in the car, though it must be noted that at no point did I ever subjectively feel threatened. A cautious approach is recommended when topics of enquiry may be sensitive or invoke strong feelings in participants (Lee, 1993), and further when investigating issues at the boundaries of criminality, or interviewing potentially violent individuals (Craig, Corden, & Thornton, 2000). According to Craig et al. (2000), issues of race, culture and gender may impact on interviewer safety, particularly when they reflect perceived divisions in society. When interviewing in private rooms, I took standard precautions such as sitting nearest the door and never turning my back on interviewees. When interviewing in the car, the doors were kept locked, though I could open mine from inside by simply pulling the handle. The car was parked directly outside the door of the youth club, with the light kept on. As the inner doors to the club were glass and the outer ones held open, the interview process was visible from inside the club and it was agreed that the youth worker would observe it periodically from here. I also carried a small personal alarm during interviews that could be activated by pulling a cord. I carried a mobile phone at all times, with a number used only for research purposes.

### **Narrative interviews**

Before commencing the interview, individuals were presented with an information sheet outlining the research aims and procedure (see Appendix A) and encouraged to ask any questions they might have. They were then presented with a consent form, confirming that their participation was voluntary, and outlining their rights (see Appendix B), which was signed by both the interviewee and myself. Interviewees were asked for permission for me to record the interview using a digital recorder. Though outlined on the consent form, interviewees were reminded that they had the right to withdraw at any stage, without questions being asked. Interviewees were advised that if they were uncomfortable with any of the topics under discussion, to let me know, and that they should feel free to not answer questions they did not wish to. Similarly they were informed that the interview could be stopped at any time or the recorder turned off should they request this. Given the potential illegality of interview material, confidentiality and exceptions to this were highlighted at this stage, ensuring that

interviewees understood these issues and the consequences of disclosing intention to commit illegal acts, discussed further under 'Ethical issues'. The above steps were taken to ensure interviewee protection, and also to foster their sense of ownership over the interview material (Grinyer, 2002).

Given that this was my first experience with narrative interviewing, I conducted a pilot interview with a personal acquaintance using the interview guide, discussed below, both to practise my own technique and to explore the interactional dynamics involved in the narrative interview encounter (Crossley, 2000). Through this I became aware of my hesitancy in introducing topics, fearing I was guiding the content of the interview, which resulted in rather long stretches on less relevant topics. Though allowing interviewees to take the lead is characteristic of a narrative approach, I recognised the need to balance this with actively seeking information that would allow me to address the study aims.

A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C) was used, which drew on the topic-focused narrative interview style proposed by McAdams (1993) for eliciting personal narratives, and developed by Crossley (2000) and Langdrige (2007). This involved an initial broad invitation to interviewees to share the story of their life up to that point, encouraging them to begin wherever felt appropriate. The guide aimed to elicit 'experience-centred narratives', including stories about specific events but also broader material relevant to the narrator's life and sense of identity (Squire, 2008). Daiute and Fine (2003) advocate exploration of young people's behaviour across a variety of contexts to allow for more holistic and understanding interpretations. I facilitated the construction of narratives relating to my research aims through open-ended questions, using follow-up questions and probes to elicit further information. The guide was influenced by conversations I had with various youth workers around issues they found to be important to young people, for example through my incorporating a question on whether they felt they were given the chance to make choices in their lives. The guide was not prescriptive; I found that many of the topics were covered spontaneously in interviewees' narratives, while other important topics were introduced by them, with my responses and probes often in-vivo reactions to these. Riessman (2008) highlights the necessity of such flexibility with a narrative approach.

Crossley (2000) highlights the importance of achieving rapport in a narrative interview, with McAdams (1993, p. 254) suggesting the narrative interviewer needs to be an "empathic and encouraging guide and affirming sounding board". As discussed below

under 'Ethical issues', I strove to cultivate an accepting and non-judgemental environment during interviews. All interviewees noticeably 'settled into' the interview after some initial nervousness, and typically became animated and engaged in the process. It was my impression that interviewees were open and honest in their narratives. On several occasions interviewees said they would rather not discuss something, such as when I asked for elaboration of a specific incident. This indicated to me that they were comfortable using this caveat, and did not feel it necessary to fabricate a response. Regarding the nature of the data I aimed to obtain through the interviews, this was again situated between a realist and relativist status, as described succinctly by Schafer (1992, p. 14) in his description of narratives as "not an alternative to truth or reality, rather, it is the mode in which, inevitably, truth and reality are presented. We have only versions of the true and the real." This is echoed in Spence's (1982, p. 2) contention that "a well-constructed story possesses a kind of narrative truth that is real and immediate and carries an importance significance".

Interviews ranged from 36 minutes to 2 hours in length, though these two extremes aside all fell between 50 and 70 minutes. Upon completion of each interview, I thanked interviewees, switched off the digital recorder, and provided them with a debriefing sheet (see Appendix D). I asked interviewees how they had found the interview, eliciting any emotional responses to discussing sensitive material, or material that they might ordinarily have been unlikely to reflect upon. Most responded that they had enjoyed it and found it interesting, while several reported they had been nervous to begin with but found they relaxed quite quickly. Each interviewee was provided with a resource list of contact details for supportive and psychological resources, including several specifically for young people. Each interviewee was asked to choose a pseudonym by which they would be referred to in the write-up, recommended by Grinyer (2002) as a means of allowing some sense of ownership over their narratives while preserving confidentiality.

### **Data storage**

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word (see Appendix E for transcription symbols). Audio files were stored on my personal laptop and an external hard drive, under password protection. Interview transcripts were stored in both digital format on the laptop and hard drive, and hard copy format in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Data was stored as outlined above for the duration of the research process, and destroyed upon completion of the study.

## **Narrative analysis of the interviews**

Given the broad array of possible analytic perspectives within a narrative approach, Riessman (2008) emphasises the importance of tailoring to the study aims and objectives. Being new to narrative analysis, I began by consulting at length Riessman's (2008) comprehensive outline of the various forms of narrative analysis; thematic, structural, dialogic, and several of the studies she references (Ewick & Silbey, 2003; Gee, 1991; Labov, 1997; Riessman, 2004, 2008; Tamboukou & Ball, 2003; Williams, 1984), until I felt I had a grasp of the various approaches. I examined several models of narrative analysis in psychology, in particular Langdrige's (2007) critical narrative analysis (CNA), Hiles & Čermák's (2008) narrative oriented inquiry (NOI), and Crossley's (2000) approach to analysis of biographical narratives.

I selected Langdrige's (2007) model of CNA as the blueprint for my approach to analysis. Built upon the work of Paul Ricoeur, CNA emerges from interpretive phenomenology, though it incorporates aspects of several methodological approaches (Langdrige, 2007). Langdrige (2007) identifies the key distinguishing feature of his approach as a focus on interrogating narratives using aspects of social theory, which fit well the aims of the present study, and sits comfortably alongside its phenomenological focus. Other key feature of the model that appealed to me were an explicit focus on researcher reflexivity (Stage 1 below), and on the identity work being done by individuals in their narratives (Stage 3 below). Langdrige (2007) describes CNA as an idiographic approach, positioning case-study work as the ideal, fitting my desire not to lose the individuality of each separate narrative. Lastly, I found Langdrige's (2007) approach to be the most thoroughly outlined, with an in-depth worked example provided, which was of great use.

I was influenced by aspects of other models in my analysis, bringing as they do subtle variations in perspective that I found relevant to my research aims. Blending analytic approaches is characteristic of narrative inquiry, which is still in its infancy and constantly evolving (Riessman, 2008). Further, models of narrative inquiry within psychology themselves typically draw upon several psychologically focused methodological and analytic approaches (Hiles & Čermák, 2008; Langdrige, 2007). Hiles and Čermák (2008) emphasise the many interpretive perspectives available to narrative researchers, advocating that others be added to those they outline in their NOI model. Hiles & Čermák's (2008, p. 152) description of their model as a "dynamic framework for good practice [which, rather than] exhaustive and definitive, is explicitly

inclusive and pluralistic” seems an appropriate way to view models of narrative inquiry more generally. Langdrige (2007) acknowledges the demanding nature of his model, and stipulates that abbreviated versions may be possible and valid.

Below are outlined the 6 stages of CNA as I applied them (see Appendix F for diagram), with any additions I made explained. For guidelines to a standardised approach to CNA, readers may refer to Langdrige’s (2007) detailed treatise. To allow for analysis, interview transcripts were printed down the centre of A4 pages with blank columns to each side used for notes (see Appendix G for sample). More detailed analysis notes and ideas were simultaneously compiled in individual PowerPoint documents, one for each interviewee (see Appendix H for sample). I commenced analysis of each interview by repeatedly reading through the entire transcript, once while listening to the digital recording of the interview, to re-familiarise myself with the interview and build a picture of the context and the narrative as a whole.

#### Stage 1 - A critique of the illusions of subjectivity

I began each analysis with a period of reflexive engagement with the research topic, which involved thinking through what it meant to me personally, in the context of my background and experience, and the impact these beliefs may have had on the information I sought and my understanding of the material. Langdrige (2007) suggests critically engaging with social theory in order to critique one’s preconceptions and illuminate assumptions on the topic, and position oneself within the world of the research. I noted thoughts in the PowerPoint document, returning to this throughout analysis with further relevant reflections. I was intrigued by how this process turned up new reflections as I analysed different interviews, perhaps a result of both my cumulative engagement with the material, and experiences with each interviewee.

#### Stage 2 – Identifying narratives, narrative tone and rhetorical function

I first identified the stories that narrators chose to present, noting shifts in content, setting, and jumps in time to divide the transcript into meaningful sections. I attempted to identify the main narrative of the interview, structuring this in the form of a sentence, and repeating this for the various sections. I then focused on the tone of the narrative, both at the level of the entire interview, and throughout, noting shifts in tone even within sentences where relevant. I did this by listening to the interview recording while reading the transcript, writing tone-descriptive words in the leftmost column. I also paid

attention here to the use of any imagery, as outlined by Crossley (2000). As suggested by Langdridge (2007), I used the most appropriate descriptor available, rather than slotting into a predetermined framework. Analysis of tone was intertwined with the next step, examining the rhetorical function of the narrative. Langdridge (2007) recommends asking questions such as; ‘What kind of story is being told?’ and ‘What does this story seem to be doing?’ I asked these questions of the whole interview, and of the various narratives within it. I looked for opinions and attitudes expressed, excuses, justifications, explanations and criticisms, positive and negative evaluations, and where individuals positioned themselves against perceived counter positions, noting in the second left column. Langdridge (2007, p. 138) posits that this allows one to position the individual “in relation to the wider world of stories” that they inhabit.

### Stage 3 – Identities and identity work

At this stage I focused specifically on the identity work being done by the individual in their narrative, asking questions such as; ‘What kind of person does this particular narrative construct?’ ‘Who are they positioning themselves in relation to?’ Analysis of tone and rhetoric helped to inform this examination of how the individual brought a sense of self to their narrative. I underlined and marked relevant sections and noted thoughts in the PowerPoint document. Langdridge (2007) advocates relating the above to what we as researcher know of the person, and to the research topic.

### Stage 4 – Thematic priorities and relationships

A core feature of the analytic process was conducting a thematic analysis of the text, which was influenced by Riessman’s (2008) guidance, as well as that of Langdridge (2007), who advocates identifying themes directly without losing a sense of the whole narrative, and that systematic coding (first order, second order etc.), and breaking apart the text to code individual units of meaning, is not necessary. I worked through the transcript methodically noting words, phrases, and emerging ideas, which I put in the two columns to the right. I organised themes into a grid in a separate document (see Appendix I for sample), adding to this through repeated readings. Having completed this for each individual interview, I then engaged in a process, away from the transcripts though referring back to them if necessary, of thinking about these themes. I examined commonality and relationships between themes across the narratives, rearranged them, collapsed some into others, and repositioned some as subthemes, using flashcards laid out on the floor during this process.

#### Stage 4b – Structural analysis [addition to CNA model]

Not explicitly outlined in Langdridge's (2007) model, I analysed transcripts from a structural perspective, following the guidance offered by Riessman (2008), and referring to Labov's structural narrative analysis (Labov, 1997, 2001). This involved examining stylistic features of narratives such as emphasis, repetition, use of direct speech, asides, metaphors, pronouns, grammatical shifts and paraphrasing, as well as dialogic features such as self-interruptions, apologies, contradictions, laughter, and pauses. These were noted in the innermost left column, and influenced all aspects of the analysis, particularly investigation of rhetoric function. Riessman (2008, p. 80) states that such an exploration of the narrative form can add to and illuminate thematic analysis of narratives, allowing inclusion of voices "that might be missed otherwise".

#### Stage 5 – Destabilising the narrative

The purpose of this stage was to explore the functionality of the narratives produced, in the context of the interview and the broader social world. This involved first situating myself in the context of my ideological position, as explored in stage one. I then explored the social and psychological functions of the narratives, and possible links between personal and dominant cultural narratives (Willig, 2008). Langdridge (2007, p. 137) cautions against subsuming the meanings of the individual to the superior interpretations of the researcher, or digging beneath the surface for hidden meanings not apparent to the individual, but rather critically engaging with theory to allow a perspectival shift in understanding the life world of the individual; "an alternative perspective [...] grounded in broader sociocultural discourse".

#### Stage 5b – Dialogical analysis [addition to CNA model]

Though very much an aspect of 'destabilising the narrative', I have chosen to present dialogic analysis as a sub-stage, as Langdridge (2007) does not refer specifically to analysis of the interactional dynamics of the interview situation, and I was influenced by the approach of others in this regard (Goffman, 1959; Riessman, 2004, 2008; Willig, 2008). This involved reading through the transcript focusing on how narratives were interactively constructed and performed with me (as the audience) in mind (Riessman, 2008). I looked at ways in which individuals chose to dramatise aspects of their narratives using stylistic features such as direct speech, sound effects, asides etc. I sought to identify the preferred self that they were presenting to me, and reflected on

my possible influence on this process (Riessman, 2008). My assumption was that interviewees' perceptions of me inevitably shaped the contours of their narratives, viewing this as an inevitable and informative influence, which was reflected upon and incorporated into understanding the stories that emerged.

### Stage 6 – Synthesis

The final stage involved critically synthesising the above findings. Langdrige (2007) does not offer prescriptive guidelines on how this should be done, but notes the importance of outlining the key themes identified, and privileging the voice of the individual, cautioning against subsuming their subjectivity beneath that of the researcher or the theories employed. My own synthesis was a lengthy, iterative process. An interactionist perspective shaped my interpretation of the narratives, through a desire to understand the meaning narrators ascribed to their actions and behaviours, within the context of their worlds. As articulated by Patton (2002, p. 132); "What common set of symbols and understandings has emerged to give meaning to [the individual's] interactions?" I began by constructing a single narrative for each individual, guided by the question 'How do they understand their behaviour?' which included material from across the above analytic steps (see Appendix J for sample). The purpose of doing this to begin with was to ensure the focus remained on trying to understand each individual's perspective, and to adequately situate their meanings within the context of their world. I then drew out and synthesised data from across these individual narratives, developing this material through my own interpretations. Through repeated reflections and reconceptualisations, and guided by findings from the thematic analysis, this material was reduced to five overarching thematic categories, and their constituent categories, described in the following chapter.

### **Ethnographic data**

Though this was not ethnographic research, there was a minor observational element to the present study through the time I spent at the housing association youth club, where I went one evening a week to conduct interviews. The youth worker I was liaising with had noted interest from those I interviewed, however specific interview times were not arranged further than that they would take place during the evening club. Each week I spent up to 2 hours at the club, either waiting for interviewees to arrive, or to finish other activities, and during this time would interact with the youth and youth workers in attendance. As my research had been introduced, my reasons for

being there were known. Nonetheless, my presence could be considered 'covert observation' of sorts, as described by Grinyer (2001, p. 127); "Although the focus of the research may be entirely overt, researchers may find it difficult to 'switch off' when in a privileged situation". I found watching the young people interact thought provoking, and valuable in helping me to think about my research. I typically made notes in a notebook I kept for this purpose on my way home, refraining from making any notes during these times. Such observation was in line with BPS guidelines on observing those in public spaces without informed consent (British Psychological Society, 2004), but given that this was not my originally intention in being there, the use of this material still posed ethical questions (Grinyer, 2001). I thus chose not to refer specifically to this material in writing up the research, but rather used it to help me think through my discussion.

I considered whether my presence had allowed some of the benefits Arksey and Knight (1999, p. 67) attribute to 'insider' research, including "an ability to obtain richer data [as] interviewees are more likely to be candid and open because they feel confident the interviewer believes them". This seemed reinforced by the easy rapport I found with those interviewed at the youth club, and their frequent references to the club, others who attended it, and the estate on which it was located, which I felt allowed their narratives to flow quite easily. It is difficult to quantify the impact of this additional information on analysis of these interviews, particularly as I also had casual conversations with some interviewees outside of their interviews. I do not claim to have been immune to some shading of my perceptions of the material on the basis of this. However, while analysing the interviews, every effort was made to stay immersed in the transcripts, and given my commitment to reflexivity throughout, I feel confident that any impact was kept to a minimum. Rather, the observational notes provided an important source of information for me while writing my discussion, in conceptualising the lived realities of the individuals in my research. I thus viewed these notes and experiences as a valid and worthy addition to the primary interview material.

### **Methodological reflexivity**

Early in the research process, I conducted a 'reflexivity interview' with a colleague (see Appendix K for questions), as recommended by Langdrige (2007). In this I explored issues including my motivations for conducting the research, my positioning of the interviewees, and my view of self in relation to them. I kept a reflexivity log throughout the research process, in which I frequently reflected on my process and struggles, and on turning points in my thinking. I made sure to personally debrief following each

interview by noting in this log how I had experienced the interview, thoughts on my own impact on the material, and beliefs of mine that may have been activated during the interview. These reflections are explored in the following chapter, and in the final reflexivity statement.

Use of the self in qualitative research can bring huge benefits, but must be accompanied by continual reflexivity (King, 1996). I reflected on the boundaries and merging of my own identity as a counselling psychologist and as a researcher, as discussed by Burck (2005), including the possibility that this may have allowed for deeper questioning and a level of comfort in the interview process that may have influenced the material obtained. Within narrative approaches, reflexivity and an awareness of one's own role in the research process become integral to the methodology (Willig, 2008). The dialogic nature of the narratives produced, the context of the interview and the impact of my shaping the narratives were all considered fundamental to analysis, and are explored in the following chapter.

My thinking in relation to this research was influenced in important ways by the many youth workers, fellow researchers and professionals I spoke to throughout. A special case in point, I attended regular research meetings at the *Brent Centre for Young People*, a psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy centre. These meetings centred on an intervention programme for young offenders being run by the centre, and were frequently attended by sociology professor Michael Rustin. I believe the sharing of perspectives at these meetings, from psychoanalysis to sociology, impacted on my thinking and interpretations, particularly during the writing of the discussion chapter.

#### Part four: Ethical issues

Ethical approval was obtained from City University prior to recruiting participants, with no further approval from outside agencies required. The BPS 'Code of Ethics and Conduct' (British Psychological Society, 2009) and auxiliary 'Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants' (British Psychological Society, 2004) were adhered and referred to throughout the research process.

## **Ethical considerations in narrative research**

It has been suggested that, owing to the typically personal and relational aspects of narrative inquiry, specific ethical considerations are required in such research (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Clandinin and Huber (2010) advocate a respectful and non-judgmental attitude, and empathic listening to personal narratives, given their central role in identity construction, and that this approach be maintained throughout the analysis and in how narratives are represented in the written research. The notion of respect centralised in these guidelines formed an ethical imperative throughout the present study. A related issue is the need to explicitly acknowledge the role of interpretation in narrative analysis, framed as a central ethical problem in narrative research (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Squire, 2008). As put by Smyth and Murray (2000, p. 325); “given [the researcher’s] unique perspective on people’s stories, it is imperative that they claim some ownership and control” over the analysis process and findings produced. In the present study, I attended to the interview material with the utmost respect, and attempted to accurately represent individuals’ stories by presenting extensive extracts from the transcripts to highlight and support the analysis. I also aimed to convey throughout that interpretations made are my own, and do not reflect any form of absolute truth.

## **The status of the text**

Willig (2008, p. 10) emphasises the importance of determining what a transcript represents, “the status of the text”, before attempting to analyse it. For example, may it be viewed as a factual account, or is it an attempt by the interviewee to disclaim responsibility (Willig, 2008). Several aspects of the present study are worthy of specific note in this regard. In particular, I found that to access the population I wished to interview and communicate my research aims clearly to them, without resorting to unhelpful labelling or pathologising of behaviour, was a delicate process that demanded consideration from an ethical perspective. I was aware that as youth workers would be approaching potential interviewees and explaining the study to them, there was a risk this could be presented in an unhelpful way, which would impact both on the narratives produced, and potentially on the individuals. To this end, I always highlighted in discussions with youth workers that I wished to avoid labelling or pathologising behaviour. I was aware that they would be familiar with the young people they were approaching, and emphasised that participation should be voluntary and based on the individual’s interest, i.e. not to persuade them to partake. In discussions

with interviewees prior to interviews, I inquired about what they had been told about the study and their motivations for participating, in an effort to incorporate this context into my analysis and correct any misinterpretations. I emphasised that there were no right or wrong things to talk about, that the intention was not to judge behaviour, and that I was interested in hearing the story of their life, whatever that might include.

### **Sensitive research with young people**

The present study is deemed to focus on 'sensitive' subject matter, given the potential for disclosure of illegal and/or socially unacceptable behaviour (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Economic and Social Research Council, 2005). In addition to this, several interviewees were 'young people' at 17 years of age, and must thus be considered a 'vulnerable' population (Economic and Social Research Council, 2005). This was carefully considered during recruitment and the interview process, described above. As recommended by Robson (2002, p. 70) in research with vulnerable populations, I strove to demonstrate "a commitment to genuine participation" in my interactions with individuals at all times. Arksey and Knight (1999) outline researcher aims when eliciting sensitive material in interviews as inviting the interviewee to respond whilst ensuring they are allowed to preserve 'face' and not caused undue distress. I sought to negotiate these tasks through utilising the interpersonal and therapeutic skills developed through my training as a counselling psychologist. More specifically, I took time to discuss research objectives with interviewees, strove to express and demonstrate non-judgement and acceptance at all times, and paid special attention to eliciting and exploring emotional reactions to the process during debrief. Arksey and Knight (1999, p. 114) refer to substantial evidence that research interviews "can be cathartic [...] because the process of telling the story – perhaps for the first time – has the potential to lead to greater insight and understanding both of oneself and the problem being confronted". This echoed my hope that to have their experiences listened to in a non-judgemental environment, and my genuine interest in understanding how they understood them, would be a validating experience for interviewees.

### **Limits to confidentiality & data protection**

As outlined above, all standard precautions were taken in assuring participant confidentiality when storing interview data. All identifying information such as names of individuals and places was changed in interview transcripts, and biographical details at times altered in order to increase anonymity. Issues of anonymity were made more

complex by the aims of the present study to give a 'voice' to the individuals involved, and it was felt that it would detract significantly from the rich content of the narratives to remove all identifying information. Thus, as an added precaution, full interview transcripts are not provided in the appendices of the present research, and the extracts presented in the analysis are anonymised in an effort to preserve confidentiality.

Another issue faced was the likely disclosure of illegal activity during interviews. This was not a straightforward matter, with relevant guidelines referring only broadly to legal implications, leaving much discretion to the researcher. As recommended by the BPS (British Psychological Society, 2004), prior to commencing interviews, specific instances of disclosure that would fall outside of the confidentiality agreement were made clear to interviewees. These were intention to commit an illegal act, or one that might endanger them or another individual. Individuals were informed that disclosure of such acts would be reported to the relevant authorities. In such cases I recognised both an ethical obligation to report such information, given that preventative measures might be taken, and further a legal obligation: Feenan (2002, p. 763) points out that if a researcher fails to report intention to commit an offence that then transpires, they could be "held liable for failure to disclose under the law of negligence." I made the decision, again communicated to interviewees prior to interview, that in the case of potentially illegal behaviour that had occurred in the past, I would not feel obligated to report it to authorities. This decision was based on several factors. From a utilitarian perspective, to report such information would potentially render the research unfeasible, given its focus. My aims, closely mirroring those of Hobbs (1988, p. 15), were that "[interviewees] culture, the true nature of their social world, including the forces that shape and constrain its boundaries, might be comprehended". Further, the likelihood that reporting information relating to past events, which could subsequently be denied or discredited, would be of any real use to authorities in bringing about arrests was low (Feenan, 2002), and fundamentally, was not felt to outweigh the importance of fulfilling the above aims.

## Part five: Evaluation of methodology

While reliability and replication are not necessarily concerns of qualitative research, many researchers call for a penetrating analysis of the research process in evaluating qualitative findings (Crotty, 1998; Hiles & Čermák, 2007). With this in mind, I have

aimed for transparency throughout this chapter. Willig (2008, p. 156) argues for a “systematic, cyclical process of critical reflection and challenge of the interpreter’s own emerging interpretations” in qualitative methodology, necessary to distinguish it from mere subjective viewpoint. This advice was embraced in the analytic process in the present study, as outlined above.

### **Validity in narrative research**

A challenge identified within narrative research concerns establishing the validity of interview narratives, with Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggesting adequacy and plausibility as evaluative criteria. Though the status of a narrative’s content is inarguably important, many researchers propose a focus on the ‘narrative truth’ of the material gathered, the individual truth and meaning for that person, rather than measuring it against some objective truth of the outside world (Webster & Mertova, 2007). As summarised by Plummer (2000), the search for *the* truth is untenable, but the search for truths and meanings is necessary and possible. Willig (2008) suggests a narrative approach may be evaluated by assessing the extent to which it successfully grounds its observations within the contexts which generate them. This echoes Polkinghorn’s (2007) suggestion that interpretations of narratives be well grounded in the narrative data that produces them, and further that they demonstrate theoretical backing. In the present study, I have tried to clearly distinguish between narrators’ views and my own interpretations, and have used extensive verbatim quotes from the transcripts, in an effort to contextualise my interpretations and conclusions.

### **Methodological issues**

Initially, the planned focus for the present study was on self-identified ‘gang members’, based on my assumption that this would ensure access to young people engaged in the behaviour of interest. However, engagement with the literature cast doubt on the validity of this label and the distinctions it imposed (see Alexander, 2008; Bullock & Tilley, 2008; Hallsworth & Young, 2008), as discussed in the previous chapter. Various youth workers confirmed the fluidity of such designations, and further highlighted the improbability of obtaining interviews with those who self-identified in this way. For recruitment purposes, I thus redefined the focus to simply young people’s stories of growing up and being ‘on road’, as discussed above under ‘Recruitment’.

Nonetheless, recruitment remained a drawn-out process. In several cases initial meetings with youth workers came to no fruition, in that I heard no more from them following their assurance that they knew young people that might be interested. The study initially planned to focus on males only, given that violent and antisocial behaviour is more prevalent among males in the UK (Bennett & Holloway, 2004; Smith & Bradshaw, 2005; Wood, 2006). However due to the initial slow pace of recruitment, I extended this to include females, resulting in a single female interviewee. I was encouraged in this decision by research criticising the male only focus and calling for inclusion of female perspectives in research on youth violence and antisocial behaviour (Jarman, 2005; Ness, 2004). Given the case-centred nature of narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008), and its limited ability to generalise to the general population (Ewick & Silbey, 2003), I felt that the inclusion of a female perspective might be beneficial both in any insight it provided, and in offering some base for future research.

The first five interviews of the study were conducted in a youth worker's car. I was initially very hesitant at this suggestion, and other options were considered. Conducting interviews in the young people's houses was deemed inappropriate for safety reasons and given that parental consent had not been established. I inquired about organising transport to the offices of the youth project, however these were located on the other side of London and open only during work hours, whereas the young people had been informed interviews would take place during the evening youth club. Following discussion with the youth worker, who personally knew each of the interviewees, it was suggested by him that interviews be conducted in his car. Though unconventional, this location was found to work very well, given its privacy and yet visibility, and familiarity to the interviewees. My subjective impression was that conducting interviews on the road, and within view of the housing estate where many of their narratives were situated, allowed narrators a level of comfort in discussing their experiences. However, my research supervisor raised safety concerns around this process, and following discussion with her it was decided that I would refrain from conducting the remaining interviews in this setting.

Interviewees in the present study differed significantly in terms of the violent and antisocial behaviour they spoke about in their narratives. First, in terms of the seriousness of this behaviour with regards to harm done to others, which varied from vandalism and petty theft to prison sentences for violent behaviour. This heterogeneity, though significant, and borne in mind during analysis in considering the implications of

the narrative accounts, was not felt to be a limiting feature. Given the aim of this study to understand how young people make sense of *their own* antisocial behaviour, coupled with my desire to avoid arbitrary grouping and comparing, I felt the broad array of experiences to be beneficial.

Secondly, they differed in the extent to which they were describing behaviour in which they still engaged, or that they considered to be in their past. As discussed, remembered events become reconstructed and reinterpreted over time (Levine, 1997; Schmidt, 2004), and again the time elapsed since the events being recounted was borne in mind during analysis. However narratives always constitute a reconstruction of past events in a dynamic and an ever-evolving process (Bruner, 1991; Williams, 1984), and always necessitate consideration of the context of a story's retelling (Hiles & Čermák, 2008), thus this was not seen to detract from the validity of these accounts.

## Chapter 3: Critical narrative analysis

### Overview

This chapter represents my attempt at organising the wealth of data that was produced through a critical narrative analysis approach to the interview material. The three parts of this chapter represent a synthesis of the findings obtained through the analytic approach outlined in the previous chapter. The aim of analysing the stories told by narrators was to access their individual world of meanings, and through this gain a better understanding of their behaviour. This might be encapsulated by the ambition to ‘see the world from their perspective’, though this would misrepresent the reality; the narratives were always co-constructed, while the findings necessarily emerged from *my* perspective. In the first part of this chapter, I present a critique of my own subjectivity in relation to the research topic. This reflexive endeavour is included here, as it formed an integral part of the analytic process. In the second part, I briefly introduce the eight narrators, and sketch the outlines of the narratives that they provided. In the third part of this chapter, I present my findings from the analysis of these narratives.

### Part one: A critique of the illusions of subjectivity

Borrowing from Ricoeur, Langdridge (2007, p. 136) emphasises that “we always have a view from somewhere” in relation to our research topic, and that this perspective must be explicitly identified and explored as a precursor to conducting the research. He advocates a ‘reflexivity interview’ as one way of doing this, and it was this I used as my own starting point. The information provided by this exercise, and built upon with continuing reflections, opened my eyes to the various stands I was making in relation to my research topic, that is, young people engaged in violent and antisocial behaviour. These considerations formed an important backdrop to my emerging ideas and became an integral part of the analytic process.

My representation of ‘The Other’, described by Oguntokun (1998) as a group to which the researcher does not belong, formed an important point of reflection for me. Fundamentally, I realised I was positioning the young people as victims, with ‘us’ as more privileged society in some way responsible for their situation, and thus their behaviour (particularly when this fell outside of ‘our’ acceptable norms). Though it

surprised me to realise it, this is perhaps not such a surprising position. Certainly 'we' as society assign ourselves the responsibility of *changing* such behaviour. Perhaps I was trying to redress the somewhat one-way nature of such demands by assuming some responsibility at the aetiological end. Or perhaps I was simply reacting to lazy media (and societal) condemnation of no good, out of control youth, by siding with the underdogs. I questioned the impact of such a position on the material I was gathering and how I would interpret it. Might I elicit 'victim' narratives? Further, inherent in a focus on 'change as positive' is a pathologising of behaviour as in some way 'bad' initially. Would I invite narrators to account for their bad behaviour? I recognised that this had critical implications for my research endeavour, and through continued reflection, the need to take up either position was replaced by a desire simply to understand.

I became aware of a motivation to give voice to the experiences of a marginalised, disenfranchised group, and reflected on the impact of this on the material I was gathering. Would I encourage them to counter other messages out there? I questioned whether I was setting out to explain or justify such behaviour with my research, to show the world that it is, actually, understandable. The idea that behaviour is functional, that it 'makes sense', was in line with the pragmatist underpinnings of my theoretical approach. However, I was aware of my somewhat personal attachment to this hypothesis, and recognised the need to stay as neutral as possible, to refrain from evaluating their behaviour, and to focus instead on truly listening to what narrators were saying.

I was aware from the outset that narratives were being presented to me, as a young, white university-educated woman. Many questions came to mind. What figure did they see me as? What impact did this have on what they were saying? At first, I wondered whether my status was simply too different to obtain valid data. I was, as put by one narrator, an "outsider". However I soon came to value my position, as I realised that the answers to these questions might tell me something about how narrators presented to society, if I were considered in some way representative of this. With this in mind, analysis of the dialogic and performative aspects of the narratives is addressed throughout. I am aware that others would undoubtedly have found different patterns of meaning in the data; my own relationship to the interview material evolved considerably as I worked on it. I hope that I have successfully achieved a level of transparency with regard to my own subjective interpretations of the individuals and experiences I have attempted to represent.

## Part two: Introducing narrators & narratives

There follows a brief introduction to the eight individuals who participated in the narrative interviews. This information is not intended to encapsulate who they are in any 'true' sense. Rather, it is hoped that presenting some contextual information and my interpretation of the narrators will provide a feel for the social, cultural, and relational backdrop against which the narratives were co-constructed. Further, I felt it important to include some information on the narrators in an attempt to demystify a somewhat 'unknown' set of individuals in our society, through demonstrating the diversity that each of them represents. It is hoped that the information below, together with the analysis to follow, successfully portrays the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the lives of these individuals.

Though the contours of the eight narratives varied significantly, commonly described incidents relevant to the study aims included spending time in groups, fights and violent altercations, carrying weapons such as knives and guns, drug dealing, theft, mugging, and disruptive behaviour at school leading to exclusions. Though I chose not to include any questions on behavioural *change*, as discussed above, all eight narrators spoke of engaging in less violent, antisocial and illegal behaviour as they grew older. The key thematic, rhetoric and stylistic features of each narrative are outlined below, along with any noteworthy observations. All narrators were self-consciously telling a story, with past events typically being narrated retrospectively, in the first person. Narrators employed techniques such as dramatic pacing and pauses, emphasis, repetition and direct speech, and offered asides to the main story in their re-telling of events. Narrators are presented in the order in which interviews were conducted.

### Tanner

Tanner was a 21-year-old man of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity. Born in the UK, Tanner was raised by his mother, and had intermittent contact with his father. Excluded from primary school for disruptive behaviour, Tanner attended a pupil referral unit, and then college, but was excluded from the latter following a fight with a teacher. Having been in some form of steady employment since the age of 14, Tanner worked part-time and was father to a 2-year-old daughter.

Tanner began his narrative at 16 years of age, when he first went 'on road'. He moved back in time from here to provide an account of his upbringing, through teenage years

characterised by fighting and carrying weapons, to the present day. He spent considerable time both criticising his early school experiences, blaming teachers for misunderstanding him, and praising his later school's democratic approach to discipline. Though the content often depicted difficulties and struggles, Tanner's narrative was optimistic and authoritative in tone. He presented a positive self-image throughout, often portraying himself as likeable and reasonable. I identified an overarching theme of starting life on the "right path" before being led astray, then taking personal responsibility for getting back on it. References to a good upbringing and the image of his mother as a supportive figure permeated the narrative, seemingly in support of his destiny to successfully emerge on the other side. Towards the end, Tanner's narrative became reflective and philosophical, tinged with irony and regret as he looks at his previous behaviour and its consequences from the new vantage point of his older and wiser self. However such experiences were presented as worthwhile, given what was learned, and the narrative was ultimately one of overcoming.

### Jack

Jack was a 17-year-old, white British man. Raised by his grandparents, both of Jack's parents had tragically died in separate incidents. Following school, Jack had attended college, but was excluded following a fight with another student. Jack was not currently employed or in education. A keen mountain climber, he trained and competed regularly.

Jack's narrative was largely chronological, beginning in early childhood and covering various aspects of his life, including detailed accounts of fights he had been involved in. The overall tone was animated and optimistic. Jack's story-telling style was excited and dramatic when recounting particular incidents, and he seemed to enjoy explaining things to me, and reflecting on his own views. There was a confessional quality to Jack's narrative, as he seemed from the outset to try to convey to me how "naughty" his behaviour had been. However there was a continual shift between this and trying to rationalise and justify his behaviour, with Jack seeming to struggle to position himself within this, often bringing negative emotions into his understandings of his fighting. At times, he assumed a moralistic stance, condemning others and somewhat pedantically outlining his opinions. Jack presented himself as disciplined and ambitious, ending the narrative with his high hopes for his future.

### Alex

Alex was 19 years old, of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity, and had been raised by his mother since immigrating to the UK as an infant. Alex had been excluded from school for fighting, and from college following an argument with the principle. He was not currently employed or in education, and spent his time “on road”, selling drugs to make money. He and his girlfriend were expecting their first baby.

Alex’s narrative recounted his experiences of school and college, and his years spent “on road”, centred on instances of fighting and violence. It took the form of a series of accounts of incidents such as fights with other youth, and group violence including that involving knives and guns. Alex’s tone was subdued to begin with, however he quickly became relaxed and engaged, and his tone animated. Alex’s presentation of self shifted markedly throughout his narrative, from conveying a tough and nonchalant attitude, to becoming self-reflective, musing on topics and seemingly exploring new understandings of incidents. Alex initially positioned himself clearly in line with other youth, at times rationalising and justifying violent behaviour. His narrative moved from this to become a very personal exploration of early experiences, unmet needs, and an evolving capacity to process negative emotions, which seemed to allow the narrative end on a hopeful and somewhat empowered note that the comparative apathy of its opening did not forecast.

### Bobby

Bobby was a 17-year-old British man, of Italian ethnicity. Following school, Bobby began attending college, but was excluded following a fight with another student. He lived with his parents, and was not currently employed or in education, selling drugs to make money.

Bobby opened his narrative by describing the illegal activities he had been involved in as a teenager, which tended to be non-violent and for which he had been arrested and charged. He frequently referred to his motivations for this behaviour as purely mercenary. Bobby’s narrative went on to depict social life on his estate and at school, and time spent with groups of friends, which centred on illegal activities including theft. Bobby often presented himself as independent and self-sufficient, and tended not to position himself within the context of personal relationships. Bobby’s tone was quite subdued and pessimistic throughout, negative evaluating his behaviour, and mourning

wasted opportunities. He reflected upon the impact of his behaviour and college exclusion on his parents, who he spoke of highly, whilst simultaneously describing feeling isolated within family life. Bobby's narrative was characterised by a sense of regret, particularly at the end as he reflected upon the impact of his behaviour on his current options in life.

### Joseph

Joseph was a 19-year-old man of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity, who was raised in the UK and lived with his parents. Following school Joseph had spent several years "on road", and was currently back at college studying design. He continued to sell drugs to support himself. Joseph had been diagnosed several years prior to our interview with depression and anxiety, reporting these to have significantly improved over the preceding years following work with a psychologist.

Joseph's narrative focused mainly on his years "on road", and his life at home. He provided detailed accounts of specific fights, and experiencing stigma from police, which he attributed to his skin colour. His narrative conveyed confusion and fear at others' behaviour, and a need to be cautious in his own actions. Joseph often referred to his difficult relationship with his father, his verbally abusive behaviour and the emotional impact of this on him. His narration was somewhat avoidant in style, often bringing up topics then seeming reluctant to explore them. His self-presentation was similarly hesitant, as though fearful of being judged. After we finished the interview, Joseph divulged a story that he had seemingly felt unable to share with the recorder on. Though he was optimistic in his expressed attitude and future ambition, the overall tone of Joseph's narrative was one of a struggle to make sense of his life experiences.

### Sarah

Sarah, the only female narrator in the study, was a 17-year-old white British woman. Raised by her mother initially, she spent several years in foster care, and was living in a council funded hostel at the time of our interview. Sarah had left school and then college before completing either, and had never worked. She planned to re-enrol in college the following year.

Sarah's narrative focused on her relationship with her mother, experiences of violence and drug taking with groups of youth, and largely on her developing understanding of herself. Sarah was soft-spoken, and her tone struck me as sad, though she frequently

laughed and used humour. Sarah had clearly engaged in a degree of self-reflection, and presented herself as a different person now than in the past, shifting between self-criticism and presenting her previous aggressive and violent behaviour as a way of coping with an unstable and abusive childhood environment. Insightful and honest, Sarah was notably flippant with regards to her own unmet needs and considerable suffering. Throughout her narrative, Sarah expressed shame at how “not normal” her life had been, with a sense almost of bewilderment at how she had found herself in it.

### Brian

At 27 years old, Brian was the oldest of the eight narrators. Originally from Scotland, Brian had lived in London since childhood. Following school he trained as a carpenter, before spending several years in prison for burglary. Brian worked full-time, and was father to 2 young children, who lived with their mother.

Brian’s narrative centred on the fighting and law-breaking behaviour of his teenage years and early twenties, explicitly linking this to the bullying he had experienced at school and the emotional impact this had on him. Learning to fight was presented as a life-changing event, leading to acceptance and friendship. Brian invoked concepts including biological determinism and the negative influence of friends in understanding his behaviour. Brian’s tone shifted between self-assured and seeking assurance, while he was staunchly optimistic in his evaluations, with prison framed clearly as a positive learning experience. Brian presented himself as mature and philosophical, and his narrative was ultimately one of reflection, recounting a journey from being both self-focused and self-destructive, to changing his priorities, refocusing on family, and coming full circle.

### Delroy

Delroy was a 26-year-old man of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity, raised in the UK by his father having moved here as a child. Permanently excluded from school, Delroy spent ten years involved with several London gangs, followed by time in prison for a violent offence. Following his release, Delroy had ended his gang-affiliations and was working full-time for a youth charity.

Delroy’s tone was quite flat to begin with, and his narrative felt somewhat like a recital. As it progressed, it shifted from depicting the facts of his life, and took on a more reflective tone, becoming at times angry and emotional. His narrative was largely

chronological and focused on difficult family experiences, the danger and the thrill of his extensive violent past, and the power of being feared by others. He frequently rationalised and justified such behaviour in the context of his own difficult life experiences. Delroy had clearly engaged in some degree of reflection on his life, and interspersed his current understandings of these experiences with a commentary on 'youth today'. Though he described the vulnerability and hurt of his early years, his tone was typically authoritative and defiant, and his narrative essentially one of survival.

### Part three: Analysis of the narratives

Findings are organised below into five overarching thematic categories, each containing several constituent categories. It remains important to acknowledge the heterogeneity of individual experience within these. I have included extensive narrative extracts to illustrate, which contain all utterances, hesitations and self-corrections of the narrators, with any of my own utterances included in parentheses.

#### **'On road': A (different) way of life**

Narrators spoke of their social lives and relationships as though they were part of another world, separate to the world we were conducting the interview in, and the one they clearly assumed I inhabited. They laughed when I questioned the terms they used, though always went on to carefully explain them to me, such as their frequent references to being 'on road'; spending time on the estate with their friends. Narrators often became animated when discussing life on the estate and fights they were involved in, seeming to enjoy being knowledgeable on our topic of discussion. They openly struggled at times to convey to me the intricacies of situations they described, and to verbalise what seemed to be unspoken but clearly understood social rules.

#### **Behaviour in context**

Something that struck me early on was that though the behaviour described could often be deemed antisocial, the motivations and ambitions expressed by narrators were often prosocial. So violent fights were presented as a means of communicating, of gaining acceptance, drug dealing as an industrious way to make money. Narrators all actively constructed their identity through their narratives, often portraying themselves

as disciplined, ambitious and future-oriented. Several referred to a desire to do things right, and of the satisfaction of accomplishing something that they had worked at. Discussing a lack of “respect” causing him to start a fight, Jack goes on to situate this construct in the context of self-promotion and success.

**Jack:** {And why do you think it’s so important that you respect people?} ‘Cause if you don’t respect people they won’t respect you, and if they don’t respect you, then you ain’t gonna do anything, ‘cause if you go into a job and you start, yeah, all of this rare fucking bollocks they’re gonna think; one he’s disrespectful and two; he’s a knob-head and so like you have to be polite and respectful. (14:6)<sup>2</sup>

None of the narrators had completed secondary education, yet educational attainment was presented as highly valued. Bobby cited completing his GCSE’s as his “best experience”, while all described actively pursuing education, often in face of obstacles, and emphasised the importance of gainful employment and their ambitions in this regard. In describing an incident of school exclusion, Jack focused on the “missed” education, while Tanner spoke in angry tones about how little he learned in his first school.

**Tanner:** I started to think ra how come I didn’t learn this in primary school when I was in year five and six? I was like aw, I didn’t know nothing until I left that school. (4:26)

In describing making it to college after negative experiences at school, Brian’s speech becomes figurative, his tone bright and animated, and his sense of pride is tangible.

**Brian:** And when I got into the college course I was like, because I wasn’t really good with my writing and stuff at school, it was like practical. When I finally got to do something with my metabolism and that, I just flew. Just always a one-way street from then. (26:6)

Outside of such conventional channels also, an overwhelmingly positive view of *learning* emerged from the narratives, with the word itself repeatedly used. Injuries were framed as valuable learning experiences, as were arrests and time spent in prison. Fighting was presented as an integral part of life at school and on the estate, as functional and often necessary as a means of communicating, learning, and teaching lessons. Brian described how fighting became a way for him to cope with bullying, gain acceptance, and integrate into the social life of school.

**Brian:** It wasn’t just about fighting, it’s sort of like, just getting noticed. {Mm} Y’know, that’s what it was, it was more about getting noticed, than anything else. And when you

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<sup>2</sup> Narrative extracts are referenced by transcript page and first line number

got noticed, you start noticing that more people will talk to you, and you started communicating more, and you start learning more. (12:18)

Another frequently cited function of fighting was to develop a protective or intimidating reputation, and to cultivate fear in others. At times, physical violence was framed as the only means of doing this.

**Alex:** It has to be physical, so the person knows (.). Like, certain people, someone could say that to them and they just be like “yeah yeah yeah” and could still do it. So obviously to stop them from still doing it therefore I gotta show them, so therefore they ain’t going to do nothing. If they gonna do something, they gonna make it much worse than what it is already. Basically. (11:6)

Alex’s tone here is defiant, and there is a clear threat in his penultimate sentence. Narrators at times seemed to slip into character and use direct speech when narrating experiences. I took this sense of immediacy as a signpost for more emotive situations.

Narrators often alluded to boredom, both directly and indirectly, as a motivation for engaging in fighting or law-breaking behaviour.

**Bobby:** What we were thinking? We weren’t thinking nothing, we were just bored really, we were just doing, we just wanted to do something, something exciting together, like for us to get excited or I don’t know. (10:11)

Even when not describing it thus, narrators often conveyed a sense of boredom and futility when talking about life on the estate. Several spoke of struggling to find things to do, and as put by Joseph, simply “wandering around doing nothing”. Though he begins animatedly describing life “on road” in the below extract, Alex quickly becomes dejected and sighs, almost as though hearing his own words.

**Alex:** ‘On road’ don’t mean looking for trouble, on road is like walking up and down. You’re not going in no house or nothing, you’re just walking (hhh) up and down, going anywhere your legs take you basically. (13:22)

At other times, as referred to by Bobby above, a sense of freedom and excitement was associated with life on road. Narrators often smiled when recounting fighting, breaking into buildings, stealing cars, and the adrenaline rush of dangerous behaviour and breaking the law was mentioned several times.

**Brian:** I enjoyed it. I did enjoy it, breaking the law ya know, the thrill, I did enjoy it. And that’s the truth. (35:34)

### **Violent scripts**

In stories of violent altercations, narrators often invoked a sense of implicit rules

guiding their interactions, as though reactions and responses were directed by certain scripts. I use the term script here as described by Wilkinson and Carr (2008); behavioural repertoires based on previous and vicarious experiences that familiarise young people with how to react in certain situations. This seemed to extend to adopting an entire persona, as described by Alex.

**Alex:** I just took everything in and (.) used to be on road and move to people and that. {You used to, sorry?} Move to people and move to other boys and that. {Move to?} Yeah, like rob them. That whole lifestyle; when I used to see someone that I don't know or I don't like I used to be like "What are you looking at me like that for" and I just took that and use it as my whole lifestyle basically. When I went to school I was like that, when I was at home I was like that. So that's what changed me really. That point changed me really. (5:28)

Though these scripts prescribed *what* to do, it seemed they did not always provide the narrator with a sense of *why* that course of action was preferable, as illustrated by Joseph's struggle to articulate his motivations for fighting back when provoked.

**Joseph:** Me, I'm not the person to stir, stir trouble, just to start trouble {mmhmm} for no reason. It's just...obviously when you have to defend yourself...defend yourself, you have to defend yourself innit. {Mmm} But obviously, right, a fight is not the answer innit but (coughs) on the streets it's different. 'Cause I learnt that (.) like if you, if you don't defend yourself, they're either gonna, they're either gonna, they might have a knife on you, they might have a gun {mmm} you never know innit. So you're gonna have to defend yourself, I think. (15:28)

Joseph explicitly defines the rules on the streets as "different" here, indicating that though he knows alternative courses of action exist, he feels unable to implement them in this context. Self-protection is offered in explanation, though his "I think" introduces some doubt around this rationale. This struggle is further illustrated below.

**Joseph:** Sometimes, sometimes you have to...you can't let people just, get away with stuff. That's how I felt innit, so I just, so I just punched him innit. {And to walk away? What would that have meant?} No, that would be (laughs) don't be, don't be nice innit. 'Cause like (4) 'cause like obviously if, if I just left him {mmhmm} (3) that, that wouldn't be cool innit. I don't know where to call it though. I'm supposed to help him out and he's supposed to help me out innit. {Mmm} It's family innit. (11:38)

This time Joseph shifts from a self-protection explanation (which would have fit) to describe the sense of *obligation* he felt to retaliate. This seems to be in accordance with several rules; don't tolerate being spoken to rudely by someone; don't walk away from someone who has provoked you; always defend family members by retaliating when they have been affronted. A similar set of rules is implied in Alex's story of a fight at school, when someone skipped him in a queue.

**Alex:** I coulda resolved it by being like, ra, I coulda either, it depends, I don't know like I coulda been like ra "you go first", but it's the principle of like, I'm not no dickhead so why am I letting you go first. Like why shall I let you go first, when I come in you're gonna say something. {Mmhmm} So it's just basically, how people think. I don't really know how to explain that one to you. (21:26)

Alex hesitates to begin here, as though struggling to 'see' outside of the social protocol and offer a deferential alternative. He quickly reasserts his position with "I'm no dickhead", his wording and tone hinting at the shame associated with backing down. Alex further implies that it would be futile for him to change his response, as the other boy wouldn't reciprocate, illustrating a commonly narrated quid pro quo dilemma. Similarly, narrators typically described carrying weapons for self-protection, often linked to ongoing feuds and the potential that others might be carrying a weapon, again highlighting the tit-for-tat culture that seemed to perpetually restrict narrators' options. In describing his desire to "escalate" a potentially violent situation involving weapons, Alex initially alludes to self-protection.

**Alex:** They probably would have backed out a knife on me or probably backed out a gun on me like telling me to give me my stuff, this time I mean to say it would be different. So I would have a reason to escalate it basically like, that's what I mean. {And would you want a reason to escalate it?} Yeah! No one is pulling out a gun or a knife on me and getting away with it. (16:27)

However he goes on to describe a *desire* to have to use a weapon, seemingly drawing on a violent script to create an interaction that legitimised violence as defensive, whilst serving the function of bestowing a certain power on Alex, as conveyed in his last sentence. A similar shift from an explanation of self-protection to a rather different function is illustrated by Tanner below.

**Tanner:** That was the in thing to have a weapon...anything happens, you can, protect yourself and, back yourself and (.) to make people know to be scared of you. That's how it worked. (26:31)

The wording "make people know" in the above extract is interesting, seeming to imply that people will assume a fearful role, rather than experience actual fear. I began to wonder if carrying weapons and the fear this engendered acted as a sort of currency of power. So, to legitimise the notion of being powerful by making others fearful with your weapons, one had to at times 'act' fearful of others' weapons. This notion of fear as a commodity was further articulated by Delroy.

**Delroy:** It's always better, whether it's your best friend or whatever, to always install some fear into everybody, 'cause fear lasts longer than love, yeah. People will love you if they fear you longer than if they love you. (25:33)

## No space to think

Narrators often described simply not thinking about their actions, and I wondered whether such scripts allowed them to ‘switch off’ their thinking. Below, Tanner describes how the familiar boundaries of life on the estate paradoxically allowed a freedom not to think.

**Tanner:** When we was young, we didn't have no care, you wouldn't care if you die, if you got arrested, nothing like that (.hhhhh) It just felt (hhhh) like nothing could happen, like nothing was gonna touch you, you know that way like, you didn't have no care, just you know you're gonna beat them back up or...just no caring. It's like, you knew, you knew your role in the road, you knew what's gonna happen, you know what's gonna happen so, you really don't care. (22:11)

Not thinking was often linked to being young and excitable, such as in Alex's description of attacking strangers in the street as a “game”, with the winner he who could “knock out” the most people.

**Alex:** {When you think back now do you remember what you were thinking? Do you remember how you felt?} No, I was just gassed. {What does that mean?} Hyper. 'Cause I'm young innit, I just got a bit of energy, don't care, not thinking. (9:8)

Alex goes on to describe the enjoyment he got from this:

**Alex:** I'm one a' them people that, it's like I enjoy fighting, I enjoy hitting someone, so, I don't understand why. I can't answer that question (laughs), it's just funny to me, I don't know why though. {So when you say you enjoy fighting, how does it make you feel?} (.) Em, I'm not sure you know. It's like I don't, I can't think about that. How I felt when I'm fighting someone. I don't think about how I feel, I think about making sure I don't get beat up. (9:31)

There is a marked change in Alex's tone in response to my question above. He shifts from laughing at the notion of hurting others to becoming very serious. “Can't think” would seem to imply that thinking is not an option Alex feels he has, if he wants to avoid getting “beat up”. Similarly, in recounting a situation where Alex and a group of friends badly beat a boy, Alex's tone shifts from subdued and uncertain when describing the boy following their attack, back to aggressive when I probe this.

**Alex:** I don't know what was wrong with him I think he was knocked out or something he was just laying there. That's all (.) I think his arm was broken as well. I don't know what happened to him. So, everyone was just keep beating him up basically. {Do you remember how you felt at the time, or what you were thinking?} Yeah! “Don't try come round my area, what you doing, you can't do that! You trying to violate so obviously you gonna get punched up innit”. (14:28)

I wondered if feelings of empathy might be felt as incredibly threatening in this situation, either posing a risk to Alex's own safety, i.e. by allowing him get “beat up”, or

psychologically, leading to feelings of guilt. Perhaps as a way of coping with this anxiety, the transgression of social rules and scripted responses are invoked again above, and there is a return to surety in Alex's last words on the subject.

**Alex:** He was just, in the wrong place at the wrong time basically. {Mmm} That's the reality. (15:13)

Clichéd phrases and everyday adages such as the above, or "that was street life", "that's the way it goes", "that's how it was back then", were often used by narrators to frame behaviour as simply part of the way things were, the status quo. This typically seemed to mitigate a desire for any further exploration, and also to relinquish personal responsibility for behaviour. Several narrators described not questioning when they were younger behaviour that was simply part of "normal life".

**Bobby:** So us lot that we always go and fight the other estates, which are in there (points). That's all finished, that was when we were young, but when we were young it wasn't that...it wasn't nothing, it was just like normal life. (1:23)

A common sentiment was that, however narrators began engaging in behaviour, through following scripts, or acting out of habit, over time they got used to what they were doing, so that by the time they came to question it such behaviour had become their norm.

### **Managing self and situations**

There was a strong sense across narratives that narrators had become quite adept at managing their often-precarious social worlds. Even when engaging in violent or risky behaviour, such situations seemed to be actively 'managed'. Several described limiting their alcohol and drug use, stopping of their own accord when they felt it getting out of hand, while Bobby described conducting his drug dealing so as not to step on the toes of rival gang dealers. As articulated by Brian, there were implicit standards to keep to.

**Brian:** It's like we were thrill seekers, but we weren't take the piss thrill seekers. {So what would a take the piss thrill seeker be?} Like to burn a car outside someone's house, or just to not listen, just to carry on...doing what you're doing, not paying attention to what's going on around you, basically. (21:28)

Narrators often spoke of a desire not to "escalate" violent encounters, seeming adept at diffusing such situations, through attempting to first talk things out, or making an effort to keep weapons out of fights.

**Alex:** They've backed out a knife on my bredren. Obviously I've gone to the youth, I've pushed the youth telling them "what you doing? What are you trying to back out a knife

for, this ain't even like no situation, like you're not, you're not even arguing with each other. He's just asking you a question. You're just acting like you're bad, back out a knife without talking". (17:9)

Interestingly at other points in his narrative, as illustrated above, Alex indicates the futility of talking, and a desire to escalate violence, with the prevailing logic seeming highly contextualised and situation-specific.

Though overwhelming emotions were often a prerequisite to violence, discussed further below, an ability to manage oneself and emotional reactions was typically presented very positively.

**Jack:** I don't try to go out and use my anger on other people, like I go out...if I've got anger I go out and use my anger on myself like. I won't say like I'd self-harm or nothing like that but I'd go out like because I do mountain climbing and, like, I'd put my headphones in, I'll block everyone else out and I'll just use that anger. (21:27)

Narrators often presented themselves as calm, reasonable and rationale in their stories, while depicting others' behaviour, including teachers and parents, as irrational or hysterical.

## **Rules**

References to rules permeated the narratives. This included both personal systems of rules, and those imposed from outside. While the former were forcefully articulated and implemented, the latter seemed to be subjected to a process of evaluation, being either respected and advocated or ignored and defied depending on their perceived fairness.

### **Authoritarian morality**

One of my earliest observations during the interviews was the moralistic tone that narrators at times adopted. The words "right" and "wrong", "good" and "bad" were frequently used, while others were frequently labelled or admonished. Narrators referred to the strict rules that they imposed on themselves and others, such as Jack's assertion that he was "quite strict on like, respect", which he illustrates thus:

**Jack:** If someone isn't respecting their table manners I tell them about it. And just little things like that, that kinda wind me up. (4:24)

Jack refers here to the frustration he feels at others not abiding by his rules. I noticed that narrators seemed to adopt such a stance at points where they seemed frustrated,

or struggled to express themselves, and I wondered if the surety of a moralistic standpoint was anxiety reducing. Narrators at times conveyed a *need* to see consequences implemented. Below, Sarah's tone shifts from casual to earnest, and even angry, in justifying a girl being punished (shot by her boyfriend) for a transgression (having sex with another boy).

**Sarah:** She got shot by her boyfriend basically, because of it. {Why did he shoot her?} Because she, she went round acting like a slag and, she thought she could just go and creep around and do it without no one knowing. (13:27)

Narrators outlined strict personal codes of conduct, which often served to justify their violent actions, such as Alex's account of attacking another youth.

**Alex:** I don't believe in, someone being a trouble to someone so much smaller. I see that as bullying basically. So obviously that was what I was thinking at that time. (10:31)

An emphasis on personal rules was clearly evident in stories depicting violent offences, where actions were justified on the basis that personal standards were being followed. The fact that social rules (laws) were being broken was often simply not acknowledged, illustrated in Alex's account of his arrest for attacking a ticket inspector.

**Alex:** I was with my friends, innit? Obviously we were going home together, so why am I going to change my route 'cause I ain't got a train ticket. I told you the train was coming while I was coming into the station, obviously I have to get home on time, so therefore that's why I jumped on the train without a ticket. (8:22)

Alex's tone here is pedantic and somewhat exasperated, as his account focuses exclusively on the reasons it made sense for him to get on the train. Violent behaviour was often presented as a justifiable response to provocation or injustice, when rules were broken or, as Tanner put it, when people made "the wrong move". Moreover, there was a sense that being provoked justified almost any level of response.

**Tanner:** If you brought it to me, I'm not gonna stop hitting you because you came to me. (11:16)

Below, Delroy describes how his personal moral code allowed him to rationalise his violent behaviour to the point where he viewed it as helpful.

**Delroy:** Loads of times where I've robbed people in the street and their family live in nice marble floors and...so I'm taking your money off you. Because, I don't feel like I'm doing nothing wrong, why should you be selling drugs when you're mum's got a good job? You wanna fit into the street culture, I'm going to help you. (23:19)

## Boundaries and authority

Others' rules also were often referred to positively, and strict boundaries advocated, *once* these were deemed logical and fair. Brian describes a favourite youth worker, much admired for her hard stance.

**Brian:** It's like she, she had a stamp of authority, if you didn't abide by them rules, as much as you can connect with Jane, she'd shut you off. (34:9)

It seemed that such boundaries conveyed reassurance, or knowing where one stood. Tanner enthusiastically advocated the democratic disciplinary system in the pupil referral unit he attended, indicating that when blame was fairly apportioned, he was willing to take responsibility for his behaviour and accept the consequences.

**Tanner:** So, me to deal with things like that was different, I didn't know, I was like "ra this is good". D'ya know what I mean, 'cause this person writ down what they done, and then, you can tell if they're lying cause I'm writing this down, so. {Mmm} Then they, they will put us together and we say sorry, then we shake hands then we go back to our classes. (7:9)

Tanner further alluded to the power of an apology in preventing an ongoing feud.

**Tanner:** But I respect him because, obviously, obviously the apology, we did that, and all of that, we sorted it out then. {You think that helped?} Yeah that did help. 'Cause if I didn't say sorry to him or he didn't say sorry to me, we'd be enemies to this day. (9:6)

However, positive views on the enforcement of rules in certain contexts were in stark contrast to narrators' portrayals of other forms of authority. In particular, there was little respect for arbitrary authority, i.e. that which did not relate *meaningfully* to the narrator. In relation to the incident with the ticket inspector described above, Alex implied that he would have more respect for those in authority if he personally knew them.

**Alex:** {What [were you thinking] when you were on the train and he was telling you to get off?} Ah I ain't hearing what he got to say! I don't know him from nowhere. That's what I was thinking. (8:18)

Similarly in describing arguments with teachers at school, Alex alluded to difficulty respecting someone just because he should. Again, there is a sense that unfair treatment negates any 'official' rules and rationalises an aggressive response.

**Alex:** "You think you're like my mum and dad? So what gives you the authority to shout? I don't know you from nowhere, you're the teacher. Alright fair enough you're an adult like, I respect that but there's only a certain line, you can't go past that. 'Cause you start shouting at me and trying to hold me. And I don't like that, therefore I will be rude to you, I will shout at you." (4:19)

Both Tanner and Alex described very similar incidents of their largely absent father re-emerging to assert their authority when visiting them in police cells following their being arrested, and the frustration they felt at this.

**Tanner:** Then my dad came. He didn't say nothing to me he just looked at me, he was, he was angry. But then, I looked at him, I said "what you angry for, you ain't been there for me so (.hhh) what you coming here for?" I was, I used to think like that, like "you don't need to be angry, you ain't shown me the right path, you ain't come...you ain't come to me, you ain't, you ain't asked me have I, have I started puberty yet" you know what I mean, "you ain't asked me nothing about, myself. You don't know my favourite colour so, why would you even come down to the police station and scare me with your attitude?" (24:23)

I wondered whether parental authority exerted largely without accompanying support might lead to more general negative attitudes towards authority. Similarly, several narrators described authoritarian approaches at home, and the impact of this on their perceptions of discipline elsewhere.

**Tanner:** When I'm at home, I was quiet 'cause obviously my mom, I would get, I would get a slap if, I act naughty. But in school, they weren't like that, they didn't have that kind of strictness about them. (6:1)

## **Stigma**

Experiences of feeling stigmatised based on reputation, race, or even being young were frequently narrated. The emotions evoked by such experiences, and narrators' ways of coping with these became, in my mind, central to understanding their behaviour.

### **Reactions to injustice and stigma**

Several narrators described feeling stigmatised in school, and reacting in defensive, oppositional ways, often to their personal detriment. Both Tanner and Alex understood this stigma as due to the negative reputation of family members in the same school, with Alex describing being permanently excluded from college as a result of such singling out by a teacher. Below, Alex illustrates his difficulty requesting help from certain teachers, who he felt were prejudiced against him.

**Alex:** {So what would stop you from asking them to explain it?} (.) Na sometimes I used to ask, depends. Some...in my school it kind of depended on the teachers, because I didn't get along with most teachers. It wasn't just because of me, it was because of my cousins and that. They were like "because your cousin is messy, I know I've now taught them for so long, that I don't want to teach you because I know you're

going to be exactly like them". It's just like what certain teachers used to think. "I do what I want to do, innit. Sit over there and teach someone else." (4:5)

In his last two sentences, Alex describes his response to such teachers; one of outward indifference and defiance. Central here is Alex's perception that their not attending was based on a stigmatising view of him. Thus in this instance Alex's perceived options were to 1) ask the teacher for help and risk not understanding, or 2) ask them for help and risk being ignored. The potential shame associated with either of these options is significant. Conversely, Alex describes how respect and understanding from other teachers led to his sitting several GCSE exams.

**Alex:** Some teachers I used to ask. Some teachers used to help me. That's why I went into my Art and my English exam, because I liked my teachers there, I didn't mind them so I done them. All those other teachers, they didn't help me so I did my own things basically. {So what did you like about the teachers you liked?} Mmm, it was the way that, maybe just the way they spoke to me, like they never really shout and that. (4:11)

Several narrators spoke of feeling stigmatised by police, such as Joseph's account of being arrested on suspicion of stealing a car, for merely looking in its window while waiting at a bus stop.

**Joseph:** There was one time, this is the time where I just, I got arrested for no reason innit. Like, obviously I was hoodied up and all that. (10:21)

His reference to being "hoodied up" implies that this was the basis for his being targeted. Joseph's tone is earnest and angry as he describes being questioned in a cell for several hours.

**Joseph:** I was quite upset actually, I was. 'Cause there were like, there were loads of police, there was like six of them, just, just for me ya know. {Mmm} Just for me, just mad. (10:35)

Joseph narrated several other instances of being unfairly targeted by police:

**Joseph:** There's a couple of times where, police just, stopped me for no reason. Just, stop and search me 'cause they're thinking I'm doing something. Well, whatever innit? {And how did that feel?} Eh (4) Not, not very good really, 'cause I weren't, wasn't doing anything like for them to try and arrest me and all that. Em, there's been a number of times actually, when they searched me and all that. 'Cause they'll say, obviously they'll say "there's been a robbery" or whatever, "want to search you" and all that stuff. Sometimes I'll say, I'll say "Why do you want to search me?" and then, obviously they'll search me and all that. But (.) just keeping myself out of trouble, that's all I'm tryin'a do innit. (6:23)

Joseph's "whatever" above indicates a weariness at such treatment. He goes on to portray the futility of questioning it (it happens regardless), though this aspect of the story is not emphasised by Joseph, as though his being ignored is so expected as to

not deserve specific mention. His concluding sentence hints at the upshot of such disempowerment; learning to try to avoid such situations rather than expect to have any control over preventing them, a sentiment echoed by Tanner.

**Tanner:** That's why I keep, I keep doing what I'm doing and I keep my head focused and start doing, different things. 'Cause I know, if I go to a little club, like a house party {Mmm} I know there's gonna be trouble, something...I'm expecting something to happen. (41:1)

This diminished sense of personal agency is seen at another point in Tanner's narrative, as he wonders "why do bad things always happen to me?", echoed by Jack.

**Jack:** I've just been told like from loads of different people that I don't go out looking for trouble but trouble always manages to find me. And I don't know what it is about that but it's true, I always manage to do some, some stupid stuff. (18:9)

At times, narrators conveyed their perceptions of wider society's judgemental attitudes toward them and their behaviour. In describing a favourite youth worker below, Brian emphasises her non-judgemental nature.

**Brian:** If you, if you said that you stole a car, or if you said that "Oh, I smoked a joint" and what not like, she wouldn't be, she wouldn't be like opinionated by it. She wouldn't, she wouldn't turn around and make judgements about you {mmm} because she already knew what it's like, she knows it's everyday business with the kids nowadays. Just, she was real, 100% real. (34:31)

Brian's use of "real" is interesting here, implying the false or appropriated nature of others' judgements, and their refusal to try to understand. Alex initially laughs nonchalantly below when speculating on others' view of him. However his tone shifts to one of complete seriousness, becoming angry as he describes the hypocrisy of "older people's" refusal to understand or empathise with young people.

**Alex:** {And how do you think people viewed you?} Probably like something like a hoodlum (.) I don't know, whatever words that describe...I don't know what to call it. I've, I've been called a lot of names for them things (laughs). {What do you think they didn't get? What did they not understand?} Bein' kids innit. That's the way I saw it. Like 'cause the stories I used to hear from like older people bigger than that, they used to do the exact same things when they were younger! So why do some people sort of, older people, just see it as...what, they never even see that happening when they was younger? Or that they never went through it? Or that sort of stuff never happened to them? Maybe, because maybe something like that might have happened to them, and they would say why do we [young people] have to do it. I just think that's just a lie. (13:31)

Alex seems to imply that older people are in some way *pretending* not to understand, in the hope that young people won't repeat their mistakes. Alex conveys anger at this deception, captured his forceful utterance of "lie". At other times, narrators professed

disinterest in wider society's views of them, with references to government and social structures possessing a distant and somewhat 'unknown' quality.

**Bobby:** Obviously there's things like jobs and that, but like, 'cause I'm not, I'm not at college at the moment, and the government is like...You know how the government is, how like there's no that many jobs and that, and you can't find jobs around. (2:27)

At times it was as though these actually presented obstacles, which had to be overcome in order to achieve ambitions.

**Bobby:** I achieved what I wanted and people never thought I could do it, but I raised up to the thing. {Who didn't think you could?} Like teachers and that. (8:30)

### Countering dominant narratives

Narrators frequently seemed to be appealing against perceived negative images of or assumptions made about young people, attempting to convey the reasons for their behaviour. Tanner's tone below is beseeching, as though pleading to be understood.

**Tanner:** They saying "aw (.hhh) alla this, shootin' and killin' em, black on black crime" and alla that yeah. It's not, it's not even that it's just (.) the government don't know why these people are dyin'. They're dyin' for a reason, they're not dyin' cause of nothing. (39:25)

Sarah describes the protective function of a construct such as 'respect' in the face of real physical threats from others, implying that this is typically ignored or underplayed in general use of the term in relation to young people.

**Sarah:** You probably think it's like, just to 'respect' and all that, but it's like, if you lose your respect, like, you just get, the piss taken out of you even more. (16:16)

Narrators at times openly appealed for my understanding, though perhaps didn't anticipate it, such as Bobby's frequent "do you get what I'm saying?" and "it might sound stupid but..." Bobby and Joseph seemed most aware of society's possibly critical perceptions of them, and of the pessimistic view of authorities towards young people, with their narratives characterised by a struggle to maintain hope. Below, Joseph makes a plea for people to understand and empathise with the life situations of young people. In his own narrative, Joseph made a connection between his father's abusive treatment and his spending time "on road".

**Joseph:** What they're not getting is what people actually go through innit. Like, the upbringing and all that. Em (.) Why people do, like stuff on the streets and all that. Some people do...they don't even have parents, or have any dads or whatever. Em. Obviously the police and the government they need see...they need to see innit what's really, what's really going on. Why people...do what they're doing, innit. {Mmm} Instead

of just...just arresting them and all that stuff, eh (.) they just need to see where they're comin' from really. (17:15)

In his presentation of drug dealing as a means of earning money, Bobby implicitly defends against a narrative of young people doing “dumb” things for no reason:

**Bobby:** I didn't want to do something dumb just for the sake of doing something, I just wanted the money. (7:33)

Of note here is how, in the process of defending his behaviour from perceived attack, Bobby seems to rationalise his viewpoint. This is further illustrated in Delroy's account of his being a “robber” as a means of escaping a deprived environment.

**Delroy:** It's not the typical eh, young black man growing up in an urban area, whatever they want to call it, ending up getting caught up in gang culture. I was trying to find a escape {Mmm} and that was my way of escaping. (25:8)

I began to wonder whether having to consistently defend oneself and one's behaviour from others' judgements diverted energy and attention away from the behaviour itself. And further, whether an evaluation of the behaviour became enmeshed with others' judgemental views on it, so that proving the injustice of the judgement became equated with justifying the behaviour. Below, Joseph seems to anticipate judgment based on his skin colour, pre-emptively defending himself.

**Joseph:** You'd think “ah, there's two black boys innit, tryin'a...tryin'a you know, beat him up” or whatever. I wasn't like that though. (3:18)

Joseph's concluding sentence indicates his need to defend this behaviour to *me* also, in the context of the interview, even though I already had the facts (that they were attacked by the white youth). Again, it seemed Joseph expected his word to be disregarded. I was aware of narrators' using the pronoun “you” when describing society's perceptions of them, and questioned whether way I too was being addressed.

**Jack:** You see like most people they look at youths and they go “oh he's nothing but a hoodie, all he's gonna do is end up in jail, and selling drugs and all of this”. But if, if you really actually took a good look at the wider picture, and had a look around like had a look around yourselves, it's around everyone, you've just got to spot it. (24:2)

At other times I wondered if I was being less directly addressed.

**Sarah:** 'Cause [council workers] were just like, I dunno what they're called, proper people who talk properly and all that, I just thought they were just a bunch of wankers (laughs) really. Sit there with their pen and paper and tell you...get told off. {Mmm} Mmm. Drink their water. (18:3)

It was only during analysis that I reflected on whether Sarah may have been referring to me on some level, as I pictured myself sitting opposite her, with pen, paper and a bottle of water. The implication that Sarah is not a “proper” person illustrates the extent of the invalidation linked to such perceptions. Narrators seemed to belittle their own judgements at times, struggling to find the ‘right’ thing to talk about, or dismissing their rationales as probably wrong. There was a sense of shame in what they were telling me at times, such as Sarah’s nervous laughter whenever she spoke of her drug use.

**Sarah:** So, em (laughs). It’s a bit weird, ‘cause I’m nothing like that now. Mmm. (6:33)

I was also aware at times of an eagerness to please me, and meet my interview needs. Narrators often attempted to help me, taking care to explain things to me, and seeming pleased when able to answer my questions.

**Brian:** Explain that again. I’ll try and answer it a bit better for you. (28:10)

At other times, their words conveyed a certain submission to my authority as interviewer, requesting permission to talk, highlighting the fundamental power imbalance inherent in the interview situation. Narrators seemed curious about me, about my research, and how much I knew about the things they spoke about. As put by Brian:

**Brian:** I’m surprised you’ve got as far as you have. You have to realise, some of the kids nowadays won’t tell you half of their story {mmm}. They won’t. They won’t open up to you because you’re an outsider. (33:25)

Sometimes, it felt as though narrators simplified stories for me, or left out important contextual details, which belied the seriousness of situations and made them seem trivial. I began to wonder if narrators had internalised a process of disregarding or undermining the rationales for their own behaviour. To illustrate, in recounting an incident when she was arrested for racially aggravated assault, Sarah initially offers being “drunk” and “high” in explanation of her behaviour.

**Sarah:** I ripped a turban off a sheik guy, and beat him up, two of em. Was like, I got kicked in the ribs as well though (laughs). And like, then I picked up a bag of potatoes and chucked em at his head. {So what happened?} I was drunk. I was high. (18:16)

However she goes on to describe the sense of injustice she felt at not being allowed to pay (over the odds) for a bottle of water, and at being physically pushed from the shop.

**Sarah:** After he told me to get out he started pushing me. I was like (laughs) “You don’t touch me like, I’m paying for this drink yeah”, not expecting any change back, give him

a pound for a bottle of water like, after he told me to get out the shop. So I just took the piss, so a fight kicked off. (18:24)

And further, becoming increasingly emotional, describes her anger at the perceived exploitation of young people by shopkeepers.

**Sarah:** All they care about is making money, yeah. Why do you think so many under age people get sold fags? Things like that. 'Cause they just care about making money. So there's no need for him to push me out the shop. (19:3)

Sarah articulates her own experiences of exploitation at other points in her narrative, and in the context of these it seems that broader issues may have been at play in her aggressive response, which it seems she had not been encouraged to articulate or explore. Similarly, in describing an incident in which a girl was attacked by another group of girls, Sarah initially presents somewhat trivial motivations.

**Sarah:** [The boys] set her up to get her beaten up like. {Why?} Because she's from Hackney and they're from Islington, so. {So?} She's just a slag (laughs). (13:18)

However, I remained curious, and Sarah went on to offer quite a different explanation; that the violence was a message to a rival drug dealer.

**Sarah:** Obviously it's just to get to her boyfriend probably, 'cause he sells loads of drugs and that. (13:24)

That it felt like a struggle to get past the dismissals to these more serious explanations would seem to indicate narrators' limited ability to make their views heard, with the unfortunate consequence that they continue to be misunderstood.

## **Emotions**

A theme that permeated narratives, implicitly and explicitly, opening pondered upon and palpably avoided, was the centrality of emotions to narrators' behaviour. In particular, a struggle to cope with feelings of anger, shame, and vulnerability emerged as important.

### **Fighting feelings**

Fighting was presented variously as a way of blocking out painful emotions, or working through or releasing them. Jack describes the cathartic function of fighting for him.

**Jack:** When I first hit him, it felt like a bit of the anger came away from me, so I just kept on hitting him. (2:24)

While Delroy links his nonchalance around hurting others to the hurt that he himself had experienced.

**Delroy:** I never thought about anybody I hurt doing my crime or anything like that. It's just eh, the feelings that you have is, where you've gone through certain things in your life and you sit there and you feel "what have I done to deserve this". (23:11)

Overwhelming emotions were often positioned as a prerequisite for extreme violence, as articulated by Delroy below.

**Delroy:** Normally, you have to be in a emotional state to go and kill someone. They've troubled your family or your best friend, you're all emotional and you just go and...end up getting yourself in something over your head and you've crossed that line because of the emotion built up inside you, your brain's not working properly. (12:33)

Narrators appeared to relinquish responsibility for their actions once they passed a certain threshold, with Jack describing an "anger limit" after which "you kind of lose the plot". When I highlighted the discrepancy between Jack's "strict" rules on respect and his justifying the theft of a car, I had a sense of his giving up on trying to rationalise.

**Jack:** {And how does that fit with you talking about respect and respect being important to you, does that come into your mind if you're nicking something off someone?} Yeah. {Or is it two separate things?} No obviously it does, 'cause that's me, obviously, disrespecting them. But like (hhhh) sometimes it's just like things change, like one day you can be like the happiest person in the world and then the next day you just want to go out and like absolutely slaughter everyone. And I reckon it was just one of them days where I just really didn't give a fuck about anyone, sorta thing. (19:28)

His final sentence above encapsulates what many narrators expressed; that when emotions became too much to bear, all good intentions fell by the wayside.

### **Fear and victimisation**

Narrators often invoked feelings of threat, suspicion and fear in describing their social worlds. Bobby described life on the estate as "scary", while Sarah spoke of racial divisions and the safety offered by one's "own kind". Joseph illustrated at several points in his narrative the dangers inherent in life on road.

**Joseph:** I'm used to it really but. It's just like you have to be aware when you are on the road, you have to be aware when you are on the streets. You have to know where you're going, and that (coughs). Don't be at the wrong place at the wrong time and that. (9:38)

A common experience narrated was being victimised by other young people, such as being mugged or attacked.

**Tanner:** I've been robbed, em, in front of my like, my friends like, like, they, you see, when, mistakes and mistakes go together they will go somewhere. (17:5)

Tanner alludes to the cycle of retaliation that this can establish. His slightly hackneyed phrasing is interesting, again seeming to position this outcome as inevitable and, importantly, not worth questioning. Tanner directly linked his fear of being victimised to continuing with “silly” behaviour”, i.e. fighting and carrying weapons. He sighs as he does this, and his tone is somewhat dejected.

**Tanner:** I was always thinking of negative things what was gonna happen, em, so, doin' the silly things with my friends again (hhhh). (20:17)

There are undertones of shame and humiliation also as Tanner describes how his appearance and naivety made him a target.

**Tanner:** My body language em, the way I looked, I looked like a easy target, do you know what I mean. I've, I've been robbed, em, guys would come up to me and, try to, fight me for no reason at all 'cause my body language. (14:33)

Experiences of being victimised were clearly something that stayed with narrators, as Delroy said “even up to this day”, and those who spoke about it tended to do so repeatedly throughout their narratives.

### **Rejection, vulnerability and defiance**

Instances of perceived parental rejection and neglect, and the pain of these, were poignantly described in several narratives. Bobby became emotional when describing his changing relationship with his mother.

**Bobby:** Like she used to make me like my packed lunch in the morning before going to school, and then I started smoking and then my mum just stopped everything. Like she comes late at work, and she goes like and sees how my sister is doing in her bedroom, and she doesn't come to my bedroom. That just got to me, so I just wanted to do anything to, to like get her attention, but now looking back that was like the wrong thing to do. (3:6)

Bobby shifts to the present tense above, painting a vivid image of rejection and isolation, which he appears to take the blame for. Alex recounts a similar tale of the hurt he felt when nobody came to collect him from a school daytrip. He was completely absorbed in telling his story here, his tone low and quiet.

**Alex:** Everyone's mum came to pick them up, my mum didn't come to pick me up. My dad didn't come to pick me up. {Do you remember how that felt?} Yeah I was upset. I cried and that, and my schoolteacher was all hugging me like that, just like I was crying. Everyone's got off the buses, their mum waving an' that, gone to say hello to their mums and that. And my mum weren't there. {Do you remember what you did?} Went home. Went out. Didn't come home 'til like 1 in the morning (.) Never asked her why didn't she come pick me up. Never cared. {You never asked her?} (.) Never. (25:4)

Perhaps the most striking feature in the above narration is the shift in Alex, both in his demeanour and through the images conveyed, from pain and suffering to outward defiance, echoing Bobby's description above. Alex articulates the strategy he developed to cope with such pain, that of shutting others out and focusing on himself.

**Alex:** When my mum (.) it's just like (hhh) when I was younger than that like, before like, she used to bring me to my grandma's and just like, leave me there like. Just like, in a way, I used to hate her for that but...so obviously I didn't really have my mum at that times, like at some time either. {Mmm} So it was just like, like I didn't really care about anyone else basically it's just all by myself, I just holded in everything, what I thought, and just done my own thing. (24:16)

A similar pattern of reacting defiantly to perceived rejection was discernable in narrators' accounts of aggressive behaviour, illustrated in Alex's description of starting a fight after being left out of a football game.

**Alex:** In a way I can kind of say I was a bit of a bully 'cause sometimes people would be doing things and I just, I would just get in the way. Maybe because I was getting in the way, that's way they have said such and such to me, and that's why I turned around and hit them or something. Say "I don't like what you're saying get away from me". {So what do you mean you used to get in the way?} I don't know, just say for instance I've come outa class late and people have already started playing football. So I'm like "what team am I on" they're like "it's even". I'm like "What are you talking about you're even. Tell him to come out or something". (13:1)

There was a pervasive tendency across narrators to present themselves as strong and underplay their own vulnerability. They highlighted their self-sufficiency, dismissing their own vulnerability and needs, presenting as almost omnipotent at times.

**Alex:** I wouldn't have it from no one {Mmhmm} no matter who you was, you could be the baddest man in the world I'm not giving you my stuff. (15:22)

"Weakness" was directly condemned by Delroy, and indirectly by others through the stories narrated. Brian criticised himself for being emotional at times, or as he put it, "soft". I discerned a pattern whereby expression of vulnerability in narratives was often followed with one of bravado. In the below extract, Jack casually describes his decision to fight less as others can't "fight properly", though this is coupled with a frightening account of the lengths to which they might go in retaliation. He then immediately

departs on a tale of the extent of his violent past, his tone becoming defiant and aggressive.

**Jack:** The reason why my anger's kind of calmed down a lot is 'cause to tell you the truth no one can fight properly these days, everyone's on bringing their brothers or bringing their boys or bringing their gun to your house or they, they go on all mental and they bring a knife to your sister or they'll start like shooting at your house. And I don't need all of that so I've kind of calmed down quite a lot. But when it was...when I first started [secondary school] it was a totally different story. I beat up my teacher, made him move to \_\_\_\_\_, told him if he'd ever come back I'd stamp his face in. (15:30)

Below, Alex alludes to feelings of vulnerability leading to his seeking out friends, following this with a yawn, as though an expression of need must be accompanied by one of nonchalance.

**Alex:** I had moved to a new place and I don't know no one too tough too so obviously I've just gone out, started talking to...made friends and that, basically (yawns). (24:5)

At times, it felt as though narrators' own hurt or vulnerability was projected outwards onto others, resulting in intense anger at people who were seen to take advantage of others, as in Sarah's incident with the shopkeeper described above. The below extract directly followed Jack's description of the pain he himself experienced when his father died.

**Jack:** If someone's doing something and I hear about it I'd kind of look, like, put it in my perspective like "how would I feel if this person that was close to me done it, how would I feel" and then it's just sometimes I can wind myself up so much. (12:11)

## Reflections

Narrators all engaged, to varying degrees, in overt reflections on themselves and their behaviour, with this often becoming increasingly the focus throughout their narratives.

## Struggle to understand behaviour

Across all eight narrators, there was a palpable sense of a struggle to understand their behaviour, to position themselves in the stories they told. Joseph's narrative, in particular, seemed characterised by a need to make sense of things. In the below extract he reflects on what was causing him to be "aggressive".

**Joseph:** It's just (.) I don't know maybe, 'cause obviously my parents not getting along so, that's probably affecting, probably affected it, as well. {Mmm} Even, even, even now

I'm thinking, what really could have caused it really. Sometimes I think, I'm still trying to find the answer and that. (13:25)

Narrators often shifted between taking responsibility for their behaviour and blaming others. The influence of peers and older youth was frequently brought into understandings of behaviour, as in Alex's account.

**Alex:** I'm not even sure what made me changed. It's just like I started jamming with older people; what they was doing, I wanted to do. Like I looked up at them basically, it's obviously when they used to do things I used to do it too. I just took it a whole different way from, I took it all in basically. (5:22)

This notion of being "changed" by such influence was common. Narrators' descriptions often served to position them as essentially good but led astray, as passive rather than active agents in this process.

**Tanner:** I was going through the right path do you know what I mean but, as I say, friends show me, my friends showing me the wrong path to, to lead. (16:32)

Tanner goes on to reinforce this position with the notion of a good upbringing.

**Tanner:** The way I got brought up, I was a lover, not a fighter, {Mmm} do you know what I mean. I didn't get brought up to be a fighter. (15:14)

Conversely, there was a strong discourse across narratives of the potential negative impact of upbringing and parenting on their behaviour. Absent fathers were referred to by most narrators, with Alex making a clear link between this and who he is now.

**Alex:** My dad wasn't always there for me when I was younger, so that why I'm kinda like this in a way. (24:2)

Alex goes on to link this absence to his spending time with older people, presenting a somewhat idealised view of what a father might have provided, and the buffering impact this might have had for him.

**Alex:** Certain stuff I coulda done with my dad, like not going out to go punch people up but like, playing football and that like. (23:27)

Narrators typically acknowledged the struggles they had experienced in their upbringings, and the difficulty of reflecting on these was apparent. Throughout her narrative, Sarah conveyed how "not normal" her life had been, speaking with a sad tone at these times.

**Sarah:** When I was in school I had loads of friends. When I started taking drugs, I had hard...all my friends changed. Well, like I cut loads of them off 'cause I knew what I was

doing was wrong and I didn't want them to see me like that. You know, they all had normal lives and that, like they all had mum and dads. (4:12)

Narrators further expressed ongoing anger and sadness at this deprivation, such as Delroy's emotional extract below.

**Delroy:** I didn't start living this life, I been born into this life, you understand what I'm saying. I didn't ask for this, I didn't, choose to be put here and be, forced to go through certain struggles and having to deal with certain pain and emotions that a young person of my age back then shouldn't 'a been dealing with. (23:28)

Several narrators described ongoing attempts to avoid a negative home environment leading to their spending more time on the street, which in turn caused arguments with parents, resulting in a negative spiral.

### **A split self**

Narratives had a confessional quality at times, as though narrators were eager to convince me of the extent of their misbehaviour. They offered negative evaluations of their behaviour and themselves.

**Tanner:** That's all the things that I've done, wrong. Basically I've done wrong. (31:20)

And engaged in self-critical reflections.

**Bobby:** I shouldn't have been doing that kind of things when my mum's working and that. I don't need the money. (4:7)

Such reflections were accompanied by a sense of regret and disappointment, as in Jack's extract below.

**Jack:** Sometimes I just realise that I've looked back on things now and done some, done really dumb stuff. (16:2)

At other times, stories served to minimise narrators' actions, for example by offering favourable comparisons to other young people.

**Bobby:** Normally we didn't rob nothing off them, but there's like people who would have robbed everything, like phones and that. (2:1)

And to adults.

**Brian:** There's still big grown men nowadays, football hooligans and what, they're doing exactly the same thing, they're like 40 and 50 year old men, but we were a lot younger. (19:19)

Feelings of guilt and shame were explicitly expressed by several narrators, often when reflecting on the impact of their behaviour on others.

**Jack:** I didn't want her to see that side of me and she ended up did, like she did see me like that, and I wouldn't talk to her for like a whole week because I felt so guilty that she seen me like that. (9:10)

Bobby often discussed the consequences of his behaviour, in particular for his parents, describing feeling disappointed in himself. He seemed to position his parents as having been there for him, with him taking responsibility for their reactions.

**Bobby:** People around me, like my parents or people like that have always taught me right from wrong. But my mum after I started smoking and that, she started getting mad at me, so like she got fed up with me and then she just like didn't pay attention to me so I just started doing more and more things just to get her upset. {Why did you want to get her upset?} 'Cause you know, it might sound stupid but I just wanted attention from her. (2:35)

There was a sense of regret throughout Bobby's narrative, particularly at the end as he reflected upon the impact of his law breaking behaviour on his life choices. It seemed that narrators struggled to find a way of integrating such behaviour into their current self-image. There is a long pause when I ask Alex what kind of person he sees himself as. It is as though he doesn't feel he has the right to say he is a good person, until given permission.

**Alex:** {What kind of a person do you see yourself as?} (hhh) Boy! (laughs) I don't know you know, it's like, I'm kind of a criminal or something, I don't know anymore I don't know what to call myself. (laughs) It's just I don't know. What, when it comes to the violence side and all the rude side of things? Or just me as a, actual person? {No, you. You as you.} Ah, I'm a cool person as a actual person when I am in my good moods and that I can be a good person to be with at that time. Just when I'm not in a good mood I'm not one of the best people to be around at that time (hhh) basically. 'Cause I take it out on everybody, no matter who you are. (23:11)

In presenting himself as two separate people, Alex distances himself from his "rude" side, preferring to identify with his "actual" good side. This struggle is echoed by Jack.

**Jack:** Well I like to put myself in as two people, there's the side of me that can be your best friend and help you out whenever you need it or whenever you want it, and then there's the other side of me that like can just completely ignore you and you can just say the wrong thing and it'll all just go straight up in the air. I don't really like to let that side of me come out that much, 'cause obviously I'm a young guy, and I know what I can do. (26:30)

Both Alex and Jack conclude with a sense of fear of their own behaviour, and its destructive potential, echoed by others. Jack's tone is soft and vulnerable below, and there is a sense of horror as he describes accidentally burning down a building through

lighting a fire. I wondered if this metaphoric description might in some way reflect a fear of his own violent capabilities, his potential to lose control.

**Jack:** I had nightmares for two months. {Why do you think that was?} I don't know. It just kinda scared me really. The flames, like, just covered the wall like so quick. It was like you know if you strike a match, you only light the top first and it burns down the stick, but if you cover that match in petrol and you light it's all gonna go at once. That's what the wall done. Just went all up at once. (7:1)

Jack's repeated use of the words "get rid of" in the following extract point to the strength of his desire to separate from this side.

**Jack:** At the moment I'm trying to get rid of it, that angry side and the one that's always pissed off and just, I just want to kind of get rid of that, I don't want to be a pissed off guy that always walks around...wants to be pissed off with people, wants to start fights with everyone. I don't want to be that person, I want to be someone that walks around can be happy with people and help people. (27:10)

However Jack nonetheless seems ambivalent about this 'bad' side, as he often smiles as he remembers his "naughty" behaviour with friends, as in the below extract.

**Jack:** And like fair enough yeah we look back on it and we have a laugh, but it's so stupid the things that I've done. (17:17)

This statement indicates the paradox I felt was faced by some narrators, in feeling unable to acknowledge the positive social aspects of such experiences, perhaps feeling obliged to view them in wholly negative terms.

### **Beginning to think**

A shift from not-thinking to thinking, from mindlessness to mindfulness, was often referred to in narratives as a point of change in their behaviour.

**Tanner:** I was young, foolish, silly. Weren't thinking. But now I'm thinking. (27:14)

Such thinking seemed characterised by consideration of the consequences of actions. Alex explains how, at a certain age, consideration of legal consequences led to his cutting back on his law-breaking behaviour.

**Alex:** But 'cause I knew that once I got to 16 it's different now. When I do some things there are going to be a bigger consequence than what happened before. So I kind of kicked back on doing them things like goin' on road to rob people and that, so I just thought "none of that". (7:3)

Bobby indicates that such considerations were always there, though perhaps "in the back of your mind" as opposed to the front.

**Bobby:** About 15, you started getting pushed into doing things, which you wanted to do in a way, but obviously like you knew in the back of your mind that's going to be, consequences is going to happen, like drugs, doing bank frauds, robbing houses, load of things. (1:27)

Narrators were quick to highlight supportive relationships in their lives, ranging from youth workers, friends, extended family, to in Tanner's case, his mother. A single supportive relationship was often offered as the reason they were able to think or feel differently about things. Talking was often presented as helpful in this regard.

**Alex:** I'm fine, happy. I don't think about, obviously all my problems like, I used to hold them in, like didn't used to tell no one about it. But obviously I've told someone about it so now, they're just like, like gone like, I don't really care about it. {So who did you tell?} My girlfriend, I told her everything. (26:8)

Jack credits his girlfriend in helping him to "calm down" the anger that so often led to fights for him.

**Jack:** It's just, the feeling like when I'm around her, it's like I can never lose my temper, or like I'm always happy. She keeps me happy. (7:32)

This desire not to dwell on negative past experiences was echoed in several other narratives, as was a need to have support from parents in doing this. Both Bobby and Alex expressed this toward the end of their narratives, in both cases a marked shift from their earlier very self-sufficient presentations. Alex's assertion below that there are ways other than violence to settle disagreements again represents a very different stance from earlier in his narrative.

**Alex:** Obviously some fights can be resolved, some can't. But it don't really need to be escalated to shoot someone, in a fight. Well that's the way I see it. (20:32)

Similarly, there was a marked change in Tanner's attitude in the below extract, where he professes the flawed logic of carrying a weapon for safety.

**Tanner:** {So how did you stop carrying [a knife]?} (3) I don't know I just woke up (.) didn't, it didn't concern me I didn't...I got wise or somethin', there was really no point walking around with it. {What if you need it?} If it happens, it happens. But I'm not gonna walk into something where, I know, if a police stops me now, and I've got a knife on me, I know what's gonna happen, straight away. Now if I got jumped (3) it wouldn't really save me 'cause it's gonna happen. (27:11)

There was a notable shift from the externalising of responsibility that often characterised narrators' descriptions of violent or illegal behaviour, to a clear sense of personal agency in *changing* this behaviour.

**Tanner:** I've got out, I got out of it ma own way, no one didn't tell me. I didn't have a dad, to tell me. (26:18)

Narrators tended to present themselves as independent and self-sufficient, and further as "different" from other youth.

**Tanner:** I'm in my different role and I'm, I'm a different person. I'm my own person now. I used to rely on people, used to rely on them, used to roll with them. 'Cause I'm not relying on no one else, I went my own way, my own separate way. (13:1)

However though Bobby's message below is one of self-sufficiency, the tone is of isolation and disconnectedness.

**Bobby:** So I just do things for myself now, I just do them for me only. (11:3)

And despite assertions of independence, narrators' self-descriptions typically focused on positive interpersonal characteristics, seen in Jack and Alex's self-descriptions above, and below in Joseph's.

**Joseph:** Eh, yeah I'm friendly, I'm friendly. Eh, I'm easy to get along with, like easy going and all that. (17:39)

Groups and other youth were typically portrayed as dangerous or threatening. Delroy described being influenced by the "wrong crowd", while Sarah spoke of the dangers of living in the "wrong area" depending on what other youth lived there, and the danger of inciting jealousy from others. In particular, narrators often spoke of the danger of others "knowing your business", as articulated by Tanner.

**Tanner:** They don't know my business, they don't know what I'm doing. That's how you have to keep it ra. Nowadays no one's keeping it like that, these kids that's why a lot of kids are dying and, a lot of kids are doin this, a lot of kids are doin that, because they're telling each other each other's business. (34:10).

I wondered about the implications of narrators' tendency to distance themselves from other youth, essentially from their peers, and my sense that they felt this was the 'right' thing for them to do.

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I feel it necessary to note an important point, relating to language and expression, to be considered with regard to the above interpretations. As mentioned, there were moments of communication breakdown during the interviews, when I struggled to comprehend the meaning of certain words or phrases used by narrators. I can only assume that there were multiple instances of more covert meaning breakdown that I

still remain unaware of. As noted, none of the narrators had completed formal schooling, and all were aware that I was completing my doctoral research. I do not claim that this directly relates to my ability to articulate my thoughts, or they theirs, but nor do I claim that it has no impact. At the very least, their *perception* of me as someone academic *may* have impacted somewhat on their ability to communicate effectively with me. In particular, I wondered if a sense of self-doubt around effectively articulating their thoughts may, at times, have led to narrators' unintended insistence, or at other times dismissal, of their point of view.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

### Overview

In this chapter, I first synthesise and discuss the findings obtained through critical narrative analysis of the interview transcripts. The discursive categories below draw on findings across the five thematic categories outlined in the previous chapter, developing the ideas in relation to existing literature, and in the context of data gathered through discussions with youth workers and professionals throughout the research process. There is a focus throughout on potential therapeutic applications of these ideas. In the second part of the chapter, I summarise the applicability of the findings to counselling psychology, outline important limitations of the present study, and suggest avenues for future research.

### Part one: Synthesis and discussion

I was aware during the analytic process and in writing this discussion of the varying levels of interpretation available to me in exploring the material. There was the young person's understanding of their behaviour, but also the possibility of 'understanding' or categorising this on another level, such as in the tradition of Matza's (1964) neutralisations or Bandura's (1999, 2002) moral disengagement. However, I found myself questioning the value of doing so. My interest was not so much *why* young people engage in violent and antisocial behaviour, but how they understand their reasons for doing so. Flowers & Langdrige (2007) highlight the danger of psychologists unwittingly engaging in pathologising knowledge production when conducting what they term 'suspicious' research on 'the other'. The authors warn "it is possible to embroider a moral tale which constitutes a further deviant 'othering'" of the population under study (Flowers & Langdrige, 2007, p. 679). They suggest that this may occur through focusing upon singular or simplistic constructions, or by employing discourses of 'unconscious motivation'. Similarly Squire (2008) cautions against broad narrative research being overly-interpretative, using over-psychological frameworks or simplifying assumptions, suggesting more context-rich frameworks that pay attention to social discourses. These ideas are echoed by Christensen (2010), who cautions that assumptions about the disposition of those who engage in deviant behaviour have frequently been accepted without empirical justification. Christensen (2010) argues that

by invoking concepts such as neutralisations, researchers both endorse the deviant label applied to those they study and engage in unhelpful 'motive mongering'.

Such ideas were carefully considered throughout, and contributed to my maintaining a focus on trying to understand what was being told to me, from the perspectives of those telling it. This involved significant interpretation on my part, from my own perspective and experience, particularly when attempting to understand what I was being told within a psychological framework. However the discussion to follow remains focused on trying to appreciate the views of the young people interviewed. I found my thinking in line with that of Oguntokun (1998), who questions if 'the other' can in fact be legitimately and ethically represented. She criticised 'the seduction of sameness' as the illusion that we can represent participants' experiences with legitimacy and authenticity as an insider, when in fact the best we can do is "catch a glimpse of the nature and implication of their experience, distorted by the lens of 'otherness'" (Oguntokun, 1998, p. 527).

### **Internalising and countering dominant narratives**

The narratives in the present study are taken to reflect not only narrators' own beliefs and attitudes, but also popularly held discourse and views, or dominant cultural narratives (Salzer, 1998). Salzer (1998) proposes that these narratives, if pathological, may act as powerful contributors to development of a negative collective identity, perhaps particularly if held by those in positions of influence and authority. Previous research cautions against young people internalising negative societal representations of them (Apena, 2007), and has explored the ways in which young people resist stigmatising social categorisation, through using language to construct alternative selves and identities (Widdicome & Wooffitt, 1995).

The options open to young people in negotiating their identities are shaped and constrained by cultural narratives of appropriate behaviour. In the present study, there was clearly some conflict between narrators' own experiences, and dominant cultural narratives around 'good' or appropriate behaviour. When narrators' behaviour transgressed such norms, or when they perceived their behaviour might be criticised or disapproved of by me, they appeared to explain and justify their behaviour through constructed 'defending' narratives (Salzer, 1998). For example constructing drug dealing as a way to make money due to the government's inability to supply jobs, or violent theft as a valid way out of a deprived environment. Reflecting on the interviews,

I wondered whether narrators' need to *defend* their behaviour might lead to a strengthening of their rationale for engaging in it, through reiterating their justifications and defences. It would at least seem to inhibit exploration of the behaviour in more useful ways, as was observed in the narratives. It would seem that an openness to understanding non-normative behaviour is needed in the first, to allow for any meaningful exploration of it to occur.

Narrators typically strived to present themselves as essentially good people, in line with the ideas of Matza (1964) and Bandura (1999, 2002), along with Goffman (1959). Narratives of behaviour that harmed others at times had a confessional quality, and guilt was expressed. At other times, narrators professed no regret, and apathy around their actions. Reflecting upon these shifts in the rhetoric of narratives between confessional and dismissive, it seemed that when narrators assumed my negative judgement, they gave up trying to salvage a positive sense of self. However, typically later in the interview, following prompting and a lack of judgement on my part, there often emerged attempts at presenting a positive self-image. I wondered if narrators did not feel *able* to communicate or even to hold a positive self-image in face of what I perceived as anticipated negative judgement from me. I sensed at times that they anticipated that their views would be disregarded, either pre-emptively defending their justifications, invalidating their own opinions, or simply not offering any explanation for their behaviour.

Such observations seemed to point to narrators having internalised a discourse around their not being worth listening to, perhaps understandable given how much their behaviour is talked about, rather than asked about. Several narrators shared their frustrations around inaccurate media and societal portrayals of youth violence. Interestingly however, feeling their opinions to be unworthy at times led to narrators offering trivial or dismissive explanations for their behaviour, thus ironically (and unfortunately) perpetuating these inaccurate portrayals. From my own therapeutic work with clients, again and again I have found *validation*, of themselves and their experiences, to be the cornerstone of our work. The invalidation of own experiences and of self seen in the narratives emphasised to me the importance of centralising self-validation in therapeutic work with such young people, and of research such as this that allows their voices to be heard.

Narrators at times alluded to a fear of their own destructive capabilities, echoing previous findings (Carlson, 2003). Further, several youth workers spoke of young

people's dislike of working with people who seemed afraid of them. I wondered about the impact of negative media representations of 'dangerous' youth, and the resultant fear this engendered in others, on how narrators constructed their own self-image, and the impact for them of fearing their own thoughts and feelings.

There was a strong discourse across narratives of the importance of being independent and self-sufficient. A certain degree of omnipotent thinking may be said to be characteristic of youth, when growing independence leads to a desire to manage things autonomously, perhaps particularly so when parents have proven themselves unavailable. However, this felt particularly pronounced in the narratives, in particular the notion that to change unhelpful behaviour patterns one had to isolate from friends, and a broader distrust of groups and of other youth. This supports Jones' (2004) finding that youth insulated themselves from conflict by limiting the strength of their social relationships. Several authors have commented on the widespread negative discourse around groups as destructive to order and rationality, particularly in modern Western psychology (Brown, 2000a), with young people often positioned as especially vulnerable to such negative group processes (Emler & Reicher, 1995).

Emler and Reicher (1995) propose that a focus on groups as somehow 'releasing' deviance is misguided, and that the social nature of self-definition in youth is an integral and necessary part of identity development, leading to a need for acceptance and belongingness (Omizo, Omizo, & Honda, 1997; Wilkinson & Carr, 2008). This was seen in the present study in narrators' desire to be accepted by others, presenting themselves as sociable and well liked. Research has linked isolation from peers in young people to negative outcomes including antisocial, aggressive and impulsive behaviour (Bierman, 2004), and demonstrated a link between early entry into independent adult roles to increases in fighting and weapon use during early adolescence (Roche, Ensminger, Jalongo, Poduska, & Kellam, 2006). I wondered if negative media (and broader societal) representations of youth gangs and groups as destructive and dangerous, along with legislation essentially criminalising being present in groups in public places (see Crawford, 2009), had impacted narrators' sense that they needed to be independent. Echoing Sauma (2008), I wondered also of the impact of encouraging young people to operate as isolated individuals rather than as human beings dependent on meaningful relationships.

Rustin (2010) highlights the value of demonstrating to young people the potential positive functions of groups, suggesting group therapeutic work as a means of

achieving this. Such a platform allows for consideration of the group as an entity, with destructive but also positive potential, and an exploration of group emotions and behaviours, particularly valuable as young people so often operate as a group. It further allows development of their capacity to manage themselves as a group, again valuable given that antisocial behaviour most often occurs in a group context. The potential value of group work is supported by Kennedy's (2007) discussion of challenging 'gang narratives' (e.g. 'violence is the only way to gain respect'), schemas which form an important part of the street code that young people may adopt. Kennedy (2007) describes these narratives as instrumental in justifying violent and antisocial behaviour, suggesting that pluralistic ignorance leads to young people supporting such narratives when with their peers, but refuting them when alone. He suggests that challenging groups to defend their narratives is key to dispelling the notion that they all, as individuals, subscribe to them (Kennedy, 2007).

### **Transient identities and limiting constructions**

How narrators chose to present themselves in their narratives was an important focus in the present study. Narrators' contradictory behaviour and shifting presentation of self was notable in this regard. From doting father to drug dealer, from being expelled to conscientiously trying out college courses, from serious theft to diligent training as an athlete, each individual presented replete with contradictions. One way to view this may be to consider an internal structure or sense of self so fragile as to allow for such inconsistency, but this belies the fact that we all assume a variety of roles as we negotiate life. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective positions the notion of 'self' as simply the set of characters that we perform in various situations, echoed in Hewitt's (1988) idea of a 'situated self' that can be defined and shaped by situations. This is particularly pertinent to young people navigating processes of identity development, as they constantly perform or test out different versions of themselves, maintained through fluid group relations, without feeling obliged to fully commit to any (Sauma, 2011). Emler and Reicher (1995, p. 7) centralise such ideas in their model of delinquency, defining the latter as essentially "a form of self-presentation through which young people manage their public reputations". In her ethnographic research of street youth in Brazil, Sauma (2008, p. 33) found that even extremely negative social identities, such as belonging to a drugs faction, did not trap young people, but rather "it only really consumes them when they accept that identity in full as adults". I wondered whether narrators in the present study felt trapped by the violent or antisocial identities they at

times employed, or whether they too felt able to move on from these, and about the impact of 'outside' representations of their behaviour in this regard.

Goffman (1959) proposes that as individuals we are often 'taken in by our own act', so that we begin to feel like the identity we're portraying. Several narrators spoke of behaving out of habit at first, before "getting used to" their behaviour, supporting previous findings (Albert, 2007). Negating boredom and satisfying a need for excitement were further reasons given by narrators for their violent behaviour, supporting previous theoretical and empirical suggestions (Canham, 2002; Deuchar, 2009; Katz, 1988; Lien, 2001). Baumeister and Campbell (1999) suggest that attempts to escape boredom can lead to unintended violent consequences, presenting an interesting analysis of how enjoyment of violence might then increase over time, using opponent-process theory. They propose that initial instances of hurting others are typically quite aversive. However as the initial adverse reaction to harming another gets weaker over time, so too the initial positive feedback response (that allows this diminishing), while very weak at first, grows stronger (Baumeister & Campbell, 1999). Narrators in the present study typically described engaging in violent behaviour most frequently when younger, usually at about fourteen years of age. I wondered about the implications for narrators of having to process the harm done to others as they became increasingly self-reflective with age.

Certainly, narrators seemed to struggle to make sense of their behaviour, and integrate into a coherent sense of who they were now. Several narrators depicted a split sense of self, disowning the 'bad' parts that engaged in such behaviour rather than feeling able to integrate these into a holistic self-image, echoing Green et al.'s (1995) findings. Therapeutic approaches in this regard might work with the guilt, and in particular shame, that may be associated with a need to distance the 'real' self from that associated with certain behaviours, focusing on self-compassion and acceptance (see Gilbert, 2010; Gilbert & Irons, 2005), and on acknowledging, exploring and integrating these disowned parts into the total self (Hymer, 1985). Campbell (2009) suggests it is not about simply acknowledging emotions such as guilt and shame, but helping young people to *feel* these, acknowledging the enormous protective mechanisms that may be in place.

Previous research findings support the notion that adolescent-onset antisocial behaviour is best viewed as transitory in nature (Moffitt, 1993; Schoepp, 2000), while studies have demonstrated that links between moral reasoning and such behaviour to

be complicated and context-dependant (Tarry & Emler, 2007). Constructions of 'gangs' as static groups with defining characteristics have been widely criticised (Bullock & Tilley, 2008; Hallsworth & Young, 2004). Of note, in the present study not one narrator used the term 'gang' until I questioned them on the issue, with all referring to the ambiguity of the term, often struggling to explain it to me or to decide who was or wasn't in a gang. Highlighting the post-hoc nature of such labelling, Delroy claimed that though he would now consider himself as having been "general" in three gangs, it was not a term he used until he was in prison. Nonetheless, the labelling of young people based on their 'antisocial' behaviour remains, in many ways, a damning sentence, perhaps typified by the ASBOs (Anti-Social Behaviour Orders) introduced in New Labour's 1998 Crime and Disorder Act (and currently under reform), a disparaging label which has come to denote a certain 'type' of young person.

The present narratives made clear to me the futility of such labelling. Professing enjoyment of violence, little empathy or regret, and a prioritisation of his own needs over the law, Alex fit in many aspects the profile of an 'antisocial' or even 'psychopathic' youth to use the language of Kellerman (2003). Two things were of specific note to me in reflecting upon Alex's interview. The first was the marked change in his narrative throughout, from stories that illustrated the above characteristics, to a far more reflective stance, and one that acknowledged his own vulnerability. This shift seemed facilitated by my simply listening to him, as discussed earlier. The second was the intense emotional pain that Alex had experienced through instances of parental neglect, which I felt more in his than in any other interview. Such reflections pushed me to deeply question the purpose of such labels -outside of placating our own anxiety and perhaps punitive aims- and the deterministic future they engender for those labelled.

Considering that social identity and reputation have been shown to be a driving force in young people's lives (Anderson, 1999; Emler & Reicher, 1995), and disrespect and stigmatisation to have a strong detrimental impact (Wilkinson & Carr, 2008), it seems remarkable that the disparaging representations of certain young people by those in positions of power has not been more thoroughly examined. Becker's (1963) ideas on the self-fulfilling prophecy inherent in labelling theory are relevant here; it could be said that as a society we have lowered the bar as far as it can go in terms of our expectations of certain young people. Also perhaps relevant is Baumeister and Campbell's (1999) suggestion that attacks on reputation lead to aggressive responses directed towards the source of attack, linking to Winnicott's (1964) suggestion that

society's unfairly punitive approach to young people with experiences of deprivation and neglect may instil in them what he termed a 'delusion of persecution'. The essential point is that our representations of young people *matter*. They have real consequences, influencing their locus of responsibility, how they view themselves and think about their behaviour, how they relate to each other and to society.

Several researchers argue for a reconsideration of pathologising discourse on youth violence, as further marginalising those vulnerable and socially excluded (Faucher, 2009; Scanlon & Adlam, 2008; Scheper-Hughes, 2004). Deuchar (2009) found that inability to leave the stigma of 'gang' culture behind was more damaging to young people than a restricted sense of social mobility. Such critiques advocate a focus on challenging stigmatising constructions at the organisational level, with institutions participating in the construction of more affirming identities for young people (Apena, 2007; Rustin, 2010; Ungar, 2001). I believe those working therapeutically with young people have an important role to play in this regard.

#### **'Antisocial' behaviour as expressing identity and managing emotion**

Findings from the present study, combined with the growing body of literature outlined in the introduction, point to a need to move away from judgement and towards *understanding* of antisocial behaviour in young people (Bailey & Hales, 2004). Narrators presented their violent and antisocial behaviour as a means of learning, communicating, gaining acceptance, achieving ambitions and defending themselves and others, supporting previous research (Mares, 2001). Garot (2007, 2010) argues that aggressive behavioural rituals such as challenging each other be viewed as a social resource strategically employed by young people with limited opportunities for status and identity expression, while Jones (2004) illustrates the protective function of violent reputations. More generally, it has been suggested that such young people could be construed as being proactive in the face of risk and uncertainty, as making pragmatic choices that enable them to maintain their aspirations despite the persistence of structural influences on their lives (Ungar, 2001; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999). This is not to advocate tolerance of violent behaviour or that which harms another. Certainly victimising behaviours should be criminalised, but, as put by Garot (2007, p. 79), mass criminalisation and deterministic labelling of young people "reifies highly situated and contingent-grounded construction[s]". Such research, supported by findings from the present study, highlights the need to appreciate the structural and

cultural context within which behaviour occurs, and indeed to establish other challenging outlets for young people's creativity (Garot, 2007, 2010; Jones, 2004).

An interesting finding in the present study was that carrying weapons seemed to be used as a way of communicating fear, and thus as a currency of power. Young people seemingly took turns performing roles of fearing others' weapons, and instilling fear in others with weapons of their own (Goffman, 1959). It was notable from the narratives how few opportunities outside of this appeared to offer a sense of empowerment to narrators. Further, narratives illustrated the tit-for-tat nature of the rationale around carrying weapons for protection, described by Campbell (2009) as a 'culture of debt'. He proposes that feeling constantly needed, such as by (often single) parents, leaves young people struggling to forge their own way, with a need to 'owe' people, and enforce debts through retaliation (Campbell, 2009). An offshoot of this cycle in the present study seemed to be narrators isolating themselves by either staying at home or not leaving their estate, contributing to further marginalisation.

A strong sentiment across narrators was a positive view of education and a desire to achieve and fulfil ambitions, supporting previous findings (Stretesky & Pogrebin, 2007). Ungar (2007) comments on the often overlooked strength of pathologised young people, advocating a need to truly listen to their stories of their lives, rather than constantly retelling our version. Youth workers I spoke to echoed this need to listen to what young people are communicating. One east London youth worker highlighted young people's frustration at being offered trial placements as DJs, when they wanted realistic job prospects with their level of educational attainment, giving plumbing as a desired example. Several studies have highlighted young people's awareness of the limited options available to them and frustration surrounding this (Sauma, 2008), with Jankowski (1991) attributing the failure of policymakers to deal with problems of youth violence to their failure in acknowledging this.

Narratives in the present study depicted narrators actively 'managing' themselves, their emotional reactions, and situations, supporting several previous findings (Emler & Reicher, 1995; Jankowski, 1991; Jones, 2004; Wilkinson & Carr, 2008). Narrators seemed to enjoy their role in negotiating conflict, taking on an authoritative tone when describing such instances. This supports Jones' (2004) finding that youth derived a sense of power and self-confidence from intervening in situations on the strength of their own reputation. One way in which narrators described managing their emotional states was by staying away from unhelpful family dynamics, echoing findings from

Albert's (2007) study. However, this typically led to spending more time 'on road', so that efforts to avoid emotional turmoil unfortunately backfired, an irony acknowledged by Joseph in his narrative.

Narratives in the present study illustrated the emotional functions that behaviour often served. In line with Katz' (1999) ideas, and supporting previous findings (Stretesky & Pogrebin, 2007), it seemed that narrators at times created interactions that legitimised violence as defensive or protective, while satisfying emotional functions. Fighting was presented as a cathartic way of coping with painful emotions by Jack and Brian, while apathy around harm done to others was attributed to the suffering narrators themselves had experienced, as described by Delroy. Overwhelming feelings of anger were also provided in explanation of lashing out, supporting Thomson and Holland (2002). Forney, Crutsinger and Forney (2006) review literature indicating that low self-esteem is linked to initial engagement in delinquent behaviour, with self-esteem then enhanced by ongoing behaviour, a pattern clearly expressed by Brian in relation to fighting.

Aggressive behaviour in narratives often seemed aimed at avoiding feelings of shame or vulnerability, supporting previous findings (Winter et al., 2007). Experience of shame resulting from evaluating oneself as defective or inferior (Stuewig & Tangney, 2007), and associated with the labeling process (Scheff & Retzinger, 2001), have been linked to aggressive and violent behaviour, with Scheff and Retzinger (2001) describing a potential shame-rage spiral that may result from such violent reactions. Feelings of shame have been linked to more detrimental psychological outcomes than experience of guilt (Stuewig & Tangney, 2007). Interestingly however, it is guilt, or more specifically a lack of guilt, that has typically been the focus of delinquency research, particularly in relation to antisocial behaviour and psychopathy (e.g. Kellerman, 2003). In the present narratives, though guilt was expressed by several narrators, and evidenced in the narratives, shame emerged as more central to my understandings of their behaviour. Campbell (2009) centralises the experience of shame in delinquent behaviour, asserting that shame is experienced as a very real threat to the self in vulnerable youth, citing it as the primary motive in youth violence. Building on Erikson's (1963, p. 253) description of shame as "rage turned against the self", Campbell (2009) suggests that in young people who act out rather than think reflectively, shame, confusion and betrayal are directed externally towards others, with this projection confirmed when others retaliate. Campbell (2009) suggests that routine street altercations among youth may be understood as continuous cycles of projections and reactions to these, such as

starting a fight with someone for looking at them the 'wrong way', a common incident described by narrators.

Rustin (2010) advocates therapeutic group work as a means of developing awareness in young people of such projections, and the emotions behind them. In a unique description of psychoanalytic group work with a group of delinquent boys, Millar (2006, p. 45) vividly describes the processes of projection that took place, including verbal and threatened physical attacks, which he understood as their attempts to forcefully convey to him "their own experiences of being on the extreme fringes of ordinary life". He further describes his feeling attacked and abandoned one minute and rescued and idealised the next as indicative of their "potent-impotent-omnipotent lifestyle that could only be embraced existentially and, heretofore, could not be thought about or talked about but that they harboured a desperation to understand" (Millar, 2006, p. 46). Millar (2006) describes the challenges of fostering in these young people a realistic level of potency, with Campbell (2009) advocating the need to work slowly, and to acknowledging how exposed young people might feel in this regard.

### **Stigmatising approaches, defiant reactions and a need for boundaries**

Narratives in the present study indicated that experiences of feeling targeted by teachers because of family reputations, by police because of race, and feeling judged by others for behaviour, were common. This reflects earlier findings of young people feeling stigmatised based on where they live or who they associate with, leading to a lack of trust in authority figures (Deuchar, 2009; Fine et al., 2003; Kelly, 2003; Rich & Grey, 2005; Waiton, 2001; Wilkinson et al., 2009). An emerging literature criticises growing institutional mistrust of youth, leading to criminalisation of their socialisation processes, and even presence in certain spaces (e.g. Crawford, 2009; Deuchar, 2009), and policing based on prejudice (Waiton, 2001). Recent UK 'anti-gang' injunctions against wearing certain colours, or being present in certain community areas may be viewed as examples of this. Tarry and Emler (2007) suggest that the increasingly negative attitudes towards institutional authority that negative experiences of formal education and procedural fairness engender may contribute to increased antisocial behaviour in adolescence, reinforced by feelings of exclusion from the law's protection.

Narrators tended to speak of organisational structures and their representatives, such as government, council officials, and lawyers in negative or distrustful terms. Teachers were at times represented as obstacles to progress and achievement, or the closing of

youth centres seen as abandonment. At other times such figures had a distant, somewhat 'unknown' quality. Interesting in this regard, Trope and Liberman (2010) have shown judgments of blame to be a function of psychological distance, so that judgments made at greater 'distance' are more like to blame parties for negative events. Reflecting on the narratives in the present study, I recognise the challenge of fostering mutually positive relationships with social structures that seem to alienate young people. Emler and Reicher (2005) highlight the need to overcome rather than confirm young people's feelings of exclusion from formal systems. Useful in this regard, Daiute, Stern and Lelutiu-Weinberger (2003) propose negotiation of social values with young people, such as how social rules in institutions might differ to everyday social interactions, thus drawing on young people's experiences, and socialising them to engage in critical reflection, rather than enforcing unquestioned values of a 'good' society and positioning them as the 'problem'. Though much of this literature relates to education and broader social systems, I believe the same ethos is equally important to bear in mind in therapeutic work with young people on the margins of 'acceptable' society.

Sauma (2008, p. 34) attributes young people's rejection of the 'adult world', and the power it represents, to experiences of violence and "betrayal of relationships by adults who lie, neglect, undermine and betray the trust that these young people need to develop a positive association with adults". Angry and defiant reactions in response to feeling vulnerable to unfair treatment from teachers were ubiquitous across narratives. Analysis of preludes to instances of verbal and physical aggression towards teachers indicated that the chosen course of behaviour was often the only one that allowed narrators avoid the threat of vulnerability and shame that being ignored or treated unfairly posed. In her narrative, Sarah illustrated aggressive responses to *gentleness* from teachers and authority figures, which made sense in the context of her experiences of betrayal. Again the point is not that such behaviour should simply be accepted, but rather that categorising it as merely 'acting out' without an awareness of the traumatic experiences that might engender it is tragically missing the point for the young people who experience multiple negative consequences, for example both feeling threatened initially and then being excluded.

At others times, narrators described responding to unfair treatment with apathy, echoing the findings of Forney et al. (2006). This apathy, or hopelessness around things ever being different, was coupled with an expressed need to manage and avoid

certain situations, rather than strive to prevent them occurring. Echoing Winnicott (1964), Bowling (2009) links young people avoiding self-reflection and externalising problems to the paranoid culture engendered by stigmatising treatment. This externalising of responsibility that unfair treatment appeared to engender in narrators presents a noteworthy contrast to the aims of most psychological intervention programmes, focused as they are on cultivating in young people an ability to take responsibility for their behaviour.

An interesting disparity was seen in the narratives between defiance of externally enforced authority and rules, and yet a strong desire for rules and boundaries within narrators' social worlds. Narrators espoused authoritarian moral rules for themselves and others, typically focusing on these as their primary point of reference in stories of law-breaking behaviour, rather than the 'arbitrary' laws that were being broken. Literature on this seems sparse, though Imhonde, Aluede and Oboite (2009) found high rates of both rebellion and authoritarianism in young people exposed to violence, while Campbell (2009) describes a rejection of creative authority and turning to authoritarian authority in gang-involved youth. One could attempt to understand these findings in relation to Bandura's (2002) moral disengagements, or Fonagy's (2003; 1997) ideas on mentalisation. For example, Fonagy et al. (1997) propose that inhibited mentalisation skills may disrupt metacognitive processing, allowing personal conduct to be reconstructed in a selective and self-serving manner.

However, I found Lichtenberg's (1988) ideas on authoritarian authority of most interest here. Lichtenberg (1988) asserts that while authority is inescapable within social transactions, some level of equality is also assumed. When people approach transactions with this mind frame, they typically behave in egalitarian ways. However, if people proceed on the assumption that inequality is the probable outcome, they are more likely to behave in an authoritarian way; "because authoritarianism is based upon assumptions about inherent inequality and scarcity of gratifications, authoritarian authority centres upon gathering and securing the authority's own satisfactions or protecting his interests in an exploitative world" (Lichtenberg, 1988, p. 6). I wondered if the marginalised status at times portrayed by narrators linked to the authoritarian approach to social interactions demonstrated in their narratives.

Narrators typically spoke admiringly of youth workers and others who maintained strict rules and consequences. Youth workers I spoke to echoed this, commenting on young people typically reacting defiantly the first time boundaries were enforced, but quickly

internalising them, following them diligently and monitoring each other thereafter. A common sentiment in this regard was that young people found it easier to trust once 'they know what you're about'. These findings support those of several studies, which have demonstrated what they typically term surprising results, such as young people advocating stricter parenting and schooling, harsher punishments by the criminal justice system (Goldstein, 1990), stronger police presence in neighbourhoods (Lafontaine et al., 2009; Wilkinson et al., 2009), and the need for authority figures with strict moral boundaries and the power to punish, trusted to use this power appropriately (Thomson & Holland, 2002). Further, narratives indicated an interesting dichotomy between views on authority and discipline at home and outside of this, with authoritarian approaches accepted in the former only, supporting Thomson and Holland's (2002) findings.

A need for boundaries may be viewed as an inherent human trait, keeping at bay anxiety around the unknown. Thus there is a certain freedom in knowing where limits are, as expressed by Tanner regarding the rules "on road". From an existential perspective, Carlson (2003) proposes that structure and foundation from outside may be sought to cope with excessive freedom or responsibility in young peoples lives, with clear expectations and knowing what's expected of oneself within social groups a relief in this regard. This echoes Winnicott's (1964, p. 228) description of delinquency as young people seeking out boundaries in their environment against which to react; "the child whose home fails to give a feeling of security looks outside his home for the four walls...looking to society instead of to his own family or school to provide the stability he needs". Winnicott (1965, 1984) strove to draw attention to what he deemed the positive value of delinquency, positioning acting out as a sign of hope. On the other hand, Carlson (2003) proposes that environments that are seen to create arbitrary and meaningless boundaries leave youth feeling invisible and undervalued, with repetitive and overly restrictive environments proving threatening.

In the present study, a key determinant of whether rules were enforced or disregarded seemed to be whether they were deemed *fair*. There was a strong emphasis on fairness and rationality, with narrators tending to present themselves as logical and reasonable, responding positively to respectful attitudes from teachers and youth workers. Importantly, this was the case despite other negative experiences with authority figures. So Alex chose to sit the GCSE exams of teachers who had helped him, but not those of teachers who he felt didn't want to teach him. Joseph trusted the

authority of youth workers, despite ongoing experiences of being targeted by police based on his skin colour. Having consistently broken the rules in his first primary school, Tanner enthusiastically advocated the rule system in his next school, which was centred on reciprocity and fairness. Thus an ethic of reciprocity, and the necessity of mutual respect, were found to be of central importance. This supports previous findings that authority does not automatically command respect, and the importance of a commitment to reciprocity, an awareness of power, and reflexivity and accountability around power relations (McCarthy & Walker, 2006; Thomson & Holland, 2002; Yackley, 2003). Such issues, and notably the importance of therapeutic boundaries being discussed with young people, may be important considerations within a therapeutic environment (Rustin, 2010).

### **The pain of thinking, establishing responsibility and allowing healing**

The theme of 'not-thinking' emerged in the narratives in several ways. Narrators described acting out of habit over time, only thinking about the consequences of behaviour much later. This is supported by Wikström's (2010) situational action theory, which positions deliberation, and thus self-control, as a negative function of familiarity with the circumstances. Behaviour that followed violent scripts also seemed automatic and unthinking, as did that invoking the notion of a status quo. Beginning to reflect on behaviour and think about its consequences was associated with engaging in more self-fulfilling behaviour. Tanner and Alex described an increased tendency to self-reflect as linked to a more empathic view of police and authority figures, echoed in recent findings of increased self-identity exploration and affirmation in young people relating to more positive perceptions of police legitimacy (Lee, Steinberg, Piquero, & Knight, 2011). Perhaps the important observation here is that narrators typically externalised responsibility for non-thinking behaviour, with personal agency typically foregrounded when describing reflected-upon behaviour.

Several researchers advocate a therapeutic environment that fosters in young people an ability to *think* about and narrate their violent or antisocial behaviour, and promotes consideration of others' perspectives (Ochoa, 2010; Wainryb et al., 2010). Fonagy (2003) advocates interventions aimed at enriching representations of mental states in self and others, by encouraging reflection on experiences of violence. Wainryb et al. (2010) highlight the paradox inherent in this, when non-thinking (they discuss deficits in self-control, empathy and consideration of consequences) may have contributed to behaviour. Ochoa (2010) stresses the importance of constructing meaning around such

behaviour, what he terms 'experiential interpretation', cautioning against the negative impact of professionals attempting to dictate to young people how they should interpret their experiences. Haigh (2009) outlines the subtle shifts in thinking that enable young people to reinterpret their behaviour and move from engaging in, to desisting from, routine illegal and antisocial behaviour. His description of young people shifting between their 'known' and 'unknown' worlds seemed to characterise the tone of several narratives in the present study. A narrative therapy approach might have hugely valuable implications for therapeutic work in this regard, both in light of the above suggestions, and given the broader advantages of a narrative approach discussed throughout the present study.

Narrators referred to the danger and fear they often experienced in their social worlds. A young self-identified 'gang member' who spoke from the audience at a conference at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust titled *Psychoanalytic understanding of gun crime and gang culture*, highlighted fear experienced by young people, and a lack of safe space, as important factors in their grouping together. There was a sense in narratives in the present study of there being no 'space' for empathy at times, as taking the focus off self might pose a threat to one's own safety. Further, the potential shame of being victimised or bullied was clearly illustrated in the narratives. Schwab-Stone et al. (1995) note the demand placed on urban youth living in violent environments to accommodate in their psychological development a chronic threat and lack of safety. A recent narrative study by Burcar (2009) highlighted young people's struggle to incorporate the perceived weakness and impotence of being victimised into a strong self-image.

A pervasive theme across narratives, not always articulated by narrators but clear from the content of their stories, was the threat, pain and confusion they had experienced in their family lives. Narrators' professions of regret over wasted opportunities and self-criticism evoked intense emotions at times, echoing findings in Schoepp's (2000) study. Similarly, feelings of blame, including narrators blaming themselves, and anger at parents over not meeting their needs, were expressed. Rustin (2010) comments on the helplessness of young people having no one to rely on in life, escalating their behaviour to get through to emotionally absent parents, a sentiment expressed in Bobby's narrative. Bowling (2009) discusses destructive feelings of shame around negative family experiences engendering feelings of social isolation, reflected in Sarah's narrative. Clear parallels were discernable in Alex's accounts of painful

rejection by his mother, by his peers, and by his teachers, and his defiant reactions in each case.

This led to consideration of the importance of enabling young people with experiences of deprivation and neglect (overlooked perhaps, owing to their misbehaviour) to address the emotional impact of these. This is supported by Batmanghelidj's (2006) criticism of therapeutic work with young people in the context of socially depleted structures for failing to fully acknowledge the impact of these. Similarly, Garbarino (1999) criticises the lack of consideration that most young people engaged in delinquent behaviour have suffered major and repeated losses. Such work should acknowledge and facilitate coping with anger around parental abuse and neglect and family instability, and feelings of despair and desperation (Batmanghelidj, 2006; Carlson, 2003). Where such losses are not recognised, and grieving and coping does not take place, this sadness may lead to further violent behaviour (Crenshaw & Garbarino, 2009), a sentiment expressed by several narrators, including Jack and Delroy.

As discussed narrators seemed to struggle to understand their behaviour, shifting between externalising and taking responsibility for it. I noticed a pattern whereby the narratives of those who seemed to have made sense of misbehaviour as their attempt at overcoming adversity, and who took responsibility for what they felt to be a positive change in their behaviour, such as Tanner and Jack, were generally more optimistic in tone. The narratives of those who took personal responsibility for negative consequences of their behaviour, and appeared to blame themselves for family difficulties, such as Joseph and Bobby, were notably more pessimistic in tone. Such reflections led to my consideration of the need to balance insight and awareness of the consequences of their behaviour with fostering the ability to cope with the associated pain, or feelings of guilt or shame. As discussed by McLean and Pasupathi (2010), exploration of self-identity comes with costs, as it allows young people to see the complexity and contradictions in their sense of self. A similar ethos may be considered in relation to facilitating awareness and trust in a world that, in many ways, continues to stigmatise the young people in question. The focus of mindfulness and compassion-focused approaches (see Gilbert, 2010) on fostering an ability to tolerate suffering, and through this promoting growth and fulfilment, might be an important ethos to incorporate into therapeutic work in this regard.

Narrators, including Alex and Delroy, spoke omnipotently at times. A certain degree of invulnerability and omnipotence is both normal and healthy in young people (Lapsley & Stey, 2011), with Millar (2006) highlighting the importance of adult reactions to such omnipotent tendencies, cautioning against preliminarily judging behaviour over-rebellious or retaliatory. However, there was a sense across all narratives of a real struggle for narrators to express their own vulnerability. Rustin (2010) comments on the flow of insults, jokes and banter exchanged among young people, notable from my time in youth clubs also, which may be viewed as a comfortable way of communicating, of sharing intimacy, of getting to know one another. It may also be a way of avoiding communication, or thought of a different kind, such as fearful or painful thoughts and feelings that may be perceived as unbearable. Therapeutic work in this regard might be to facilitate young people bearing these feelings, recognising the potential shame associated with bearing sadness in young people for whom vulnerability has felt particularly dangerous.

A growing body of research outlines specific therapeutic interventions in working with young people engaging in violent behaviour (see Leschied & Cummings, 2002), however my aim in the present study was not to be prescriptive in this regard. Findings point to the central role of self-forgiveness and compassion (Albert, 2007; Boyle, 2010; Wainryb et al., 2010), a context of acceptance (Morgan, 1998), of caring, and the ability to reframe stressors and traumas to create strength (Holleran & Jung, 2008). Ability to manage emotions was highly regarded by most narrators, with the impact of supportive others acknowledged in this regard. A key factor associated with helpful others seemed to be their signposting new ways of processing destructive emotions. Studies have demonstrated that improved emotional awareness allows for improved regulation of negative emotions (Wilkowski & Robinson, 2008), with Day (2009) advocating the integration of emotional regulation into psychological interventions with young people engaged in violent behaviour.

As discussed, I have found validation of experience to be central in therapeutic work, and believe this to be true here. Rustin (2010) advocates being open to ideas that may not be true, as young people struggling with their own behaviour may find it easier to pass their feelings to the therapist through false or exaggerated stories. Sauma (2011) criticising services for failing to appreciate this, instead taking it as a sign that effort is being wasted on young people not wanting help. The difficulty for young people who have negative experiences of authority and power to put trust in a helping relationship

is significant, though, speaking positively, so is the value of such a trustworthy relationship. I was consistently struck by how eager narrators were to convey their worlds to me, providing detailed illustrations and actively seeking my understanding. A key thing that young people are trying to ascertain in a therapeutic context is whether or not they are being understood, necessitating that psychologists (see Gross, 2007) and other professionals enter into these young people's worlds when working with them.

## Part two: Evaluation of the study

### **Applications to counselling psychology**

Perhaps the most important means of evaluation within the present study is its applicability and usefulness to counselling psychology theory and practice, bearing in mind Crotty's (1998, p. 17) caution against qualitative researchers being "abstract intellectualisers, divorced from experience and reality".

Though perhaps modest, I believe a very valuable outcome of this study has been simply a better description of these young people. From the perspective of counselling psychology, this has the potential to develop more useful ways of interacting with them, and suggest new priorities for interventions. The ability to think about these young people in a different way may be key to what has been missing in interventions in statutory services, which complain of non-engagement, but may be engaging young people in ineffective ways by lacking a fuller understanding of their experiences.

Though not the original aim, the present study evolved in part into a social critique of dominant cultural narratives of youth misbehaviour, and their negative implications for the subjective experience of these individuals. Disempowering narratives both reflect and contribute to the stigmatisation and invalidation experienced by these young people. Through exploring these processes, along with considering more helpful ways to think about and work with these young people, it is hoped that the study provides a means of challenging such constructions, and empowering the individuals in question. The unique role of counselling psychologists as therapists, as researchers, and as important sources of learning and supervision, provides an important opportunity to promote more constructive, empowering dialogues that have the potential to impact on therapeutic work in this area.

My subjective impression was that talking about their social worlds was a positive experience for narrators. Ending the interviews with a question relating to their future allowed it to finish on a note of hope (Foster & Spencer, 2011). However it seemed to me that the very process of talking through experiences that had typically been stigmatised, often unspoken, and ultimately confusing and painful for narrators itself imbued them with a sense of hope. I believe there is a huge capacity for counselling psychology and counselling psychologists to provide the acceptance, openness, and space needed for young people with experiences such as these to come to understand them, and move forward with the lives.

### **Limitations of the present study**

This was a broad, exploratory study that used individual narratives to explore experiences of engaging in violent and antisocial behaviour. Due to the small size of the sample it can only be used to point to possible similarity of story in other people in similar circumstances, beyond this generalisation cannot be the aim. The intention was not for the eight narrators to serve as representative of all young people engaged in antisocial behaviour. Further, all studies are limited by the socially constructed language of the teller (Patton, 2002), and my lens should not be the only lens through which the present narratives are viewed.

Narrators in the present study were recruited from various sources, and comprise a heterogeneous sample in terms of their age, the seriousness of their behaviour with regards to harming others, and whether they still engaged in such behaviour or consider it to be in their past. While narrators were racially diverse, their stories are by no means presented to represent racial norms or variations. Only one female was interviewed in the study, alongside seven males, and potential gender differences were not explored.

Despite these limitations, I believe there is much to be learned from the narratives shared in this study and the emergent themes they illustrate. Given the exploratory aims of the present study and its narrative approach, I believe the heterogeneity of the sample not to detract from its validity. Rather, I feel the broad breadth of experience included to be an asset. It is my hope that the stories the eight narrators so honestly shared may provide some ideas around appropriate expectations and support structures for interventions with young people with similar experiences.

## **Ideas for future research**

It is hoped that the broad and exploratory nature of the present study might provide helpful indicators of possible avenues of further inquiry. Future research with a similar qualitative narrative approach may be strengthened if conducted on a larger scale, though this should not be at the expense of in-depth analysis of individual experience. Given the importance of contextualising understandings, and being open to the possibility of different sets of meanings in research such as this, I feel that much may be gained from conducting research within a single setting, ideally taking an ethnographic approach, incorporating qualitative narrative interviews.

Several researchers have called for female involvement in violent and antisocial behaviour to be prioritised as a research focus (Jarman, 2005; Ness, 2004). Though gender differences were not explored, my subjective experience of interviewing the single female narrator in the present study was that her way of articulating her experiences, and processes of meaning making differed to those of the male narrators. I feel a more thorough examination of the female perspective in this area, and not merely as an auxiliary to male perspectives as has often been the case in the past, is a very necessary and worthwhile step.

The central role of rules and boundaries in the lives of the narrators was an important and unexpected theme in the present study. Though such findings relate to literature on authority and moral reasoning generally, I feel a more thorough exploration of these processes would make for interesting and valuable research. In particular, the role of authoritarian morality in the lives of young people engaged in violent or antisocial behaviour, and the role of violent scripts in guiding young people's behaviour, and the process through which they adopt or refute these, are worthy of further investigation.

Regarding the split sense of self articulated by several narrators, an important area for further exploration might be to look at the impact for young people of distancing unwanted parts of the self in this way, and the role of moral emotions such as guilt and shame in this process. Further, research focused more specifically on the factors that allow young people to maintain a positive sense of self having engaged in violent or antisocial behaviour, and in face of judgement or stigmatisation based on this behaviour would make for valuable investigations. It is hoped that the present research provides a good foundation on which future studies in this area may build.

## Conclusion

The primary focus of this study was young people's understandings of their violent and antisocial behaviour, an important evolved focus being the importance of challenging disparaging constructions of youth misbehaviour. In many ways, youth perspectives challenge normative perspectives (Daiute & Fine, 2003). Rather than fearing this, I propose that we rise to this challenge, and attempt to understand what may be very different perspectives.

Giroux (2003, p. xii) describes a "thunderous silence on the part of many critics and academics regarding the ongoing insecurity and injustice experienced by young people". Similarly, Batmanghelidj (2006, p. 10) criticises the silence of adults who "collude in a form of self-delusion, believing the public unworthy of the complex arguments that comprise any explanation" of youth misbehaviour. It is hoped that the voice of the present study contributes in some way towards ending this silence.

## Reflexive statement

### Researcher reflections

In striving to make the research process as transparent as possible, issues of reflexivity have been addressed throughout the preceding chapters, including my motivations for conducting this research, the dialogic nature of the interview process, and my subjective positing within the analytic material. The purpose of this section is to reflect upon the study from the point of completion, in order to situate the entire process within this, its ultimately subjective context.

I found the research process an arduous but ultimately incredibly rewarding one on a personal level. A process in which I had to confront my own ways of being in the world, and which paralleled life in this way. The difference was that when these ways didn't quite work in life, I had always found a way of working around them. When they weren't working in the context of my research, I had no choice but to face them and work *through* them if I were to continue. There were several such impasses, and they had important implications for the research as it is now.

The first was my indecision in settling on a focus for my research, which led me to focus on the experiences of first 'gang members', then 'former' gang members, before settling on the broad behavioural focus of the study as it is now. On reflection, I knew what I wished to explore from the beginning, I just felt unsure about how to word this. More specifically, I felt that to simply word it as I have done somehow wouldn't be enough, that it had to be wrapped up in a neat parcel, a delineated and identifiable group. If anything, conducting the research has confirmed for me the futility of over zealous attempts to categorise individuals to meet research needs. The complexity and individuality of the eight young people who contributed their stories positioned them across a broad spectrum on so many factors. Certainly they did not all fit the prototype 'antisocial' youth. In particular, I realised that their variability in terms of life experiences, intellect, and history of mental health problems at times led to my unconsciously positioning them as anomalies. There are no anomalies, because there is no single type of young person that engages in violent and antisocial behaviour. That I was automatically thinking this way highlighted for me the power of the preconceived notions we unknowingly carry with us. Ultimately, this led me to question the validity of conducting psychological research from anything other than the perspective of the individual, in the context of their world.

My indecision and lack of self-assurance was a reoccurring theme in the research process, as I battled with the uncertainty of the qualitative endeavour, in terms of what I was looking for and what I would find. The broad focus of the study was anxiety provoking in this regard, and on reflection there were significant periods of avoidance, when I refrained from asking the questions that would have moved things on for fear there would be no answers. Ultimately, I had all the answers; to what I was interested in, and what I was hoping to achieve with the study, but believing in them felt like a leap of faith, one prompted by my supervisor Jacqui's encouragements. It may have been this process that allowed me to recognise the self-invalidating ways in which the narrators presented their own views, and to reflect on how ultimately crippling a lack of self-belief might be for them, in a world that offered very little encouragement.

The broad research questions and broad scope of interviews in the present study, though making for a long and at times unwieldy analytic process, I feel to be ultimately its most valuable feature. I felt I was truly led by the interview material, important to me in my desire to give the narrators a voice, rather than speak over them. I allowed my thinking to take as many turns as the material pointed to, as I engaged in repeated questioning of the material, and standing back from it, which I felt allowed for deeper reflections that only emerged over time. Immersing myself in the subject through attending youth projects and speaking to those who work with young people, though again resulting in unwieldy sets of notes, ideas and reflections that were a challenge to combine in a focused way, I feel added to the core material and my own thinking in so many ways.

Such reflective questioning led to an evolving understanding of my subjective positioning with regard to the study as I navigated the research process. In my desire to understand how these young people 'account' for their behaviour, and how they reconcile their more prosocial and antisocial actions, I recognised a particular need on my part to understand and explain the latter. I found I was confused when narrators expressed no qualms over their contradictory actions, anxious when they did not express guilt over hurting others, and almost relieved when they demonstrated kindness. It seemed I wanted to prove their inherent 'goodness', and further that I struggled to accept the presence of both 'good' and 'bad' together. I was bringing my own anxiety and splitting into the research. Though this was certainly uncomfortable, given its contradiction to the ethos of my research and my work as a counselling psychologist, I feel this to be an invaluable lesson both personally and professionally.

The ability I have fostered to recognise and address these processes in myself is, I believe, essential for therapeutic work. It has demonstrated to me the power of continual, honest self-reflection and self-questioning in allowing this to emerge. In this case, this awareness allowed me to step back from these drives and lessen their influence of the material I was gathering, and channel that energy into understanding the topic on its own terms, without needing to judge it, which was a relief. From the perspective of the research endeavour, it has prompted intriguing reflections about why certain things interest us, the role of Jung's (1968) shadow in this regard, and ultimately the value of uncovering this, not to threaten but to strengthen the research process.

### Theoretical reflections

In this section, I aim to address some implicit theoretical complexities within the present study. First, it is necessary to clarify the disjunction between its social constructionist and phenomenological epistemological positioning. A constructionist approach proposes that individuals construct versions of reality -often focusing on the role of language in this process- and assumes that individual experiences are the product of internalised social constructions (Willig, in press). The present study took a moderate, or contextual constructionist perspective, which allows for a more "balanced" approach that moves between subjective and objective dimensions of the issue, for example choosing when to further deconstruct individuals' beliefs, and when it may be less useful to do so (Ibarra, 2008, p. 366). The critical narrative analysis (CNA) approach of the present study was based in interpretive phenomenology, and sought to explore the lived realities of the narrators. Thus the study was focused both on each individual's 'experience' of their world, but also "the social nature of [their] constructions of the world" (Ashworth, 2008, p. 5).

This is not viewed as an impassable contradiction, as the distinction between a constructionist and a phenomenological outlook is not absolute (Ashworth, 2008), with Willig (in press) proposing that contextual constructionist research is compatible with a phenomenological perspective. According to Hiles and Čermák (2008), narrative inquiry offers a means of exploring both the inner world of lived experience, and the sociocultural environment that shapes this. One way of conceptualising this is through the symbolic interactionist perspective that thought itself originates in a social process,

which is then internalised using language, so that studying an individual's internal world accesses an internalised world of social communication (Ashworth, 2008). Importantly, having developed the capacity for mind and self as a result of interaction, the individual is then able, relatively autonomously -albeit in a continuing social context- to develop selfhood and personal tendencies of thought. Thus people are constructors but also constructed (Ashworth, 2008), and it is possible to access the experiential world of the individual, while assuming that their accounts of this world are socially shaped.

Moving on to a second issue, it is necessary to clarify here why a narrative approach, though informing the analysis of interview material, was not clearly embodied within the results chapter. I believe this occurred for several reasons. First, the CNA approach used here is characterised by approaching analysis of narratives at a holistic level, including paying attention to broader social contexts, and is perhaps less focused on systematic analysis of narrative *form* than other approaches. This is reflected in the results section, which, while paying attention to structural issues, is primarily content-focused. This was further influenced, I believe, by my focus on articulating findings in a way that was useful to counselling psychology practice. Certainly there was scope in this study to interrogate findings from a narrative perspective that focused more on the trajectories of the eight narrators, for example how they positioned themselves within their stories. However the volume of material produced from a thematic perspective led to my choosing to focus on this within the limited confines of this portfolio, as such findings seemed most suited to the present research aims.

Lastly, it is necessary to address the lack of an explicit theory of subjectivity within the present research. Subjectivity here refers to how individuals occupy subject positions within their narratives, how their *selves* are located as observable and coherent (Davies & Harré, 1990). It may be argued that, as individuals operating in society, we draw on conventional images, ideas and ways of talking about ourselves and others, and that once we have taken up a particular position, we inevitably see the world from this vantage point (Open University, 2011). The narrative approach used in this study did not specifically address what narrators' subject positions were within their narratives. For example, what agency did narrators have within these? And how might their emotions have been attached to these narratives?

A key claim of constructionist research is that language positions people - that discourse creates subject positions. Thus culturally recognised narratives around, for example, 'antisocial youth', 'dangerous gang members', or even 'victims of an unfair

society' construct individuals as characters, providing them with a way of making sense of themselves, their motives, experiences and reactions (Open University, 2011). A wholly constructionist position might argue that an individual's subjectivity is created entirely within their narratives, and as such that they have no real agency but simply navigate between available narratives and are positioned by these narratives. However, to view subjectivity only through the narratives that subject it results in a discourse determinism that ignores how narratives are related to lived experience (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Though there is not space to develop them here, important critical perspectives on how discursive positions are occupied by subjects have come from psychoanalytic, notably Ian Parker (e.g. 2002; 2005) and Erica Burman (e.g. 2008), and post-structuralist (see Foucault, 1997), perspectives.

The view I took in the present study was that it is necessary to understand subjectivity in other than a socially deterministic fashion of narratives producing subjects. Though narrators' constructions of the world may have been inherently social, within this they may nonetheless have been open to personal choice, introducing an element of agency (Ashworth, 2008). There are inevitably many different types of narratives that each individual can engage in, with Davies and Harré (1990) arguing that the contradictions one experiences between these various selves actually provides the dynamic for understanding subjectivity. This echoes the position of Ahmed (2004), who writes extensively on the subject, and describes subjectivity not as residing in subjects or discourses, but rather as what happens as we push against the barriers between these. I assumed there was space for narrators in this study to consider (consciously or unconsciously) what options they had regarding their subject positions, and to choose one over another. Thus there was space for these human subjects to be agents, not entirely bound by any one of narratives that operate in society.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Participant information sheet

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

My name is Aylish O'Driscoll, and as part of my studies in counselling psychology at City University, London I am carrying out research exploring the stories young people create about their lives.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH?**

This research aims to explore the stories young people (aged over 16) growing up in London create about their lives. I am interested in how they understand and make sense of their experiences.

#### **DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you may decide to withdraw at any time, without any consequences. Just let me know at the time that you wish to do this.

#### **WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO?**

You will be asked to sign a Consent Form indicating that your participation is voluntary and that you understand your rights. You will then be interviewed about your experiences. The interview will take place at a location agreed beforehand, and will take approx. 1 hour.

#### **WILL THE INTERVIEW BE CONFIDENTIAL?**

Yes. The interview will be taped, and listened to only by me, or an examiner if requested. Names and identifying information will be removed. The only time I would have to break this confidentiality is if you disclosed that you were planning to commit an illegal act or one that endangers yourself or another person, which I will discuss with you before we start.

#### **DO I HAVE TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS IF I DON'T WANT TO?**

No. It is up to you whether you wish to answer the questions. Mostly it will be you choosing what you wish to talk about rather than me asking questions.

#### **WHAT IF I FIND THE INTERVIEW UNCOMFORTABLE OR DISTRESSING?**

If you find it difficult or uncomfortable to talk about certain things in the interview at any time, please let me know. A list of confidential support services will be given to you after.

If you have any questions or would like any further information about this research, please contact me at [abdd280@city.ac.uk](mailto:abdd280@city.ac.uk), or my research supervisor, Dr. Jacqui Farrants at [j.farrants@city.ac.uk](mailto:j.farrants@city.ac.uk).

## Appendix B: Consent form

### CONSENT FORM

I have read and understood the PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. Based on this, I understand the nature of the study and my role in it, and I agree to participate in this research. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, that I am free to withdraw at any time. I consent to the interview being recorded, and understand that my confidentiality will be protected throughout the research, and that if I withdraw from the study the recording of my interview will be destroyed. I understand that this form will at all times be kept separate from all other research documents and at no point will I be identifiable by name in any part of the findings.

I understand that the researcher conducting this study is abiding by the Ethical Principles of conducting Research with Human Subjects set out by the British Psychological Society (2004).

By signing below I am agreeing that I am over 16 years of age, and consent to participate in this research

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Narrative interview guide

### Introduction

I'm interested in your experiences of growing up, being young. I want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers, but simply your own experiences and opinions. I have a number of areas that I would like to cover but what is important to me is that I listen to your particular experiences. Please feel free to talk in as much detail as you feel is relevant. If you can remember specific stories or times as examples that would be helpful too. A lot of things are said about young people and these issues, for example in the media, and it can be easy to repeat these, but I want to know what you yourself really think.

### Prompts to elicit narratives

- **Tell me about your experience of...**
- **Can you remember a particular time when...**
- **Can you give me an example of when...**
- **Tell me why that particular moment stands out?**
- **Tell me what happened? And then what happened?**
- **Why do you think you feel that way?**
- **Any other important memory that stands out?**
- **Okay, Now let's go a little deeper into a few. Tell me about that event.**
- **Which events can you remember most clearly?**
- **Can you think of why we have moved from talking about that to this? Is there a connection?**

## **Interview guide**

**Could you tell me the story of your life so far and how you got to be where you are today.**

What has happened in your life to get you to this point?

**Can you tell me about your family?**

Tell me what it was like growing up in your area.

What is one of your earliest childhood memories, good or bad?

**Can you tell me about your experiences of friendships?**

From lower school to now?

Can you tell me about your friends?

**Can you tell me about your experiences of fighting/ violence?**

Can you remember any violent incidents?

Witnessed /were involved in violence?

Did you experience violence at home?

**Can you tell me about the best experience you've had in life?**

And what about the worst experience?

**Can you tell me about how you think other people /the authorities view you?**

Can you remember a particular time that makes you think this?

How is this different to how you view yourself? Why?

What are outsiders/ authorities missing or not understanding?

If you were in charge of the local council, how would you view gangs and what would you do about them?

**Have you any experience of gangs?**

Have you ever been in a gang? Why not?

Do you know people in gangs?

**Can you tell me about the most important people in your life?**

Do you feel you have someone in your life that you can talk to about things?

**How do you feel about the level of freedom you have in life?**

Do you feel as though you are given the chance to make choices in your life?

How do you feel about being told what to do by others?

Do you feel different when you're with others and on your own?

**Can you describe for me how you see your future?**

Do you have any career plans?

Do you know how you want to achieve this?

What are your short-term ambitions?

**Can you tell me what kind of a person you see yourself as today?**

How do you see yourself now as opposed to before?

What do you think is the most important value in human living?

**Looking back over your experience of growing up so far, can you see a central theme running through it?**

Has it been a mainly positive or negative experience?

What can others learn from your experience?

What is the most important thing you've learned?

**Is there anything else you would like to add?**

## Appendix D: Debriefing sheet & Resource list

Firstly, thank you for participating in this research by conducting an interview.

The interview in which you just participated was designed to explore the stories you create about your life. In particular, I was interested in how you understand and make sense of your experiences. It is hoped that this will increase understanding and awareness of the meaning of these experiences to you. It is also hoped that it will increase understanding of the role played by different parts of society - schools, authorities, organisations – in young people's lives, and things that are helpful and unhelpful in this regard.

Please let me know if:

- You have any other questions about this research and what I am hoping to achieve with it.
- There is anything that you would like to add to what we discussed during the interview?
- There was anything that you found particularly helpful or unhelpful about the interview?

If anything discussed in this interview has caused you any distress, please see the sheet attached for organisations that may be able to offer help and support. These include counselling services, support services, and services specifically for young people.

If you have any questions, complaints or would like to receive further information about this research, please contact me at [abdd280@city.ac.uk](mailto:abdd280@city.ac.uk) or my research supervisor, Dr. Jacqui Farrants at [j.farrants@city.ac.uk](mailto:j.farrants@city.ac.uk).

Thank you again for taking part in this research.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Samaritans**

0845 790 9090

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

24hr phone service offering emotional support.

### **MIND**

0845 766 0163

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Provides information, advice & publications on all aspects of mental health, and local counselling services in many areas.

### **SupportLine**

01708 765200

[www.supportline.org.uk](http://www.supportline.org.uk)

Provides confidential emotional support to young adults and adults by telephone, email and post. Provides information relating to counsellors and support groups throughout the UK.

### **Get Connected**

0808 808 4994

[www.getconnected.org.uk](http://www.getconnected.org.uk)

Provide free, confidential help for under 25s. Provides telephone, email or webchat support and information when you need to decide what to do next in any kind of difficult situation.

### **National Youth Advocacy Service**

0800 616101

[www.nyas.net](http://www.nyas.net)

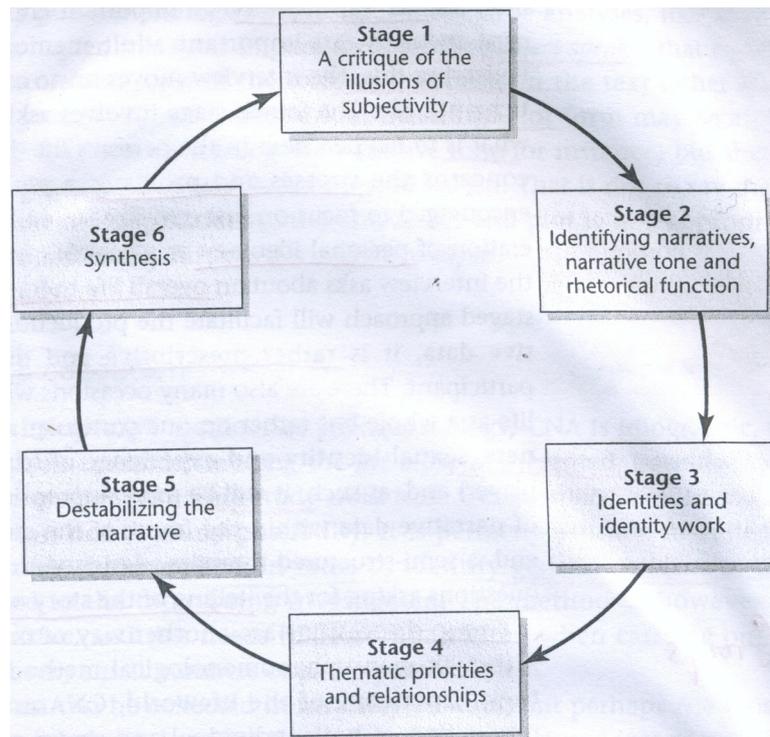
Provides information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to young people up to 25 through a network of advocates.

## Appendix E: Transcription Symbols

The transcription notation system employed in transcripts is an adaptation of the Jefferson system, taken from Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998). *Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press. The symbols may be understood as follows:

{ }	Interviewer utterances
[...]	some interim dialogue removed
[ ]	implied wording inserted
...	drifting off/ pause
(.)	short silence/ pause
(4)	pause/ silence measured in seconds
(.hhh)	audible inhale, number of h's indicates length
(hhh)	sigh/ audible exhale, number of h's indicates length
<u>emphasis</u>	underlined words indicate an emphasis/ louder voice
*softer*	words between asterisks indicate softer voice
(laughs)	interviewee laughter

Appendix F: Langdrige (2007) model of Critical Narrative Analysis



Appendix G: Extract from Tanner's transcript illustrating note taking

<p>regret frayed jaded</p> <p>hesitant</p> <p>animated</p> <p>instant</p> <p>emphatic</p>	<p>Moved - reason?</p> <p>blame - others - fault</p> <p>passive following</p> <p>seek understanding</p> <p>in jumps to reporting need for explanation</p>	<p>metaphor - regret</p> <p>my contrast setting the scene</p> <p>phrase?</p> <p>learn a lesson</p> <p>behaving to me</p>	<p># COLLEGE</p> <p>were sixteen, seventeen? And you started going to college? {Yeah} So, what started <sup>leading?</sup> happening then?</p> <p>T: Yeah I started, as we moved here, started to go college. I had a one, one day job in Tesco. So I was, going through the <u>right path</u> do you know what I mean but, as I say, friends shew me, my friends showing me the <u>wrong path</u>, to, to lead em (.). <u>eh</u>, how can I explain <u>yeah</u> so, these people on this estate <u>*my people*</u> from my old estate I used to hang around with them {mmhmm} used to be, smoking <u>weed</u>, em (.). I was foll- I was <u>following</u> {mm} I, I weren't, I weren't a leader I was a <u>follower</u> so whatever they're doing I'm doing, do you know what I mean so used to do stu- as I was saying used to do <u>stupid</u> stuff, run up in the back of cinema and that, em (.). Yeah, I've <u>been</u> robbed, em, <u>in front</u> of my like, my friends like, like, they, you see, when, <u>mistakes and mistakes go together</u> they will go somewhere. <u>Sorta thing</u>. So my friends will know this, this bunch of group, but <u>I don't know</u> them {mmhmm}. And, I got my bunch of group, who <u>he</u> don't know. So (it's) like that will, you know, so, his bunch of group, <u>yeah, musta</u> robbed me now, he musta asked for my phone to use, and I gave him my phone to use, 'cause I was like that I <u>was soft</u> didn't I {mm} I didn't know, what, what to expect. And then, they robbed ma <u>phone</u> {mm} <u>do you</u> know what I mean so then I started to realise certain things, who your real friends are, and then, things like that, like <u>not shit happened</u> but it happened <u>again</u>, it happened <u>again</u>, before, because, I didn't, I didn't <u>learn</u>. - <u>self-critical</u></p> <p>Me: So what happened, you got robbed again?</p> <p>T: Yeah. Em, I went to go for a interview for college, in Camden, em 2 bunch of guys, I had to report this to get, to get, the same phone back {mm} from O2 cause they thought aw, this person keeps getting</p>	<p>job = right</p> <p>neg. evaluation</p> <p>weed</p> <p>stupid - neg. shame</p> <p>Mistakes - whose?</p> <p>"not knowing"</p> <p>innocent, degenerator.</p> <p>shit</p> <p>threat</p> <p>need to learn</p>	<p>right path - but why?</p> <p>Bad influence</p> <p>group behaviour</p> <p>friends leads to trouble</p> <p>Betrayal</p> <p>Distancing from friends</p> <p>learning = keeps you safe</p>
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<p>defending defending himself explaining for republic aside</p>	<p>involve - pursuing image skills to their perspective</p>	<p>robbed, they must think he's em, I'm telling lies {mm} so I had to do it, but I didn't <u>want</u> to go to the police cause <u>that's not me</u>, *but I had to go to the police, my mum told me to go to the police*</p> <p>Me: What do you mean it's not you?</p> <p>T: I'm not <u>like</u> that because (3) <u>at that age</u>, we used to talk about like youknow, your friends, you're like aw I'll never tell the police I got robbed, <u>why</u>, why am I <u>snaking</u> this or why am I telling them that so I went through that <u>stage</u> innit, but <u>now</u>. *cause I got older* it's not like that. But (.) yeah so, I went to the college, to enrol {mmhmm} and then <u>two</u> guys came in the college like, they just walked in, cause, in them days they didn't have, like, security, or, any doors {mmhmm} kinda thing where you have to use your pass {mmhmm} 2 boys musta walked in, the college, they came downstairs in the Camden bit where I was, and they, looked at me, so obviously they saw my body, <u>bod- body language</u> from then and said <u>aw</u>, "we're gonna rob him ra ra ra (.) So obviously I looked at them and then, <u>didn't think</u> nothing of it, went to enrol, then came out the college, and <u>them ten</u>, <u>them two</u> guys are waitin for me (.) outside and, they were askin me questions, <u>aw</u> where you from, <u>blah blah blah</u>, and so obviously I was tellin them but, when you're <u>young</u> yeah, that's the one thing about young kids now, they need to learn from <u>my mistakes</u>. I've <u>told</u> them where I'm from, I've told them this I've told them that do you know what I mean, why you gonna tell a <u>stranger</u> where what <u>area</u> you're from or, whatever. So obviously I was tellin them, *so* they was like aw, doyou know what the time is, so obviously I got a <u>brand new</u> whatyou call it? A 5210? {mm} Can't remember some Nokia phone with a camera, first come out, or something like that. <u>Em</u>, then em, I took it out to see, to see the time and I said to them</p>	<p>does what mum says</p> <p>label stage</p> <p>security = safety.</p> <p>image - safety</p> <p>innocent - victim</p> <p>young = mistakes learning</p> <p>stranger - danger?</p> <p>phones</p>	<p>not now changed</p> <p>older &amp; wiser</p> <p>2 boys - threat</p> <p>ten, two threat in numbers</p> <p>my suffering might be worthwhile</p> <p>area- significant</p>
<p>distracted drifting</p>	<p>aside</p>	<p>ROBBER #2 "my sister"</p>	<p>lost in memory</p> <p>suspect others intentions</p> <p>direct speech</p>	<p>lost in memory</p>
<p>heated</p>	<p>aside</p>	<p>honesty doesn't hide mistakes</p> <p>describing direct speech</p> <p>details</p>	<p>honesty doesn't hide mistakes</p> <p>learning</p>	<p>honesty doesn't hide mistakes</p>

slow	incredulous	seeks my understanding	direct speech	detailed description	repetition	Heat image	animated	"	Shift - quiet	picks up and responds	picks up and responds	picks up and responds	picks up and responds	picks up and responds	picks up and responds	picks up and responds	picks up and responds	picks up and responds	picks up and responds
										<p>blah blah blah, and they said aw, what music you got? Me like a <sup>shame</sup> idiot playing my music to them and (.) he's like aw let me hear, let me hear that tune. Took it outa my hand now and he was, listenin to it, and then, after, he's still asking questions, and then, I see him takin out (2) the battery and the back innit and gave me my chip and I said aw what you doin that for. And eh, he just walked away and I said <u>ra gimme back my phone, do you know what I mean</u> I said gimme back my phone gimme back my phone {mm}. And he's pushin me away <u>pushin me</u> away. His friend was like aw move move, and then, I said ra, alright <u>then take my phone and come back here</u> with, (...) my friends ^innit. He said ra do that, do that, do that, do that. Meet me here, meet me here. So, em. Went home now. Told my mom. My mom, my mom thought I was joking, because obviously it happened before. {mm} Mom was looking at me, Tanner why you lying for? I just got you that phone, did you sell it? I say ^no. It was stolen mom. Swear (up). So why've you got your chip? The boy handed me my chip mom. Why am I gonna lie to you? So obviously <u>had to do all of the, the emotional stuff</u> sorta thing. Mum I, they've taken it do you know what I mean I started to, to go all out {mm} <u>to make my mum know</u> I got robbed, do you know what I mean so, she's like ^for real? I said ^yeah mom! Goin getting upset, hoe you don't believe me, <u>slammin the door and=</u></p> <p>Me: And were you upset?</p> <p>T: No I weren't, I was (...) show her that I'm, I'm being serious but I, I used to be a liar, when I was young. Used to lie about everything. Lie about washing my clothes, or lie about, wearing the same stuff or, lie about {mm} not brushing my teeth. Used to lie about a lot of things {mmhmm}. But my mom knew, I was a liar, so she thought I used to lie about</p>									
										<p>victim - humiliated</p> <p>desires peace</p> <p>physical</p> <p>avoid fight</p> <p>Mom doubt</p> <p>lying</p> <p>putting on an act?</p> <p>active emotions</p> <p>manipulate others?</p> <p>stained - physical has more meaning communication</p> <p>small ego</p> <p>threat of group</p> <p>not being believed</p> <p>exploited - innocence</p>									

## Appendix H: Initial analysis notes for Tanner

### Stage 1 – Critique of subjectivity

Meaning of topic for me? Beliefs about it?  
Impact/ implications for me of reading?

Brings to the fore?

Assumptions underpinning my position?

My understanding of these topics?

My way of being in the world?

- > Do want to explain this topic, to prove that what he went through is normal, or discover that it's not and actually his opinions are really different. I'm curious.
- > Do I normalise experiences?
- > Struck by his ability to tell a story, draw me in. I trusted him.
- > Can never detach personal history and try to understand independently - pointless
- > Confirms a lot of my beliefs on the topic- confirmatory bias?
- > My desire to reassure?
- > [ Reading- lit on coping with parents? ]
- > My assumption that people are either sincere or not...always a mix.
- > Did I have some idea in mind? Demanding things from the world, on my terms? - their terms. not mine.
- > Maybe more about how people cope with these circumstances rather than how they cause them?
- > Same processes are playing out, and that it is the environment that is to blame. Universal drives for financial gain can be played out in a different environment, with less opportunity. What of the chances he turned down? Keep an open mind.
- > My compassion feel like pity? Condoning his negative behaviour by excusing it? \*reading
- > Beware need to prioritize sense.

### Tone – optimistic, pessimistic, comic, tragic Good/ bad things happening? Perceptions of these? Hope? Imagery

- > Overall tone is reflective, authoritative, self-assured.
- > Tone moves between anger and fear to assured and proud.
- > Confident and assured when telling a dramatic story.
- > Angry when blaming others for their treatment of him.
- > Animated when describing being helped by others.
- > Incredible, actually upbeat when describing being cut.
- > Vague/ hesitant/ rushed with details, personal life, when apportioning blame/ responsibility?
- > Strict and hard when talking about consequences of actions.
- > Becomes aggressive at times, describing injustice
- > Sad, wistful when reflecting on things getting worse.
- > Animated when describing violence, dumb things.

Optimistic overall; presents negatives first, then the more positive (which seem to overcome the negative). Or presenting the positive first then just tagging on the negative as not as important; (e.g. younger brother) Presents himself negatively then more positively as interview progresses. A story of overcoming. It was all worthwhile as I learnt a lot from it.

### Stage 2 – narratives, tone, rhetorical function

#### Master narrative –

- > What I've been through, how I got myself through lots of bad things that were put in my way to get to here, a good place.

#### Key narratives (discursive themes) –

- > Growing up facing challenges, lack of space, unreliable father vs. Being brought up right
- > Misbehaving at school, being aggravated vs. Good schooling
- > Lessons inside and outside the classroom
- > Being forced into an ongoing feud (mistakenly blamed)
- > Defining self as different, body language (me), taking credit for change
- > Being a victim, being forced to turn into a perpetrator
- > Getting caught, spending time in cells, being scared, fear making things worse
- > Waking up, getting on the right path, impact of having a child
- > Trouble coming to find me, reacting with extreme violence
- > Self as wise, funny, smart
- > Responsible for changing self
- > Learning about people

#### Rhetoric – opinion, excuse, explanation, justification, criticism, evaluation, perceived counter positions,

- > From the beginning he's accounting for his behaviour- did I elicit this with initial question? He assumes I won't understand his viewpoints.
- > Skims over bits doesn't want to talk about, jumps and becomes vague when talking about silly things they did, dad and his partners. More hesitant about self. Minimises his own wrongdoings.
- > When he likes things, much clearer; rules in new school explained in detail.
- > Struggles to make sense of everything, make things tie together neatly, have a purpose; sister is a bully because I was school problems because of attention-seeking.
- > Often contradicts himself; Didn't have no care vs. knew what was gonna happen- safety in boundaries?
- > Uses definite labels for things they're this or that; bully, disability, dunce – concrete.
- > Begins with self-criticism then backtracks to explain and lay blame elsewhere. Begins with going his own way and then being scared then back to them shoving him. Confusion over own role in things?
- > Implicit counter: to oppositional narratives against young people going wild for no reason; things happen for a reason. Maybe more general sense of this comes from this specific? Gets quite worked up about this, externalising feelings?

#### How he understands his behaviour.

- > Overall behaviour is seen as a reaction, a consequence, one that he does not regret, though nonetheless seems to be working with some guilt over it.
- Telos – reflecting on origin/ purpose**
- > They didn't understand me, didn't teach they treated me the wrong way and aggravated me. Once I was understood I reacted well to it. When people act in a certain way, I have no choice but to respond in a certain way, the social order must be preserved. Able to acknowledge help also; taught me right.
- > I was missing guidance, and so couldn't have known how to act without learning the hard way. I was missing the support I should have gotten from a father and had to compensate for this.
- > Bad things happen to me, it is out of my control; best I can do is avoid negative situations. I was on a good path and got thrown off it. I have reacted to situations put in my path rather than actively created them. Everything happens for a reason, people don't realise this.
- > Central idea that he was targeted for looking soft. I GOT ROBBED. Fear was behind a lot of my bad behaviour. Fear was an important part of my psyche, it drags you down. Only when you're old enough to rationalise the fear can you escape it.
- > Getting thrown off the right path was not my doing but getting back on it was. You have to actively keep yourself on the right path, this is harder than succumbing to the wrong path. I was brought up right now I want to bring my daughter up right.
- > Though does not acknowledge guilt (exc- I did wrong); minimises responsibility in stories; presents hurting people last in recounting silly things.

#### Stage 5 – Destabilizing the narrative

Has a largely just and fair outlook on the world. Willing to take responsibility at times (though shifts between this and implicitly blaming). However, when his rules are broken, he retaliates; and sees nothing wrong with this, he does not shift into taking others viewpoints. And sees no responsibility on his part once the other strike was first, can 'keep hitting' cause 'you brought it to me'. His focus is on learning how to manage all the shit, he never considers that the shit shouldn't be there but neither does he consider that there are limits on how you can manage it.

Talks about feeling like a little boy at times; told what to do; scolded by dad; not there during puberty. And then a 'big man'. Underlying narrative about growing into a man?

Unspoken narrative of rejection? Trying to account for the fact that he has split from the group? They look at me different now, don't wanna trouble me, at first lets shove him. "Learn who you're real friends are" after robbed; friend's friend took it – humiliation? Me like a idiot – shame?

#### Stage 3 – Identity work

##### Presents self as?

##### Positions self in relation to?

- > Overall very positive presentation of self. No reluctance describing in very positive words
- > Gets caught up in describing his image and doesn't answer Qs. Has an idealised image?
- > Self deprecating also, a bully, soft, innocent, Liar (pretty/ innocent e.g.) function of this?
- > Presents himself negatively and then takes it back; as a bully, hyper, fighting in school, a liar, then not a bully, not a hyper mentality, not lying about serious things, loving and caring in school
- > Self as searching for something then as having a disability. Kicked out of school for being so bad, then because it was the teachers' fault. Confused sense of self? Trying to present as essentially good but lied astray?
- > Presents himself as unlucky- in the wrong place at the wrong time, central to "my world".
- > Presents himself as very rational (even at 6), responsible, pushed to the limit. Always trying to talk down situations (talkin sense), others as irrational. Fair; I was always like that. Reflects and gives his opinion a lot on young people today.
- > Different from other youth, who still hang around in big groups, while he has gone his own way, while he is teaching them a lesson; hysterical vs. calm, backstabbing vs. straightforward.
- > He positions himself in relation to his peers more than his family. He described himself as a mummy's boy, not a daddy's boy, and his dad is not mentioned from when he's 9 to when he is in the cells though he describes himself as a "little boy" here. He finishes with a sense that he owes his parents something, changed for them. Begins and ends with how his mum brought him up; this as central to his journey?
- > He attributes "waking up" to being a dad, though this comes second to "all the things I saw"; his identity as someone who broke free seems more important than his identity as a dad. Done messed up things but picked myself up- own volition as central.

#### Dialogic

##### Dialogue, Dramatization

##### What is the influence of the interviewer, setting, social circumstances?

##### Why did he tell this story at this point, when interview ending?

##### When is it being said and why, for what purpose?

- > He jumped around a lot and shifted topic – ADHD?
- > I led on certain questions and introduced certain key words. I ask about change a lot, and refer to ages.
- > He seems to anticipate judgment/ criticism from me and answers it (sometimes unspoken) with my saying anything. He assumes I wont understand his viewpoints.
- > He refers to me positively on several occasions. Seems curious about me, what I know, him knowing what to say to me now, describing my body language.
- > Introduced people walked who by the car into story.
- > Presents his traits as negative first then positive; function of narrative changes as interview progresses?

## Appendix I: Initial thematic analysis for Tanner

<p><b>Mum</b> Strict Brought up right Mummy's boy Showed things Defended at school Squash beef for their sake Made go to police Visits at work Swore at her Rang from cell Supported other mom Fear of her house getting robbed Woke up for police Knew all along</p> <p><b>Dad</b> Weren't really around Different ladies Went to America Why son I didn't have a dad to tell me See the best of me Not what your mom &amp; dad grew you</p>	<p><b>Getting robbed</b> In front of friends- mistakes go together (?) Fight me for no reason- body language All them things what happened Mobile phone (x2) Who real friends are Had to go to police Selling weed's gonna get me robbed It hurt me, got me scared I didn't really rob</p> <p><b>Victimised/ Injustice</b> They treated me different (PS) Draggin me up and leaving him Have to bang both our heads together A lot of my cousins were in school (unspoken) He said it's done and pushed me</p> <p><b>Rational</b> All you have to do is ask me to leave</p> <p><b>Guidance</b> She showed me certain things Looking for someone to teach me No ones showing kids right way to go Ain't showed me the right path</p>	<p><b>Fear</b> Cause of problems Escalates things Pushes you into things Scared to come outside I was always thinking of the negative things</p> <p><b>Stress</b> I'm not gonna sit and fret over you Always thinking negatively Not wanting to go outside</p> <p><b>Regret</b> Why didn't I learn this in primary? I feel 'what a idiot' Why didn't I done the right thing, stayed in college, worked</p> <p><b>Boredom</b> Its boring (following head teacher)</p> <p><b>Death</b> Someone could end up dying No cares when young, wouldn't care if you die</p>	<p><b>Stages</b> Growing up through that stage, of school I went through that stage (not snaking) I learnt through all that stages The stages that he had musta caught up I had to chose for myself when I got to that stage Boy man distinction Qualitatively different</p> <p><b>Growing up</b> Grow you up to be like that Grown up to year 11 together Her to grow up to think that's the right thing to do Talkin like a grown up to you I'm gonna miss her growing up</p> <p><b>Necessity</b> Come to school for unnecessary thing Not necessary to do Draggin me out – not necessary</p> <p><b>Meaning</b> Just standed here and do nothing! No cares when young, wouldn't care if you die</p>
<p><b>External locus of control</b> Need for external control = do whatever you can otherwise Without consequences, just opportunity to have fun Must give rationale / reason for me to behave in certain way, otherwise I wont (no personal initiative) Weren't a leader was a follower</p> <p><b>External controls</b> At home quiet = slap Whole day w/head = have to write letter Clothes = police gonna stop you Stopped by cameras Followed mom's orders</p> <p><b>Blame</b> They weren't teaching me Tutor used to sit there = goin to next seat He's bad = aggravating me more Wanted special treatment (expecting) Friends showing me the wrong path You brought it to me = wont stop hitting you</p>	<p><b>Right . Good</b> Brought me up right They taught me right Wanted someone to show me the right way to be Not just me wrong and you're right It was right what he done Nobody's showing them the right way to go about things I think it is the right way to show him I was going through the right path You ain't shown me the right path Her to grow up to think that's right to do Why didn't I just done the right things Not a bad boy, not a good boy</p> <p><b>Teaching / learning</b> They weren't teaching me Teached me right Looking for someone to teach me Learnt a bit there Boring , not learning It learnt me a lot Showed me a lesson (scar)</p>	<p><b>Wrong . Bad</b> There was something wrong with them Tell us you're wrong and you're wrong – ok to be wrong once other person is You might think it's wrong, but it's how we're living That's the wrong move you done (on big persons) There was one time everything went wrong He knows he was in the wrong Basically I've done wrong You were in the wrong place at the wrong time (all the time!) They thought I was just bad Saw me as the bad kid</p> <p><b>Strict</b> Mom was very strict Fairly strict background School didn't have that kinda strictness Very strict school, I liked it</p> <p><b>Older person</b> Goin in at my mouth with an older Respect for older people</p>	<p><b>Consequences</b> All things make sense Thoughts lead to actions = consequences Drawn to clear rules; If things are logical it's Provocation justifies any extreme Social rules/consequences must be applied Young kids, need to learn from my mistakes This is different to that Have to say sorry for what you done Make him know (torture) Just gonna beat them back up (no care)</p> <p><b>Normalising</b> That's what we done innit (robbing) How were living today It woulda been like that (stabbed back) Used to talk- never tell the police I got robbed Road mentality = should be cheeky</p> <p><b>Own rules</b> Draggin me = mad = fight you Make him know (torture) Take the knife and stab him back Just gonna beat them back up (no care)</p> <p><b>Demands</b> Have to bang our heads together</p>

1

<p><b>Respect</b> Not respecting screaming and shouting Mad respect for you to say hi Respect him, there was apology Next time you'll look at me different Way I dealt with his friend Enough of him taking liberties People talking your name</p> <p><b>Consequences</b> All things make sense Thoughts = actions=consequences Drawn to clear rules If things are logical it's ok Social rules and consequences for actions must be applied One thing about young kids, need to learn from my mistakes This is different to that No respect screaming and shouting I cant chat to him now, just nod He knows I will do it again, worse</p>	<p><b>Growth</b> I grew there (good school) I didn't grow you up to be like that Grown up to year 11, all together I wouldn't stop beating him, I've grown up, that's not on my mind no more Me growing up through that stage of school, I weren't a fighter Been arrested a lot of times, growing up For her to grow up to think that's the way to be Talkin like a grown up to you I'm gonna miss her growing up</p> <p><b>Change</b> Taking credit for change Not angry at self, just wistful, but angry at others My missus showed me, changed me</p>	<p><b>People's ignorance</b> Teachers didn't know about me They knew what school they were in People having opinions who "don't know" There is always an explanation</p> <p><b>Uncertainty</b> I think until I was about 9 Was it a woman or man Don't know why she used to do that Can't remember picture by picture</p> <p><b>Categories</b> That disability- anger problems A dunce Something wrong with kids in school Saw me as the bad kid Them type of people find it different</p>	<p><b>Friends</b> Friends threw me over counter Protecting one of my friends One of my friends had a knife I don't know what friends he's told They're friends with him from long time bef Now I know, me n him ain't friends Friends showing me the wrong path Robbed in front of my friends Friends will know the group but I wont Realise who your real friends are We was good friends . Come back with my friends innit One of my friend's friends took it again Thinking of negative things what was gonna em, so, doin the silly things with my friends . If I have friends who lie and get me in trouble My good friends who I don't really see I can and chat to them; I was always with loads fri My friends would be like stop crying! They're my friends who I used to hang out w Experience I had to go through to realise who your friends are They wanna be comparing themselves to eac</p>
<p><b>Physical</b> Movements (her) Stand walk sit Passing messages through actions Kicking; Pushing down stairs Draggin me out; I would get a slap Draggin me up; Pulling me up by my head Ripped your paper; Have me pinned down Write apology; Spat at him, he hit me Threw a egg; Got sat down; Hug me; Beating; Spat toast; Running around; Lay them down; Stand my ground; Run me down; Nod my head</p> <p><b>Importance of physical action in teaching</b> Scar is a permanent reminder Physical violence is the ultimate lesson Shook hands, back to class</p>	<p><b>Different selves</b> I was kinda like that (ADHD) Different ways of talking Then and now Changes other's interactions In my different role, I'm a different person now</p> <p><b>Self deprecating</b> Soft, innocent dunce Liar (small eggs)</p> <p><b>Individuality important</b> Only way is to help yourself, cant expect others to help you Went my own separate way, not relying on no one else</p>	<p><b>Emotion</b> It hurt me (robbed)</p> <p><b>Excitement</b> I was hyper I was a bit feisty Them days were fun (no cameras) Ravin Parties, bring girls up Giving them attention to stop you</p> <p><b>Anger</b> Sometimes I was angry (PS) Why didn't I learn this in primary? At dad- you weren't there</p> <p><b>Managing</b> My people talking to him Squash the beef My mom lives here, your mom You ain't learnt yourself to take care alright Ain't touched the knife</p>	<p><b>History</b> Come up to me know, cause we apologised, used to fight them He was actually my good friend</p> <p><b>Little boy</b> Am I a little boy (Eren demanding) Like a little boy (in cell with dad) I'm a big man I've grown up</p> <p><b>Race</b> Lighter than me Ppl think they're harassing me cause I'm black</p> <p><b>Words not enough</b> Argue back = show her you're taking the piss Had to do the emotional stuff (slam door)</p>

<p><b>Suspicion</b> Inferring others intentions – thought I was weak, saw body language</p> <p><b>Youth</b> Concrete use of ages Hyper mentality no cares, even to die (contradiction = such a strong sense of consequences with everything) Excuse for behaviour Excuse for lying I was just young I didn't know Stages – explain behaviour Gangs and that</p>	<p><b>Fear</b> I looked like a easy target (stubbles over words here = emotion) Try to fight me for no reason</p> <p><b>Attention</b> I don't know if I was looking for attent. I wanted attention Looking for trouble, attention Not looking for trouble, attention Baggy trousers = attract attention</p>	<p><b>Silly things</b> Young Silly as shame; actually serious? Running me down (serious) Jumping on things = robbing = beating (hurting people last)</p> <p><b>Kids</b> Kids out there are mummy's boys They say they got kids who got...anger problems Kids running round on rampage He was younger (bullied) I was a kid then I'm getting older</p>	<p><b>Street code</b> Not wanting to snake to police Eyeing each other up Street picking up where schooling left off</p> <p><b>Support</b> Talk to a peer, they will understand</p> <p><b>Protection</b> I was protecting him</p> <p><b>Misunderstanding</b> I didn't know they were joking I got the blame for dog</p>
<p><b>Love</b> Love him as a brother Love when she used to laugh Lover not a fighter Teachers loved me</p>	<p><b>Personal responsibility</b> Likes to apologise – truth letter Need for verbal exchange – this makes things official My fault cause of my mouth Caused it on ourselves</p>	<p><b>Place</b> Mom got her own place He used to take us places Used to go round their place, go on holiday Sitting down, in that place Didn't go to that place did you? Wrong place at the wrong time He lived in my estate</p>	<p><b>Group vs. solo</b> Silly things with my friends, bunch of us Bunch of guys push me, with my missus – p My friends bunch of group, my bunch of gr His bunch of group robbed me 2 bunch of guys No ones keeping it like that, why kids are d Looking for trouble, attention</p>
3			
<p><b>Importance of fairness</b> 'Just cause' permits anything Certain things have to be, regardless of consequences Have to say sorry</p>	<p><b>Collective, not individual responsibility</b> Our job to teach others (your boss) You're letting it go; he's not just gonna stop for the sake of it Others job to teach us Others job to know what we need Responsibility with others, not us Ok to get in each other's space Justice is collective, police each other Scar – teaches lesson; learning lessons Other's job to read signs correctly Not my responsibility if wrong</p>	<p><b>Reputation</b> Soft rep = targeted Hard rep = left alone If I was a bully = won't trouble Knew cousin = gave back phone</p>	<p><b>Escalation</b> I will do it even worse</p> <p><b>Violence</b> Fights in school Deal with it differently, talking not getting t</p> <p><b>Revenge</b> Didn't say sorry would beat him next time, c my eye</p>
<p><b>Women</b> Some women are not stupid A lot of people think their mom don't know, their mom knows Mummy's boys Always round my grandma Always around women Dad got girlfriend = saw more Walking with missus/ she called My missus showed me, changed me</p>	<p><b>Reflective</b> Early life; Role of dad Influencing sister I was a bit feisty</p>	<p><b>Familiarity</b> When you first meet someone, you is a bit funny See each other now, say hi, grew up to year 11 together He was the first person I know</p>	<p><b>Services</b> Kicked outa primary school tons a times Home taught for a year They taught me right Why didn't I learn this in primary? Tutor used to sit there Physical handling in school</p>

## Appendix J: Individual narrative construction for Tanner

### Tanner

#### *They didn't know what I was, they thought I was just bein' bad*

Tanner opened his narrative describing growing up with his siblings in a small flat, and the challenges they faced such as a lack of living space and a largely absent father.

*Yeah I lived in (a) 2 bedroom flat. There was (.) four of us (...) there was a lot of us in the house (...) My dad weren't, my dad weren't really around...See him, now an' again. I think until I was about nine that's when I saw him properly. So he weren't really there.*

However, though such difficulties are described in the content of his narrative, Tanner's evaluative statements regarding his upbringing are typically positive.

*My mum was very em (.) whadayoucallit (2) she brought me up right. She brought me up showed me certain things (...) mom used to take me everywhere. I used to be carrying her bags. I was a mummy's boy. My mom obviously grew me up, and my Granma.*

This optimistic tone continues throughout Tanner's narrative, as do references to a good upbringing and the image of his mother as a supportive figure in his life. Tanner goes on to explore his childhood behaviour at school. He seems to shift continuously here, from taking responsibility for his misbehaviour, to criticising those around him for misunderstanding and ignoring him, to trying to understand his behaviour, to blaming others for not knowing how to react to him.

*In primary school I was a bu- I was a bully. {Why do you say that?} Because em, I don't know. I been kicked out of primary school tons a times.*

*I weren't really, I weren't really a bully I was just em (.) em, I don't know, I don't know if it was attention seeking or whatever it was, with school. I think a lot of teachers didn't know, about me, as much...I was kinda like [children with ADHD]. And they didn't know what I was, they thought I was just bein' bad, bein' bad innit. (...) they weren't really teaching me, I was like in the corner of the classroom, they didn't really take no notice of me.*

*They just saw me as the bad kid. {Mm} Because, how I was. I was very hyper (...) I used to be, always getting in trouble for silly things, like I wanted attention.*

*I was looking for something. I'm sure I was looking for like (5) someone to, obviously teach me. {Mm}. Calm me down, 'cause obviously I was, sometimes I was angry, sometimes I was like that, I wanted someone to obviously show me the right way how to...how to be innit?*

His tone is one of blame and regret when he reflects on his early school experiences.

*When I'm at home, I was quiet 'cause obviously my mom, I would get, I would get a slap if, I act naughty. But in school, they weren't like that, they didn't have that kind of strictness about them, they just thought, "aw he's bad", so they, they were aggravating me more.*

*I had a tutor when I was (.) in primary school from (.) young (...) but used to just sit there, and don't really do nothing, so then obviously I'm going to the next seat and, cussing, that he's not helping me, 'cause he weren't helping me.*

*I didn't learn nothing, in school (...) started to think "ra how come I didn't learn this in primary school?" I was like "aw, I didn't know nothing until I left that school".*

Tanner goes on to describe in very positive terms the school he attended after being expelled from his first primary school, acknowledging the supportive staff, and implying that once his difficulties were understood he reacted well.

*They taught me right, you know what I mean, because a lot of kids who went to that school were (.) they, there was something wrong with them like, they had anger problem or, they got some disability of some sort. I went there, obviously grew, grew there. (...) every time something happened, you get in trouble, they have to like write apology, and what we done (...) you have to tell the truth (...) it's a truth letter basically and then you write aw "I'm sorry, blah, blah, blah for doing what I was doing" that's how they dealt with it. So, me to deal with things like that was different...I was like "ra this is good" (...) 'cause this person writ down what they done, and then, you can tell if they're lying cause I'm writing this down. {Mmm} Then they, they will put us together and we say sorry, then we shake hands then we go back to our classes.*

Tanner presents himself as reasonable and fair in liking this approach. It seems that where he feels the situation has been justly dealt with and blame fairly apportioned, Tanner is willing to take responsibility for his behaviour, accept the consequences, and indeed learn from it.

*I almost got my head kicked in. {Mmm} It was my fault 'cause of my mouth. I was goin' in at my mouth with an older person and he kicked the shit outa me. And from that day I've never ever [done it again]. But I respect him because, obviously, obviously there was an apology, we did that and we sorted it out then. {You think that helped?} Yeah that did help. 'Cause if I didn't say sorry to him or he didn't say sorry to me, we'd be enemies to this day. I, personally I think it was right what he done, to show me a lesson.*

However there is a sense that the responsibility lies with others to manage his behaviour, and conversely Tanner seems to view it as his responsibility to manage others' behaviour.

*If a little boy, on the road, slapped me, or he done something to me, you know what I mean I'm a big man you gonna do that to me I'm gonna, when I see him one day I'm gonna grab him up, I'm gonna like, not, what's the word, not torture him but I'm gonna make him know, that's the wrong move you done, don't ever do that again.*

Further, it seems that certain behaviour leaves Tanner with no choice but to respond in a certain way, so that if his rules are broken or he is provoked, he is justified in retaliating with violence.

*If he tried again, he knows I'm gonna, I will, I will do it again, and I will do it even worser, do you know what I mean...I would beat him (.) I won't stop beating him up, if he tried it again...that's not on my mind no more to, to em, to start things like that, have a beef or, have a*

*fight but if you brought it to me, I'm not gonna stop hitting you because you came to me (...) If he done it to me, like, if he, \*stabbed me\* (3) \*I would take the knife and stab him back\* basically. It woulda been like that.*

Tanner seems to view himself as logical and reasonable in taking this approach, illustrated further in the below extract where Tanner describes trying to talk calmly to the hysterical mother of a boy he has attacked.

*His mum come to my door, screaming and, blablabla; "Why did you..." I said, "do you know what your son said"? "Blablabla". I said, "if you don't know what, if you don't know what your son said there's no point you arguing and shouting at me, and screamin' at my mom. Because, my mom weren't there, you weren't there, so you don't know what situation me and your son had, why I done that to him". (...) And then, after that his mum came to my door again, she's like "ra..." I said, "oh my days, your son came to me, with a chain and swang it at me, I retaliated and hit him back. What you expect me to do?"...And then she was just shouting "ah, the police come, rarara, but he didn't wanted to say nothing, but he should of". I said "why didn't you, why didn't you tell the police innit. Then I can tell my side of the story". You know what I mean. Then after all of that, his mom come and apologise.*

Tanner again seems to externalising responsibility as he describes the behaviour he began to engage in as a teenager, viewing it as the product of external influences.

*I...started to go college. I had a one, one-day job. So I was, going through the right path do you know what I mean but, as I say, friends show me, my friends showing me the wrong path to, to lead.*

*These people on this estate, I used to hang around with them {mmhmm} used to be, smoking weed, em (.) I was foll- I was following {mm} I, I weren't, I weren't a leader I was a follower so whatever they're doing I'm doing.*

Tanner at times invokes a sense of inevitability when describing the violent and illegal behaviour he was involved in.

*You might think it's wrong [teaching someone a lesson through physical means], but it's how we are, how we're livin' today.*

*Used to be cheeky [to police] them times 'cause that was...the road mentality; should be cheeky.*

*That's what we done innit [robbing people on the street].*

*That was the in thing to have a weapon (...) anything happens, you can, protect yourself and, back yourself and (.) to make people know to be scared of you. That's how it worked.*

Tanner presents the fighting he was often involved in as reactionary, consequential, rather than intrinsically 'like him', referring to his upbringing in support of this.

*I'm not, my, the way I got brought up, I was a lover, not a fighter {mm} do you know what I mean I didn't get brought up to be a fighter. (...) I weren't a fighter, only when, things were happening in class, like a boy was doing something I would fight back.*

Tanner frequently seems to negatively evaluate his behaviour. Though “silly little things” could be seen to have a minimising function, towards the end of the interview Tanner explicitly refers to his behaviour as “wrong”.

*When I was on the (.) road a lot, doing a lot of things. Up and down. (...) just doing little silly things with my friends. There was a bunch of us.*

*So used to do stu- as I was saying used to do stupid stuff.*

*That's all the things that I've done, wrong. Basically I've done wrong.*

Tanner seemed to view things happening in his life as often outside his control, implying that the best he can do is avoid potentially negative situations. An upshot of this external local of control seems to be a focus on learning how to manage or avoid situations, rather than on how to prevent them.

*Wrong place at the wrong time all the time. That's why I keep, I keep doing what I'm doing and I keep my head focused and start doing, different things. 'Cause I know, if I go to a little club, like a house party {Mmm} I know there's gonna be trouble, something...I'm expecting something to happen. {Why is that?} (laughs) I don't know! Em, \*I don't know it's hard to explain\*. Em (.) I don't know man I always used to tell my mom that, say “mom why do things always happen to me?”*

Throughout his narrative Tanner often refers to several incidents when he was robbed, and an ongoing feud with a boy on his estate, seeming to link these experiences to his beginning to carry weapons.

*I've changed now. {Tell me about how you've changed} All them things that happened, when I got robbed. (...) I've been robbed, em, in front of my like, my friends like, like, they, you see, when, mistakes and mistakes go together they will go somewhere. (...) Things like that, like not shit happened but it happened again, it happened again, before, because I didn't, I didn't learn.*

*That person's gonna come, back, and shoot you one day you know. 'Cause that's how I felt when I used to get robbed {Mmm}. 'Cause even up to this day, I remember the people, I remember the people who robbed me.*

*I think I got robbed about twice, three times. {What impact did that have on you?} It hurt. It hurt me in a, kinda, what's the way (.) it hurt me in a em (.) hurt...got me scared, to come outside, basically. \*Not scared\* all the time but, scared “this is gonna happen all the time to me” (...) I was always thinking of negative things what was gonna happen, em, so, doin' the silly things with my friends again. hhhh*

*I was em (hhh) going through things like I was walking with knives at that time, after that. Em (.) because I was telling you how I, got robbed and all of that, em, so, used to be walkin' with my knife, used to have long blades, used to have em, you know the police kosh yeah? {Mmm} Used to buy them, used to have them long ones, just have them walkin' around. (...) {So why carry the knife?} For protection (3). Just protection really.*

*I had to be wary of things (...) so used to obviously have protection to, to walk around (...) 'cause I don't know, what friends he's told [mm], about, our situation they might wanna grab me one day.*

Tanner explicitly refers above to feeling “scared” following being robbed, and fear seems to be offered as an explanation for his behaviour. There seem to be undertones also of shame and rejection, as Tanner describes his naivety, how his appearance made him a target, and being robbed by friends.

*My body language em, the way I looked, I looked like a easy target, do you know what I mean. I've, I've been robbed, em, guys would come up to me and, try to, fight me for no reason at all 'cause my body language.*

*My friend will know this, this bunch of group, but I don't know them. And, I got my bunch of group, who he don't know. So, his bunch of group, yeah, musta robbed me now (...) 'cause I was like that I was soft...I didn't know, what, what to expect. And then, they robbed ma phone {Mmm} do you know what I mean so then I, started to realise certain things, who your real friends are.*

*The same phone, it was the same phone...one of my friend's friends took it again \*yeah\*. He musta had it, 'cause, I musta gave it to one of my friends who used it to call someone, and then they gave it to him. He had my phone but, I got it like at the end.*

*Yeah, I've been robbed, em, in front of my like, my friends like.*

*Me like a idiot playing my music to them...Took it outa my hand now...and I said “aw what you doin that for”. And eh, he just walked away and I said “ra gimme back my phone”.*

In describing the thought processes that characterised his youth, Tanner describes how paradoxically the familiar boundaries allowed a freedom to switch off their thinking.

*But, I was young, foolish, silly. Weren't thinking. But now I'm thinking.*

*When we was young, we didn't have no care, you wouldn't care if you die...if you got arrested, nothing like that. (...) no care in the world. Used to smoke weed, didn't have a care (hhhhh) It just felt (hhhh) like nothing could happen, like nothing was gonna touch you \*you know that way like\* you didn't have no care (...) you know you're gonna beat them back up or, just no caring. It's like, you knew, you knew your role in the road, you knew what's gonna happen you know what's gonna happen so, you really don't care, so basically if the police stop you, you know what's gonna happen, they gonna chat rubbish to you, say this and that.*

In contrast to the externalising of responsibility discussed above, Tanner positions himself as personally responsible for changing his ways. There is a sense of inevitability around the fact that he would have to learn the hard way, but of uniqueness in his taking this opportunity to learn.

*I've got out, I got out of it ma own way, no one didn't tell me. I didn't have a dad, to tell me.*

*It's you own mind that's what I had to, choose for my own self when I, I got to that stage, that age, 20 to 21, where, I had to learn myself and, say “aw I can't do that, I, I can't do that. I'm not gonna be, like that person 'cause he sells drugs. I want that clothes or that clothes, I take my time and get my clothes.*

Tanner attributes this attitude at least partly to the responsibilities that have come with having his own child. However, his identity as someone who ‘broke free’ seems to take priority over his identity as a father in this regard.

*Now it's just (.) \*I'm older, I got, got a baby that just walked past\*, I can't be walkin' with a knife, showing her (.) that sight. For her to grow up to think that's right to, to do.*

There is a marked change in Tanner's attitude in the below extract, where he acknowledges the flawed logic of carrying a weapon for safety, and focuses more on consequences. He seems to attribute this change simply to growing up.

*{So how did you stop carrying [a knife]??} (3) I don't know I just woke up (.) didn't, it didn't concern me I didn't...I got wise or somethin', there was really no point walking around with it. {[What if] you need it?} If it happens, it happens. But I'm not gonna walk into something where, I know, if a police stops me now, and I've got a knife on me, I know what's gonna happen, straight away. Now if I got jumped (3) it wouldn't really save me 'cause it's gonna happen. (...) now I've got older, them things will happen (.) specially (.) specially if you can't seem to look past, it all catches up with you, \*later on in life.\**

Towards the end of his narrative, Tanner makes an appeal against perceived assumptions that young people are violent for no reason. His tone is emotional and pleading here, conveying a request to be understood.

*The government now, talking about all'a this killin and, alla this robbin' and, all'a this. Some of it is due to (.) something that person's done. (...) All of that things you've done is caught up with him, someone said they've had enough and killed them. (...) They saying "aw (.hhh) alla this, shootin' and killin' em, black on black crime" and alla that yeah. It's not, it's not even that it's just (.) the government don't know why these people are dyin'. They're dyin' for a reason, they're not dyin' cause of nothing.*

To conclude, in understanding his behaviour, Tanner invokes notions of being misunderstood, blame, inevitability, non-thinking, relinquishing responsibility, utilising logic, and fear. In describing how his behaviour has changed, Tanner drew on meaning concepts included a good upbringing, use of support, personal strength, learning, growth and maturity, and individuality.

## Appendix K: Reflexivity questions

Taken from Langdrige, D. (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method* (pg. 59). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Below are a series of questions that a researcher might wish to reflect on in the context of a research project taking reflexive issues seriously:

1. Why am I carrying out this study?
2. What do I hope to achieve with this research?
3. What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?
  - Am I an insider or outsider?
  - Do I empathize with the participants and their experience?
4. Who am I, and how might I influence the research I am conducting in terms of age, sex, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and any other relevant cultural, political or social factors?
5. How do I feel about the work?
  - Are there external pressures influencing the work?
6. How will my subject position influencing the analysis?
7. How might the outside world influencing the presentation of findings?
8. How might the findings impact on the participants?
  - Might they lead to harm and, if so, how can I justify this happening?
9. How might the findings impact on the discipline and my career in it?
  - Might they lead to personal problems, and how prepared am I to deal with these should they arise?
10. How might the findings impact on wider understandings of the topic?
  - How might your colleagues respond to the research?
  - What would the newspapers make of the research?
  - Does the research have any implications for future funding (of similar research and/or related organizations)?
  - What political implications might arise as a result of the research?

## Part Two: Critical Literature Review

### Mindfulness and the work of the counselling psychologist

## Prologue

The following critical review of literature, exploring the role of mindfulness in the work of the counselling psychologist, was originally written in 2008. The concept of mindfulness was new to me at the time of writing it, and was rather new to the discipline of counselling psychology. Only three years later, mindfulness has become ubiquitous within the practice and teaching of psychology, both in the UK and worldwide.

I believe a key message to emerge from the research study in this portfolio is the importance of cultivating an attitude of non-judgement and understanding when working therapeutically with individuals, particularly those whose life experiences may differ from our own. Further, it highlights the power of disparaging dominant narratives to impact people's sense of self, and how they view and interact with the world. This has led me to reflect upon the possible narratives that I too, as a counselling psychologist, may carry into the therapeutic encounter, and which may impact on my ability to fully engage with and experience those I work with on their terms. Mindfulness has been shown to cultivate presence, acceptance, and non-judgement, and through this, a greater chance of opening ourselves to understanding those we aim to help. It further fosters an ability to disempower unhelpful outside narratives, by keeping one present in the immediate therapeutic encounter, with the individual as they are.

Though the literature discussed in the following review reflects the fact that it was written two years ago, given the swiftly changing landscape of the mindfulness research endeavour, it was felt that an attempt to significantly 'update' it would alter its nature, and move it away from its aim of exploring an exciting new application of a very old concept. Rather, it remains an important snapshot of a key time for an emerging area, reflected in an edited version of this review being published in the *Counselling Psychology Review* in November 2009 (see Appendix). In an epilogue to the following piece, I briefly document important directions the mindfulness literature has taken since then, specifically in relation to its impact on the work of the counselling psychologist.

## Introduction

*Mindfulness* is an expansive term, and one that has been used idiosyncratically in the literature. It will thus serve the purpose of this review well to begin with a working definition of that which it aims to cover. One description that seems to capture its essence sufficiently comes from Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994), who describes it as paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding of experience. It is a form of attention then, characterised by qualities of acceptance and non-judgement. Meditation is viewed as central to evoking this state, involving quiet contemplation of the body, particularly the breathing and the posture, of feelings, of the mind, and of thoughts or 'mind objects' (Mace, 2007).

The term itself is an English translation of the ancient Buddhist Pali word *sati*, which means 'awareness' or 'bare attention', and the concept is most firmly rooted in Buddhist psychology (Fulton & Siegel, 2005). The essence of Buddhist teachings may be compressed into the notion that suffering is inseparable from life, and that this suffering is tolerable and indeed essential for growth and fulfilment. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, William James (as cited in Lau & McMain, 2005) forecast that Buddhism would become a major influence on Western psychology. Over the past two decades his predictions have been realised in the huge upsurge of interest in the integration of mindfulness into Western psychological approaches. In their recent comprehensive review, Brown, Ryan and Creswell (2007) describe interest in mindfulness quietly exploding in recent years, and document a growing convergence of findings which point to the provisional conclusion that mindfulness is useful to adaptive functioning.

Many authors have highlighted the importance of defining and measuring mindfulness as a construct of increasing research focus (Brown & Ryan, 2004). Bishop et al. (2004) provide an initial attempt at this, through their proposed operational definition of mindfulness. The authors describe a two-component model of mindfulness comprising self-regulation of attention, and a curious, open and accepting orientation to experience (Bishop et al., 2004). This definition has received much support in the literature, providing a solid framework within which to organise the study of mindfulness, with testable hypotheses and guidelines for instrument development (Hayes & Feldman, 2004). Brown and Ryan (2004) have added to this, producing a second-order factor model in which presence and acceptance were nested under an over-arching mindfulness factor. The first self-report measure of dispositional mindfulness, the 15-

item Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) developed by Brown and Richard (2003), has been well supported in terms of reliability and validity.

The role played by mindfulness in psychology, and more specifically counselling psychology, is broad and varied. A recent issue of *Psychological Inquiry* (2007) dedicated to mindfulness represents one of the first thorough investigations of its possible positive psychological effects. A growing body of literature has established the potentially positive therapeutic effects of fostering mindfulness in clients presenting with a variety of issues, including depression and anxiety (for reviews see Baer, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). More recently, attention is being turned to look at the potential influence of mindfulness on the therapeutic work of psychologists and therapists. Mindfulness in the psychologist may itself be considered from several perspectives, from undertaking mindfulness practices in personal life, to evoking mindfulness in-session. Though still in its infancy, this area is beginning to emerge as a hugely fruitful avenue of research, as noted by Fulton (2005), Germer (2005), Mace (2007), Stauffer (2008) and Williams (2008). Of note is the high volume of doctoral theses emerging on this front, though they typically will not be reviewed here given their abstract-only availability. Characteristic of research at this stage, it has been largely descriptive, though empirical investigations are beginning to emerge, as evidence of the potential value of this focus accumulates (Breslin, Zack, & McMain, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

The notion of mindfulness is viewed as particularly relevant to the work of the counselling psychologist, with this notion forming the backdrop of this review. Given the scarcity of research in this area however, the focus will necessarily extend beyond this group to the work of clinical psychologists, psychotherapists, and counsellors. To allow for continuity, the term therapist will be used to refer to all of these throughout this review.

### Mindfulness and the therapeutic encounter

Carl Jung (as cited in Devroede, 1999) once said that it is only what we are that has a power of healing. An emerging view of mindfulness in the literature is that it may be viewed as a core therapeutic process, present on both the part of the psychologist and the client in effective therapy from a range of orientations (see Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Horowitz, 2002; Martin, 2002; Surrey, 2005). Martin (1997) positions mindfulness as a common factor, alongside the therapeutic relationship, that underlies the efficacy

of diverse therapeutic approaches. Germer (2005) goes to far as to suggest that mindfulness may be the essential ingredient active across seemingly dissimilar approaches.

Both Germer's (2005) and Mace's (2007) recent books on mindfulness criticise the frequent focus on skills, theoretical knowledge, interventions and directive change in therapy, overshadowing use of the psychologist and the therapeutic alliance as instruments. Germer (2005) reviews findings indicating that only about 15% of variance in treatment outcomes is due to the models and methods of the therapist. In support of this view, Horvath (2000) and others have demonstrated the quality of the therapeutic alliance to be a robust predictor of positive therapeutic outcome irrespective of technique or style. Attention has recently turned to the impact of mindfulness on this therapeutic relationship, as studies highlight the link between mindfulness and characteristics thought to facilitate strong working alliances such as empathy, warmth, understanding and acceptance (see Brown et al., 2007; Fulton, 2005, Heppner & Kernis, 2007; Ladner, 2005; Morgan & Morgan, 2005; Nanda, 2005). Pointing to such links, Wexler (2006, as cited in Stauffer, 2008) found significant positive correlations between both therapist and client perceptions of therapeutic alliance and mindfulness.

### Mindfulness-based client interventions

The majority of the research examining mindfulness thus far has focused on its application to client interventions, shaping strategies aimed at reducing reactive modes of mind that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviour (Bishop et al., 2004). Both Baer (2003) and Kabat-Zinn (2003) provide helpful and thoughtful reviews of mindfulness-based interventions, often described as 'third wave therapies' in reference to the behavioural and cognitive movements that preceded them, and which typically take the form of integrated mindfulness-based treatment programs, fashioned as complete therapeutic packages (Stauffer, 2008). Such programs have been used across a broad range of presentations, including mood and anxiety disorders, post-traumatic and psychotic symptoms, bingeing and substance misuse, suicidal and impulsive actions, and relationship difficulties (see Germer, 2005; Mace, 2008).

The current blossoming of mindfulness as a therapeutic approach may be substantially linked to the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn (1982; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth & Burney, 1985) in developing mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) as a coping method for chronic

pain more than twenty years ago. Another established approach based on mindfulness training is mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), which combines MBSR with cognitive therapy and has been successfully employed to prevent relapse in major depression (Teasdale et al., 2000). Further important cognitive approaches that incorporate mindfulness training are Linehan's (Linehan et al., 1999) dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), and Hayes' (Hayes, Strosah, & Wilson, 2003) acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), notably developed in Harris' *The Happiness Trap* (2008). Aspects of mindfulness training have further been incorporated into a broad array existing approaches, to augment therapeutic work within established frameworks. Mace (2007) proposes that aspects of mindfulness work can be considered integral to well-established forms of psychotherapy such as psychoanalysis and certain humanistic traditions, supported by Childs (2007).

These approaches differ in the extent to which the therapist is expected to engage in mindfulness practice themselves, as a prerequisite to incorporating it into client interventions. MBSR and MBCT specifically require that therapists practise ongoing meditation, both to experience mindfulness first hand and to provide a model for clients, while ACT and DBT place less emphasis on the therapist's personal experience (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006; Mace, 2007). Though debate exists on this issue, many authors, such as Frank (2002), feel strongly that the therapist must be experientially familiar with mindfulness in order to encourage it in their clients.

### Mindfulness in the therapist

As a growing body of literature establishes the positive contributions of mindfulness to client interventions, increasingly attention is being turned to look at the impact of mindfulness on therapeutic work from the perspective of the therapist (Crane & Elias, 2006; Dimidjian & Lineham, 2003). Though research is still in its infancy, several authors suggest that such studies appear hugely valuable in illuminating therapeutic practice (Mace, 2008; Williams, 2008).

Mindfulness in the therapist may be considered from several perspectives, from undertaking mindfulness practices in personal life and how this impacts on therapeutic work, to evoking mindfulness in-session. It is becoming clear from studies such as Nanda's (2005) however, discussed below, that these two practices are intertwined, complementary, and difficult to separate. For example Wicks (2008), writing on

therapist self-care, highlights the link between mindfulness in one's personal life and therapeutic competency. This creates challenges in such research; that of evaluating the impact of therapists' personal practice of mindfulness on their therapeutic practice, and demonstrating equivalence between what therapists are doing privately (Mace, 2007). Nonetheless, a growing body of research is attempting to explore how mindfulness might contribute to increased efficacy in therapists.

A key quality evoked by mindfulness in relation to the therapeutic endeavour is that of accepting experience with a non-judgmental attitude. This facilitates both suspension of judgment and negative perceptions of clients, and acceptance of distractions as inevitable. It further permits the therapist to model for the client the acceptance of negative emotions (Nanda, 2005), highlighted by Lau and McMain (2005) in their review article as vital to therapeutic change. Also highlighted by the authors is the role of mindfulness in decreasing experiential avoidance, as it cultivates equanimity towards experiences that might normally be avoided, allowing psychologists to explore uncomfortable and distressing experiences with clients (Bishop et al., 2004; Nanda, 2005; Wicks, 2008). Lewis (1991) highlights the prime role of experiential avoidance on the part of the therapist in stalemated therapy situations.

Again of central importance, various studies have linked mindfulness to an increased capacity for empathy in the therapist (Bishop et al., 2004; Beitel, Ferrer, & Cecero, 2005). Morgan and Morgan (2005) posit that as the therapist's understanding of their own mental processes increase, and they become more familiar with the internal sensations involved in empathy, they can more readily identify with and understand their clients, a reasoning supported by Crane and Elias (2006).

Hayes and Feldman (2004) and Martin (1997, 2002) have shown mindfulness to cultivate a decentered perspective or cognitive distancing, posited by Breslin et al. (2002) to be a cornerstone of therapeutic change. This 'space' between perception and response prevents automatic, habitual patterns of reactivity, and allows for reflective as opposed to reflexive responding (Bishop et al., 2004; Gunaratana, 1992). In Upton's (1999) self-reflective piece, the author asserted that mindfulness practise allowed her to see thoughts and interventions as they arose and before they were acted out, allowing for consideration of their suitability.

The quality of mindfulness known as "beginner's mind", the direct observation of objects as if for the first time rather than through the filter of our beliefs, assumptions,

expectations and desires, may be viewed as central to the therapeutic endeavour (Bishop et al., 2004; Hoffman & Asmundson, 2007). Epstein (1999) describes it as a fluidity of mind that is open and receptive to new therapeutic possibilities, that leads the mind back from theories to the situation of experience itself. Several authors have highlighted the complexity of the various simultaneous tasks the therapist must engage in during a session, and highlight the importance of directing attention to the best possible advantage in this regard, a skill thought to be aided by mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004; Grepmaier et al., 2007). Borkovec (2002) concludes that the only real information is that which exists in the present moment, so that focusing on this maximises the likelihood of accurate interventions.

The construct of mindfulness emerging from the above literature is very much analogous to the notion of therapist presence, which has been noted by several authors (e.g. Childs, 2007). Presence is variously described as an availability and openness to the client's and one's own experience, a 'bracketing' of knowledge, presuppositions and biases to take in the uniqueness of the client, and being fully in the moment with and for the client with little purpose or goal in mind (Fulton, 2005).

### **Studies on personal mindfulness practice in the therapist**

An in-depth qualitative study conducted by Geller and Greenberg (2002) provides a unique and elucidating exploration of how therapists experience presence, which the authors equate with mindfulness, in the therapeutic encounter. Participants were seven active therapists working from humanistic, existential, CBT and psychodynamic perspectives, with a minimum of ten years professional experience. Therapists were provided with a brief description of presence extracted from the literature, and asked to reflect upon their own experience of presence over their next few sessions with clients. They were then interviewed about their experience of presence, and using a grounded theory approach the authors proposed a working model of therapeutic presence (Geller & Greenberger, 2002).

Findings to emerge from the study highlight the importance of a commitment to personal growth and presence in therapists' everyday lives in influencing this ability in therapy. The majority practised daily meditation, which they viewed as central to their work. Therapists further described using their breath as a focus before and during sessions to induce beginner's mind and maintain presence (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). While being therapeutically present, therapists described listening deeply, and

consciously allowing in the fullness of the client's experience in a multisensory way, describing this empathic resonance as a 'shared sacred space' with the client. They further described inwardly attending to this bodily resonance, using themselves as a barometer to guide responding, which they felt infused it with a creativity and spontaneity (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

Findings support the central role of non-attachment, that is, being open and willing to be a part of emerging experience without attaching to it, and letting go of control and outcome. A common experience described was feeling intimately engaged and absorbed in the experience, while remaining grounded in oneself, entering deeply and wholly into the pain and suffering of the client while staying centered, steady and whole. Further, reference was made to an inner expansiveness and flow of energy, of calm alertness, and even joy. Such emotional experiences were linked to an enhanced quality of thinking, with thoughts and emotions reflective of what was necessary and helpful to the client (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

Phenomenological research such as this provides a wealth of valuable material in understanding how mindfulness influences in-session interactions. Some limitations may be noted in terms of generalising from this material however. Firstly, the study did not specify how therapists were recruited, and given that they are presented as 'proponents' of presence, they cannot be considered representative of a normal sample. Further, the authors note that though the therapists represented a variety of theoretical orientations, generalisations on the role of presence across all orientations cannot be made (Geller & Greenberger, 2002).

A more recent phenomenological study by Nanda (2005) explored how therapists' personal practice of mindfulness meditation influenced their therapeutic work with clients, motivated by the author's own personal experience of meditation and its effect on her practice as a counselling psychologist. Nanda (2005) reflexively situates herself within the research process, acknowledging the influence of her experiences in her interpretation of findings. Qualitative interviews were conducted with eight experienced psychotherapists from existential, integrative and psychodynamic orientations, who had practised meditation for between 12 and 30 years.

Many of the themes that emerged from the interview data were similar to those described by Geller and Greenberger (2002). Therapists reported that their practice of meditation led to transformational relational changes in all aspects of their lives,

including but not limited to their work with clients. They reported mindfulness to positively impact on openness, acceptance and empathy, leading to a focus on 'being with what is' in therapeutic practice, including being non-judgemental and fully present. Therapists described letting go of a desire to control the outcome and freeing themselves from theory, which led to staying calm and grounded and actively exploring with the client (Nanda, 2005).

An interesting theme I observed in the findings reported was the positive impact of mindfulness on therapists' processes of relating to *themselves*, and how this impacting on their ability to relate to clients. For example, therapists reported that mindfulness practice facilitated their ability to model for clients the importance of accepting themselves. And further, that it allowed them to be more open and able to make space to listen to both themselves and clients, which they felt allowed for increased empathy through a process of cross-referencing (Nanda, 2005).

Though both of the studies discussed above possess some limitations in terms of generalisability and representativeness, the variety of theoretical orientations involved in each does provide some support both for the commonality of mindfulness qualities across these approaches, and for similarity of experience in therapists from a variety of therapeutic orientations. This research is incredibly valuable in beginning to sketch a phenomenological picture of the experience of mindfulness in therapists in both professional and personal contexts, however it falls short of allowing any causative explanations. Though the impact of mindfulness interventions have been investigated in clients, and others, such as research investigating the effects of MBSR on various populations, very few studies have focused on exploring the impact of specific mindfulness interventions on therapists, both personally and in their professional work. Those few that could be located that have, will now be discussed in the following two sections.

### **Studies on cultivating mindfulness in the therapist**

Perhaps the first study to investigate the impact of mindfulness training on psychologists was Shapiro, Astin, Bishop and Cordova's (2005) investigation of the impact of an 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program on 38 health care professionals, including psychologists. Using quantitative and qualitative self-report measures, the authors gathered data on the impact of the mindfulness intervention on participants' personal lives and functioning, concluding that the

intervention effectively reduced stress and increased quality of life and self-compassion in this sample. Though all participants were actively engaged in clinical practice, the impact of the intervention was only assessed in term of global wellbeing, and the influence, if any, on professional work was not sought (Shapiro et al., 2005). Shapiro and colleagues subsequently replicated these findings in an identical study with a cohort of trainee therapists, though again effects on therapeutic work were not assessed, the focus rather being on therapist self-care (Shapiro, Brown & Biegel, 2007).

Taking this further, a 4-year longitudinal qualitative study conducted by Schure, Christopher and Christopher (2008), building on several earlier studies (Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan & Schure, 2006; Newsome, Christopher, Dahlen & Christopher, 2006), examined the influence of mindfulness practice on 33 graduate counselling students. It looked at the influence of a 15-week course of mindfulness practice on both the life and therapeutic work of the students, who were training in mental health counselling, school counselling, and marriage and family counselling, and were voluntarily enrolled in an elective course entitled “Mind-Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care”. The course included twice weekly mindfulness practise sessions, sitting meditation, hatha yoga, and home practice, along with readings and reflective journal-writing exercises.

Data was collected over 4 years using written assignments in which students were asked to reflect on the impact of the course on, amongst others factors, their work with clients, clinical practice and career plans. Using a grounded theory approach, data was triangulated with information from focus groups and compared across years, with no differences found. Emergent themes indicated that students reported positive physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and interpersonal changes. Positive emotional changes included an increased ability to deal with negative emotions, through being less defensive and reactive, and being able to accept and let go of emotional responses. Mental changes included increased clarity of thought, an increased capacity for meaningful self-reflection, better self-understanding, and feeling more whole as an individual (Schure et al., 2008).

Effects specific to student’s counselling skills and therapeutic relationships included an increased capacity for empathy and compassion, an increased comfort with silence with clients, feeling less of a need to control the situation because of their own anxiety, and being more present, more attentive and responsive to the therapeutic process at

hand. Students reported intentions to continue with personal practice and to integrate mindfulness into their future professional work, feeling it translated into being more effective professionally (Schure et al., 2008).

Issues around generalisability are again relevant, as with the studies of Geller and Greenberger (2002) and Nanda (2005), stemming from the elective nature of the course. However an important development in Schure et al.'s (2008) study was the practise of mindfulness being taken up during the study, allowing a degree of confidence that therapeutic effects observed were related to this practice. Such a qualitative exploration of the influences of mindfulness across all domains of trainee therapists' lives remains highly valuable in identifying areas of focus for future work, with the authors recommending in-depth interviewing to provide depth of understanding regarding results (Schure et al., 2008). The findings of this research are seen to be particularly meaningful given the consistency of positive outcomes over time and across class cohorts.

### **Studies on the influence of therapist mindfulness on client outcomes**

Stanley et al. (2006) took the above strand of research a step further, conducting the first study investigating the relationship between mindfulness in psychologists and client outcomes. Twenty-three trainee clinical psychologists, all on their first placement at an outpatient community mental health centre in the United States took part in the study. Each psychologist was assigned an individual 'mindfulness' score using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). One hundred and forty four adult clients, male and female, were seen by the psychologists across the duration of the research from 1999 to 2003. Psychologists rated clients at both intake and termination using the Clinical Global Impression (CGI) and Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) tools, while clients also self-rated on the GAF. Significant positive correlations were found between client and psychologist GAF scores indicating agreement in their assessments (Stanley et al., 2006).

Results revealed consistent significant negative correlations between psychologist mindfulness and client GAF scores at termination of therapy, indicating that clients of psychologists with low mindfulness scores showed greater global functioning. In no case was there support for psychologist mindfulness as a significant predictor of positive client outcome. Rather, greater psychologist mindfulness was associated with

worse client outcome, a finding which could not be accounted for by initial symptom severity (Stanley et al., 2006).

The authors, however, remain open to the possibility that mindfulness may be beneficial to the work of psychologists in some cases, hypothesising that in their study it may have distracted from the greater agenda of adherence to what they refer to as “manualised, empirically supported therapies”, i.e. CBT and motivational interviewing (Stanley et al., 2006). This point may be especially relevant given that participants in this study were trainees on their very first placement, when the task of integrating technique with client-centered practice and monitoring attention is particularly challenging.

An important point to note here is that the study did not in any way attempt to promote mindfulness in the psychologists, but rather measured dispositional mindfulness. Though the influence of this cannot be assumed, based on the literature it would seem important to view mindfulness as a cognitive skill that must be cultivated and practised, and thus it is difficult to compare the participants in Stanley et al.’s (2006) study with studies where participants were trained in mindfulness.

Grepmaier et al. (2007) recently addressed some of these issues in their randomised, controlled, double-blind study measuring the therapeutic course and treatment results of 124 inpatients at a German institution for psychoanalytic psychotherapy, receiving treatment from 18 female psychotherapists in their second year of training. Trainees were randomly divided into a Zen meditation group, who practiced meditation for an hour each morning before seeing clients, or a control group, which did not practice meditation. Clients underwent a variety of daily group sessions and twice weekly individual psychotherapy sessions, with progress assessed using a variety of self-report measures; the Symptoms Checklist (SCL-90-R), the Session Questionnaire for General and Differential Individual Psychotherapy (STEP), and the Questionnaire of Changes in Experience and Behavior (VEV).

Taking into account the longitudinal structure of the study, findings indicated that clients treated by trainees in the meditation group reported significantly lower scores on subjectively perceived symptoms and significantly more positive changes in experience and behaviour (Grepmaier et al., 2007). A notable absence in discussion of the results was the fact that clients assigned to the meditation group presented with higher initial scores on all items of the SCL-90-R. Further, the study used an all-female sample of

trainee therapists, and 80% of the clients were also female, again limiting generalisability of the research. The fact that participants were trainees may be particularly relevant given the frequently reported relaxation effects of mindfulness meditation, although this is in contrast to Stanley et al.'s (2006) findings.

Nonetheless, the above findings would appear to provide a reasonably strong indication that promoting mindfulness in trainee psychotherapists positively influenced the therapeutic course and treatment outcomes in their clients. The study boasts a strong focus on rigorous empirical reliability; trainees were at an equal level, possible confounding variables were carefully considered, and all individuals from clients to therapists to the Zen master who led the group meditations were blinded to their conditions, all adding to the strength of the findings. The mechanisms through which mindfulness may have contributed to the results obtained are not discussed, and future research would do well to investigate this. Further, whether the potency of meditation effects increase with increased meditation could be a fruitful avenue for future studies, along with replicating the research with a population of experienced therapists.

## Conclusions and future directions

The literature reviewed here would seem to suggest a central role for mindfulness in the work of the counselling psychologist. However, though research typically points to the positive influence of mindfulness on psychologists' professional practice, it is important to point out that several studies have supported Stanley et al.'s (2006) finding of general negative effects of mindfulness practise. For example Teasdale et al. (2000) found MBCT to be unhelpful to individuals who had experienced 2 previous depressive episodes, but very helpful to those who had experienced 3 or more, indicating the intricacies of the processes involved, and leading Teasdale, Segal and Williams (2003) to caution that mindfulness is not universally beneficial, and a level of care is needed in considering its application to various situations. Further, therapists in Nanda's (2005) study reported mindfulness to be a painful experience when focusing on negative emotions. The conclusion of Shapiro (1992) almost two decades ago, that the positive benefits of mindfulness outweigh the negatives, but such negative effects have been reported and need to be noted, would seem to adequately sum up the current literature.

Owing to its relative youth, the literature on mindfulness suffers from a number of methodological limitations, which have been highlighted in several previous reviews

(see Baer, 2007, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Though randomized controlled trials are beginning to emerge, the absence of rigorously controlled empirical evaluation is restrictive, while current positive evidence is constrained by small sample sizes. Broadly speaking, the development of the field would benefit greatly from increased methodological rigour (Brown et al., 2007). Further, Baer's (2007) review stresses the importance of sound methods for assessing mindfulness in clarifying its mechanisms of action, a call seconded by Hayes and Wilson (2003). Though recent self-report tools such as the MAAS show promising psychometric properties, it will take more widespread use of such measures to truly judge their efficacy, the results obtained by Stanley et al. (1996) using the MAAS being a case in point.

Looking to future avenues of research, many authors call for more rigorous and nuanced analyses of the role of mindfulness in therapeutic outcomes, to detail the specific elements that have positive effects (Hoffman & Asmundson, 2007). Leary and Tate (2007) propose the next generation of mindfulness research should begin to examine the individual components of mindfulness, in order to disentangle their various effects. One possible avenue of research that may be worth pursuing in this regard is delineating mindfulness from other forms of focused attention in therapists. Both Bishop et al. (2004) and Williams (2008) distinguish mindfulness from other forms of self-focused attention in therapists that may hinder work or even exacerbate distress.

Though Baer (2003) has proposed exposure, cognitive change, self-management, relaxation and acceptance as mechanisms of action, such hypotheses need further testing and verification. Brown et al. (2007) propose theoretical models examining the directional link between conditions that support mindfulness, mindfulness itself, processes explaining its effects, and relevant outcomes as being the next step for research in this regard. Dimidjian and Lineham (2003) suggest operationalisation of the qualities and behaviours emitted by a mindful therapist and empirically assessing the relation between these factors and treatment outcomes. Others, such as Schure et al. (2008), stress the importance of continued qualitative research to allow individuals to convey their individual experiences, advocating in-depth interviewing to build a fuller picture of the experience of mindfulness in practicing therapists.

The literature converges on the view of mindfulness as an inherent, universal human capacity (Brown & Ryan, 2004; Germer, 2005; Hayes & Shenk, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003), though nonetheless a skill that must be cultivated with practise (Bishop et al., 2004; Sternberg, 2000). Meditative practices are thought to be the most effective route

to the enhancement of mindfulness, though such training is described as being deceptively difficult, and comprised of many separate aspects (Bishop et al., 2004; Sternberg, 2000; Teasdale et al., 2003). The importance of firsthand experience of mindfulness practise on the part of the therapist in imparting such information to clients is emphasised by several authors (see Crane & Elias, 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Schure et al., 2008), though Epstein (1999) feels there is an inherent paradox in teaching mindfulness, and that learning is essentially undertaken by the individual. Many authors including Dimidjian and Lineham (2003), Grepmaier et al. (2007), Morgan and Morgan (2005) and Nanda (2005) strongly advocate the incorporation of mindfulness practices into training programs in future, given the indications of their potential for positive influence on therapeutic work, and personal benefits for psychologists and therapists. Though at this stage such a conclusion is based mainly on therapist self-report, Ladner (2005) proposes that research indicates that the qualities mindfulness helps bring to the therapeutic interaction facilitates meaningful, lasting change.

To conclude, the literature reviewed here is reflective of an emerging field, that is, the influence of mindfulness on psychologists and therapeutic work. Though this review adopts a necessarily broad consideration of the topic, it is felt that findings reported relate in a particular way to the work of the counselling psychologist. Kabat-Zinn (2003) states that the universe of mindfulness brings with it a whole new meaning to the word practice, one which, I feel, has the potential to contribute profoundly to the further development of counselling psychology.

## Epilogue

Looking at the literature that has emerged on mindfulness the over the past 2 years, in light of the above review, indicates some important trends. Not surprisingly, mindfulness continues to be an area of huge interest, with a recent issue of *The Humanist Psychologist* (2009) dedicated to mindfulness in psychology. A whole host of therapeutic interventions continue to be developed with mindfulness at their core. Notable in this regard is Paul Gilbert's (2010; Gilbert & Irons, 2005) 'compassion-focused therapy', which has become increasingly influential in working with issues of shame and self-criticism in clients.

There has undoubtedly been an increase in the number of studies exploring the impact of mindfulness on psychologists and therapists, both in a personal and professional sense. Several new voices are advocating the benefits of psychologists incorporating mindfulness practice into their lives and work (e.g. Kostanski & Hassad, 2008). However, of note, no new studies have emerged to look at this specifically in relation to counselling psychology practice or training. Whereas earlier studies tended to look at personal mindfulness practice in therapists, and how they felt this to impact on therapeutic practice, studies are increasingly investigating the impact of *teaching* mindfulness to therapists, on their therapeutic work.

Interestingly, it would seem that the majority of recent studies in this regard have looked at teaching mindfulness specifically to those training in psychology and psychotherapy, which was strongly recommended by researchers in the above review. A huge number of doctoral dissertations continue to emerge on the topic of mindfulness, and these too have tended to focus on incorporating mindfulness practice into therapist training, including training on clinical psychology courses. Such research points not just to the direct impact of mindfulness on the therapeutic encounter, but to enhancing clinical skills through trainees developing valuable tools for self-care.

Christopher & Maris (2010) review several qualitative studies looking at the impact of mindfulness training on trainee counsellors and psychotherapists, concluding that it has important implications for cultivating in students strategies of self-care that can help prevent burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatisation. Supporting this, Richards, Campenni, and Muse-Burke (2010) propose that mindfulness is a significant mediator between self-care and well-being in mental health professionals. Such

research typically supports recommendations to incorporate mindfulness practice into training programmes (see McCollum & Gehart, 2010; Greason & Caswell, 2009).

Looking at this within the UK context, Moore (2008) examined the impact of a short, structured course teaching skills for developing mindfulness in a group of clinical psychologists in training. He concluded that even brief mindfulness exercises could facilitate the development of personal understandings of mindfulness, recommending that such a format could allow mindfulness-based training in time-limited environments, such as psychology training placements within the NHS. In a more recent pilot study within the NHS, Rimes and Wingrove (2011) used questionnaires to examine the effects of an MBCT course on 20 trainee clinical psychologists, with results indicating a significant decrease in stress and rumination, and increases in self-compassion and mindfulness, with 85% reporting an impact on their clinical work.

The above two studies, though eliciting some qualitative data, have used survey-based approaches. A recent qualitative study by McCollum and Gehart (2010) took this a step further, examining the use of mindfulness meditation as a means of teaching therapeutic presence to beginning trainee counsellors. The authors conducted thematic analysis of trainees' journals, with findings indicating that meditation practice improved ability to be present, and to balance 'being' and 'doing' modes in therapy. Given the centrality of concepts such as presence, empathy and compassion to counselling training, and the inherent challenges of 'teaching' these, such applications of mindfulness would seem to indicate a valuable future direction.

Several recommendations in the above review centred on examining specific qualities and processes involved in mindfulness (Brown et al. 2007; Dimidjian & Lineham, 2003). In line with this, Greason and Caswell (2009) have examined the relationships between mindfulness, self-efficacy, attention and empathy in doctoral counselling students, with findings indicating mindfulness to be a significant predictor of counselling self-efficacy, with attention as the mediator of this relationship. Further, an interesting finding proposed by Kholooci (2008) suggests that mindfulness practice might help psychotherapists to avoid engaging in unhelpful countertransference, acting as a protective factor in this regard.

A common sentiment reported in the above studies was that mindfulness improved therapeutic work in part through trainees' increased understanding of themselves and their patterns of responding (Rimes & Wingrove, 2011), and the development of

acceptance and compassion for themselves (McCollum & Gehart, 2010). This would seem to support phenomenological findings in the above review (e.g. Nanda, 2005), which indicate that therapists' getting to know *themselves* better was a key feature of how mindfulness impacted on therapeutic work.

This ethos would seem to be reflected in a recent comprehensive APA book examining the integration of mindfulness into psychology (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). In it, Shapiro and Carlson (2009) explore mindfulness as integral to the therapeutic process, advocating that psychologists as well as clients connect with this form of awareness. Viewing mindfulness as a universal human capacity, Shapiro and Carlson (2009) propose it may be used to bridge the gap between therapist and client, recognising that we are all alike in our hopes and our needs. This would seem to be a worthy and fitting endeavour for the future development of counselling psychology.

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## Part Three: Professional Practice

Working with beliefs:

The importance of validation

## Prologue

From a theoretical appreciation of the importance of therapeutic presence, acceptance and non-judgement, to the challenge of implementing these in complex client work. The portfolio closes with an advanced case study, presenting an account of my therapeutic work with a client, which took place over a six-month period in 2010. This piece develops the portfolio theme in an experiential way, describing therapy that was centred on meaning, and our attempts to create a shared understanding of the client's experiences.

A central focus of the therapy described here was working with experiences of invalidation, and the consequences of the pervasive sense of self-doubt these engendered in the client, that of fearing his own thoughts and feelings. An important finding to emerge from the research study described above was the self-invalidating ways in which some young people presented their views, and further their seeming fears around their own destructive capabilities. It may be interesting to take what we know of these issues from the point of view of working with the individual, some of which is explored below, and use this to perhaps better understand the experiences of whole groups of people.

The therapy took a narrative CBT approach to working with these issues, acknowledging the importance of allowing the client to re-author his life story, to make sense of his experiences and, paradoxically, to accept the pain inherent in them rather than story it away.

## Part one: Introduction to the therapy

The following account describes therapeutic work that took place over sixteen sessions with an individual who I shall refer to here as Sam<sup>3</sup>.

### **Setting and referral**

I saw Sam through an Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIP) service within an NHS hospital. Sam had been referred to the service following a period of inpatient admission that ended 8 months prior to our meeting. Sam had been admitted for trying to hang himself, with reported delusional beliefs and hallucinatory experiences, resulting in a diagnosis of an acute psychotic episode from the inpatient psychiatrist. During this admission he conducted an extended assessment (6 sessions) with the consultant inpatient clinical psychologist, my supervisor, who concluded that Sam's difficulties were perhaps most helpfully understood in terms of extreme obsessional thinking. She referred him to the EIP service for continued outpatient work following discharge. Sam had been on this waiting list for 8 months when we met.

### **Client profile**

Sam was a 30-year-old white British man who had grown up with his parents and a younger brother. Sam's family were members of the Jehovah's Witness (JW) church, and he remained an active member. Sam had been married for 5 years, without children, and his wife was also a member of the church. Sam was in infrequent contact with his parents, and not seen them since prior to his inpatient admission, as he found his relationship with them strained and difficult. Skilled as a carpenter and having worked in this area since leaving school, Sam had been working part-time in a supermarket stockroom for the previous 2 years.

### **Presenting problem**

At the time of Sam's referral he was very low in mood, and was hearing 'voices' inside his head, which spoke negatively about others, including Sam's wife, and encouraged aggressive and violent behaviour, which he did not act on. When we met, Sam had been on anti-psychotic medication for 8 months, reported an improved mood, though

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<sup>3</sup> Name and identifying information have been altered to preserve anonymity

this dipped at times, and was hearing the voices only occasionally. He felt his main problem to be “my view of things”, including thinking he was useless, and attributing negative intentions and opinions to others.

### **Theoretical framework**

My work with Sam was guided by Rhodes and Jakes’ (2009) narrative CBT for psychosis, with elements of Morrison and colleagues’ (Morrison, Renton, Dunn, Williams, & Bentall, 2004) cognitive therapy for psychosis. Both of these models draw on the techniques of more traditional cognitive approaches, including those of Padesky (Greenberger & Padesky, 1995; Padesky, 1994) and Beck (1995), while situating them within holistic, flexible frameworks.

The cognitive model that forms the theoretical foundation for these approaches essentially proposes that an individual’s emotional reactions are determined by their perceptions of events. That is, it is not simply a given situation which determines how a person feels and reacts, but rather the way in which they *construe* that situation (Morrison et al., 2004). This model proposes that life experience leads people to form ‘assumptions’ about the world, including conditional beliefs (i.e. “if others knew what I was really like, they would reject me”) and rules of living (i.e. “I must always do what others ask me to”). ‘Schemas’ or ‘core beliefs’ refer to sets of unconditional beliefs (i.e. “I am worthless”) that are used to organise perceptions, and govern behaviour. In sum, an individual’s patterns of thinking are based on the attitudes and assumptions they hold, which developed from previous experience (Morrison et al., 2004).

Narrative CBT for psychosis (henceforth narrative CBT) is an integrated, flexible approach that combines narrative and solution-focused therapy with techniques from CBT, acknowledging the often complex needs of clients with a diagnosis of psychosis. It draws upon social constructivism (as outlined by Vygotsky, 1978), positing that each individual creates their own knowledge and meaning, based on their experiences within a social context. A central notion of narrative CBT is that people tend to follow or do what ‘fits’ with their worldview and beliefs, stressing the importance of understanding this worldview to be able to contextualise their problems. This echoes an interactionist stance, and Rhodes and Jakes (2009) indeed cite Mead (1934) and Goffman (1974) as influences. Thus it is important to enter the client’s worldview and look at situations from their unique viewpoint (Rhodes & Jakes, 2009).

Rhodes and Jakes (2009) describe 'frames' as similar to rules; general assumptions through which clients understand their life events. They further describe how clients may hold fast to these, even in the face of contradictory information, essentially, delusional thinking (Rhodes & Jakes, 2009). The authors suggest the importance of accepting these beliefs or assumptions, and rather than challenging them, focusing on working out what the implications of these ideas might be. Along with traditional cognitive therapy techniques, important therapeutic aspects of narrative CBT include mapping out and exploring the client's relationships with other people, and indeed other things, such as their relationships with 'voices' for example, and where possible, encouraging a sense of agency within these relationships (Rhodes & Jakes, 2009). Further, Rhodes and Jakes (2009) suggest paying careful attention to the language of the client, their narratives and ways of speaking, and to use their words in understanding problems, in this way 'joining with' the client. Therapeutic work often takes the form of potentially lengthy 'discussions' around just one topic (Rhodes & Jakes, 2009).

This therapy took place on a training placement, and my choice of therapeutic approach was closely guided by my supervisor's advice and experience, given that working with psychosis was a new field for me. There was a strong thinking aspect to Sam's presenting problems, including negative self-beliefs, rumination and obsessional thinking. A cognitive approach is the treatment of choice when working with problems of thinking, including those that would fall under the label 'psychosis' (Morrison et al., 2004; NICE, 2010; Rhodes & Jakes, 2009). Further, Sam appeared highly motivated to address his problems, necessary for the collaboration that a CBT approach requires, and I hoped that such collaboration would allow Sam a sense of agency in the process (Fowler, Garety, & Kuipers, 1995), discussed further below. Of note here, though I was guided by cognitive approaches for 'psychosis', this was not a term we used in therapy. Morrison et al. (2004) challenge the notion that there is a clear boundary between 'psychotic' and 'normal' individuals, proposing that 'psychotic' experiences such as delusions and hallucinations may be placed on a continuum with obsessive thinking, a view to which I subscribe and which led to my belief that such an approach was a good fit for my work with Sam.

### **Initial assessment**

Sam and I conducted an extended narrative assessment across several sessions, as outlined by Rhodes and Jakes (2009). The focus of this was on developing a rapport

with Sam, to build a picture of his worldview and understand his view of his current difficulties in this context. An important focus here was exploring Sam's upbringing, looking in detail at specific events and important memories to Sam, particularly around his relationship with his mother. We also explored Sam's current functioning and relationships, and his experiences over the year preceding his inpatient admission, during which his wellbeing had deteriorated to the point of his feeling suicidal. This allowed us to explore Sam's thinking styles, including the 'voices' he heard and his understanding of these. A further function of the assessment was for me to get a sense of Sam's way of being with me, his characteristic ways of communicating his experiences, to aid my understanding of his difficulties (Rhodes & Jakes, 2009).

### **Case formulation**

I formulated Sam's difficulties within a cognitive framework, as outlined by Dudley and Kuyken (2006) and Morrison et al. (2004) (see Appendix for diagram of formulation), adding to and modifying this throughout therapy. My understanding of Sam's difficulties was constructed collaboratively with him, and I shared my ideas and hypotheses with him throughout. Sam's description of his childhood painted a picture of conflict, avoidance and confusion. Sam's mother had a difficult upbringing (in social care), and she appeared consequently to struggle in bringing up Sam, her first child. Sam described he and his mother as always "clashing", though this was not the case with his younger brother. He reported that his father had tried to stay out of these arguments, though if forced to partake, always sided with his mother. It seemed Sam was positioned as the exploder within this difficult dynamic, which he reported left him feeling like "I'm the bad one". This culminated in Sam being asked to leave the family home aged 17. Sam described experiences growing up of always feeling blamed, of having his opinions disregarded, of things often not being spoken about at home, with incidents even being denied afterwards, which Sam found incredibly confusing and frustrating.

I hypothesised that Sam's relationship with his mother, his feelings of invalidation and never 'fitting in' at home, culminating in his being asked to leave, had resulted in his developing core beliefs around being 'bad', and that there was something 'wrong' with him, leading to his presentation with low self-worth and feelings of uselessness. It seemed that Sam had internalised these experiences of invalidation, leading to intense self-criticism and self-doubt. This was complicated by the JW doctrine that everyone is (and thus must be) essentially good, which I felt left Sam unable to acknowledge his

perceived 'badness'. Further, Sam referred several times to the JW idea that thinking is akin to doing, which I felt left Sam fearful of experiencing any 'negative' thoughts or emotions lest he act on them, likely exacerbating his distress (Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofmann, 2006).

These experiences and emotional reactions appeared to have set up several unhelpful cycles. For example, Sam having a 'bad' thought or feeling, such as feeling frustrated or angry with someone, triggered his belief that that he was 'bad', and negative emotion, which was then neutralised by externalising the negative thought to an outside source, such as his 'voices'. Sam found his experience of these 'voices' distressing, leading to further negative emotion that perpetuated his distress. Further, Sam's low self-esteem, coupled with his fear of expressing negative emotion or behaving in a 'bad' way, led to his typically withholding his views, and acting submissively with others, which often resulted in feelings of uselessness that perpetuated Sam's low self-esteem.

### **Contract and therapeutic aims**

Sam and I agreed to meet for 16 weekly 1-hour sessions, with reviews of progress at regular intervals. NICE (2010) guidelines state 16 sessions of CBT to be the minimum recommended for individuals presenting with a diagnosis of psychosis, and this was the standard protocol within the EIP service. It was mutually agreed that sessions would focus on Sam's goals of addressing his low self-esteem, his critical self-evaluations, and his expecting the worst from others. Based on my formulation of his difficulties at this stage, I was also focused on validating Sam's experiences, fostering trust in his own opinions, and increasing his sense of agency.

## **Part two: The development of therapy**

### **The pattern of therapy**

Sam and I met over sixteen sessions, which took place weekly, with the final session, a 'follow-up', taking place after a one-month break, which was advised by my supervisor to assess Sam's level of functioning follow completion of therapy. Sam was always on time for sessions, and called in advance to notify me that he would be unable to make the two sessions he cancelled, which we rescheduled for the following week.

## **Key content issues and therapeutic techniques**

Sam began our first session by describing the dinner table scene when his mother declared “either he goes or I go”, resulting in his being asked to leave home, and indeed this incident and Sam’s relationship with his mother formed the starting point for my formulation of Sam’s difficulties. Sam described his mother as “a bully who pinches you when no one’s looking”. Rhodes and Jakes (2009) highlight the importance of exploring the meaning of the metaphors clients use. In Sam’s description of his mother, there was the implication that she behaved differently when others were around, and further perhaps the idea that he would not be believed if he challenged her. A strong sense of helplessness and invalidation was conveyed with this, and I tentatively shared these thoughts with Sam in early sessions. This led to Sam recounting various childhood incidents when he felt let down, criticised, and that he “wasn’t being taken seriously”. He described how his mother denied the occurrence of certain incidents after they had happened, or reframed them, such as now remembering Sam *wanting* to leave home at 17. Sam described the intense confusion and frustration he felt at this, feelings that were conveyed as he spoke.

Along with exploring Sam’s relationship with his mother, I focused in early sessions on listening for positive experiences in Sam’s life, such as things he reported liking and enjoying, and reflected these back to him. These included the freedom Sam experienced after leaving home and how he enjoyed not answering to anyone, his love of the natural world, and of being alone, for example going for long walks in isolated areas. My intention with this was to validate these experiences as worthwhile, and to cultivate a self-awareness in Sam, advocated by Clark (2004) when working with clients experiencing self-doubt.

Another focus of early sessions was exploring in detail Sam’s difficulties over the year preceding his inpatient admission. Since early in their marriage, his wife Laura had been experiencing unusual medical problems including overwhelming weakness, twitching and fits (eventually diagnosed as psychosomatic). This had forced them to move many times as Laura blamed her health problems on where they were living, at one point insisting Sam throw away all his belongings, as Laura felt these were haunted and the source of her problems. Sam described a “downward spiral” in which he felt “useless” and a “failure” for being unable to help his wife, berating himself for being “in denial” about the severity of her problems while she “tried so hard.” The strain

of this time and Sam's intense self-criticism culminated in his attempting to hang himself.

Though Sam conveyed in words how difficult this time had been, emotionally he remained very neutral and even pleasant when describing it. Though Laura's behaviour had clearly made life very difficult for Sam, I was struck by his need to see himself as to blame, while Laura could seemingly do no wrong. This seemed to be repeating Sam's childhood pattern of being the "bad" one who was to blame for everything. I began to gently challenge Sam's negative self-statements regarding this time period and his relationship with Laura, by questioning their global nature, and highlighting exceptions, such as when he described doing something well (Rhodes & Jakes, 2009). Through our discussions, Sam began to reflect more emotionally on the difficulty of this time for him, expressing regret about the time "wasted" through Laura's illness, and how "exhausting" moving had been for him. I further elicited from Sam the actions he had taken that had allowed him improve over the previous year. Rhodes and Jakes (2009) highlight the importance of recruiting resources and strengths in the client from the beginning. Sam felt that cutting down his hours in work had been helpful in allowing him to feel less stressed, which I highlighted as a proactive and positive decision, emphasising Sam's agency in doing so.

Through these discussions we began to develop a shared understanding of Sam's characteristic thinking styles, which included viewing things in all-or-nothing terms, being intensely self-critical, feeling personally responsible when things went wrong, and a drive to make sense of things through ruminating on possible reasons or causes. As described by Morrison et al. (2004), individuals presenting with psychosis or obsessional thinking often demonstrate an intense need to make sense of things, including an intolerance of coincidence and a need for certainty. We labelled this "need to make sense of things", and Sam was able to explore its function and how it influenced his behaviour, acknowledging that when stressed he "desperately needed answers", such as thinking that he was being punished by God for not doing his tax returns when Laura's illness was at its worst. We discussed how though such thinking allowed Sam a sense of control at times of chaos and confusion, as he put it "when nothing else makes sense", it could be incredibly demanding on him, leaving him emotionally exhausted. I suggested that these thinking strategies seemed to be ways Sam had developed to cope with feelings of confusion and anxiety, which he felt made sense.

Similarly, in recounting his mother's behaviour, Sam typically conveyed a strong sense of confusion, such as describing his mother as a "strange woman" whose behaviour often didn't make any sense to him. He described her crying the first time she came to visit him after leaving home as the "strangest, most bizarre thing". Through exploring this, Sam and I linked this ongoing sense of confusion to the coping strategies we had already identified, particularly a need to make sense of things. I suggested that sometimes it can be easier to be preoccupied with trying to understand others' behaviour, than focusing on how painful and rejecting it can feel.

Sam described a "secret place" in his head where he would think derogatory and aggressive thoughts rather than express them to people. We explored the reasons behind this and Sam reported fearing that if he expressed any anger or 'negative' thoughts or feelings, he might lose control completely and end up hurting someone, though this had never happened. We linked this to Sam's fear of being a "bad" person, and his experiences of being positioned as the explosive one growing up. Using examples, we explored the impact of holding this belief for Sam, which was that he felt unable to express his opinions and thus "powerless" and "frustrated". I gently highlighted the all-or-nothing nature of this thinking; the options for Sam seemed to be either say nothing or be domineering, and we explored the possibility of there being a middle ground, as outlined by Leahy (2003), such as Sam sharing some of these feelings with those close to him, such as Laura.

Exploring a single incident in terms of the associated thoughts, emotions and behaviours is central to CBT work (Greenberger & Padesky, 1995). One incident that was examined in detail in therapy was an argument that Sam had with Laura the preceding week, in which they had argued over a household task, after which Laura refused to be in the same room as Sam for an entire day, leaving him feeling helpless. Exploring this in some detail allowed us to uncover and name some significant beliefs and rules of Sam's. In particular, through a process of Socratic questioning we uncovered Sam's belief that he was useless, and the consequent rule that he had to do things perfectly in order not to feel a failure, as well as the intense self-criticism that resulted if this was not possible. We linked this to Sam's experiences of feeling criticised and undermined growing up, and compared this process to how he now criticised himself.

In describing his not challenging Laura in the above argument, though he felt frustrated with her unreasonable behaviour, Sam framed this as due to his fear of the possible

consequences if he did, i.e. that he would explode, referring to our previous discussions around his fear of losing control. I was encouraged by Sam making this link, and framing the situation in this way, and felt it to be an important marker of progress. I hypothesised that earlier in therapy he may have claimed that he simply wasn't frustrated with Laura. We discussed the impact of his not saying anything in this instance; that he was left feeling "emotionally drained, frustrated, useless", and it was Sam who proposed he "try something different and see how it goes". Between this session and the next, Sam tested out telling Laura that they couldn't afford to go out for dinner when she asked, reporting that in the past he would have felt "cheap" and "no fun" had he done this. Laura reacted by agreeing with him, which Sam said gave him confidence to try this again, and left him feeling positive about taking a stand. Behavioural experiments are posited as a central point of *change* in CBT (Beck, 1995), and Sam reported being surprised that analysing his behaviour had been so useful, commenting that he had gotten good at "not exploring things" and "tucking stuff away".

As therapy continued, Sam reported feeling able to share some of the thoughts from his "secret place" more, and was noticing that as he expressed his opinions more, more people seemed to agree with him on various things. We discussed this perception in relation to Sam's growing sense of self-esteem, and how this enabled him to express himself more without fear of criticism. During this time, and building on the above progress, we began to explore the 'voices' Sam occasionally heard, which he perceived to be inside his head rather than outside. This, along with the nature of what the voices said, led me to think of them as misattributed thoughts and ideas of Sam's, that he did not feel able to acknowledge (Morrison et al., 2004). I wanted for us to together develop our understanding of Sam's thinking, which I felt we had to that point, before addressing his 'voices'. Sam reported finding their content disturbing as it was the opposite of how he really felt, such as just leaving everything and running away, leaving Laura, or being violent towards people. We spent some time discussing the fact that thoughts do not have to be 'true', or reflect how we are feeling deep down, and as humans we have the capacity to think whatever we want, and that it is only when we fear our thoughts that they have any power.

We began to tentatively explore the idea that these 'voices' may be thoughts of Sam's that he found it difficult to think about, understandable if he had assumed that there must be some 'truth' in them. Sam reported fearing that if they *were* thoughts, he might be more likely to act on them, citing previous instances of acting on "bad" thoughts by

drinking alcohol, smoking, and looking at pornography. I elicited from Sam his opinion on the worst things he remembered ever thinking. Sam recalled thinking “I’m going to kill him” after somebody had taken advantage of him. We used this as evidence that Sam did not, in fact, always act on his thoughts. And in fact, acknowledging a thought, rather than meaning that he then had to act on it, actually gave Sam the power to *choose* what to do with it.

We incorporated scheduled review sessions after six and then twelve sessions, during which we discussed how Sam was finding the process of therapy, which led to some significant insights, explored below. Sam’s aims for therapy evolved throughout, from continuing to address “my view of things” as “the main problem”, to a desire to try out different behaviours and see the impact of these, to developing a “greater knowledge and understanding of myself”.

### **Therapeutic process and struggles encountered**

In an early progress review, Sam shared that he often felt he was “rabbiting on” in sessions and that “what I say ends up dominating what we talk about”. Further, he reported worrying that he was wasting time by talking about the wrong thing, given that I knew “more about these things” than him. We spent some time reflecting on these thoughts and the anxious feelings that accompanied them. I proposed understanding these feelings in the context of the self-doubt he had so often felt growing up, and the impact this had on his own belief in his views, highlighting this as a valuable opportunity for us to see these interpersonal tendencies ‘in action’ (Gilbert & Leahy, 2007). We agreed that Sam knew more about his life than I ever could, and thus he would likely know what was most valuable to discuss in sessions. Further, if he felt unsure or anxious, he could share these feelings with me and we could address it. Approaching CBT in a ‘person-centred’ way such as this felt important with Sam, and is supported by Chadwick (2006) when working with psychosis.

Sam also disclosed in this early review that he had felt reluctant to open up for fear of being “ridiculed”, and how this had limited what he had discussed previously. Though we had explored Sam’s fear of being criticised and low self-esteem, linking this to experiences of being criticised by his mother, for it to emerge in the therapeutic relationship allowed us to explore this fear in a far more immediate way. I reflected that I had noticed Sam at times appeared to tense when I began to speak, as though he feared what I was going to say. We explored this in relation to his fear that I might

confirm there was something “wrong” with him. We made an agreement that, in this space, Sam was free to say anything he wanted, without the possibility of judgement from me, at which he looked visibly relieved, and I reflected back my sense that he needed ‘permission’ from me in this regard. Sam became noticeably more comfortable and forthright in responding to my inquiries about his opinions of therapy and our relationship as we progressed.

However, though Sam reported feeling able to open up after this, there remained a sense at times that Sam would go along with me, or choose not to express his disagreement with me. I was aware of Sam’s pleasing me and being a ‘good’ client, often simply agreeing with what I said. We discussed the impact for Sam of not expressing these feelings, as above, and this was a topic we returned to throughout.

Perhaps the most significant process that occurred between Sam and I was Sam’s focus on his parents’ behaviour as a means of understanding or ‘explaining’ his own, and my responses, which were at times to challenge this. We explored at some length Sam’s relationship with his parents, and particularly his mother, throughout his teenage years. Intertwined with this was his story of his own “bad” behaviour as a teenager and young adult, such as smoking, drinking, and looking at pornography. Sam described these as his “wild” years, often speaking about his behaviour in a confessional way, before shifting to a focus on his mother’s parenting and how this was to blame for his ‘transgressions’. Sam spoke at length on his parents’ shortcomings, such as not always sticking to church rules, or following them out of a sense of obligation rather than “love for God”. Sam described becoming very involved with the church from an early age, learning a sense of right and wrong and “how to act” from the Bible. I hypothesised that this was seeking the safety and certainty he was not experiencing at home. Sam expressed disappointment with his parents, and that he “had to do their job for them”, often painting an idealised view of how things should have been.

Essentially, my view of the above was that Sam was very understandably struggling to cope with the immense pain of what he perceived as his mother’s rejection, and her confusing and invalidating treatment. Further, the guilt and fear engendered in Sam by his resulting beliefs that he was ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’, confirmed by his behaviour, seemed too much for him to tolerate (made worse by his religious convictions). This struggle resulted in his driving need to make sense of everything, to blame his parents, to position himself as a morally righteous person. Nonetheless, I struggled at times during this part of therapy to stay with this knowledge and help Sam to explore the meaning

and the pain behind his accounts, as advocated by Morrison et al. (2004). I found myself feeling frustrated with him at times, and challenging some of his more unreasonable assertions. Ironically, had Sam's beliefs been more 'unusual', I believe I would not have struggled to stay with the meaning behind them, but Sam's righteous and moralistic tone and the overtly religious content at times pulled me away from the suffering he was communicating underneath and into unhelpful debates with him. At the time, I felt I was providing an alternative, perhaps more 'realistic' perspective on the situation, to alert Sam to the biased nature of his thinking, as his view of his parents' behaviour was certainly distressing to him. However on reflection, often in supervision, I came to understand it more as my frustration with Sam's moralising and blaming stance. Though this was incredibly useful in understanding how people in Sam's life may have reacted to his way of coping, by assuming a challenging role (just like his mother), by pushing Sam to convince me of things, I likely contributed to his putting more energy into these beliefs. Conversely, Knight (2009) suggests that taking the focus off the client having to 'defend' their ideas or beliefs creates space for these to be explored and understood, empowering the client. McGourty (2009) makes the valuable point that it is possible to accept the *feelings* associated with a belief, without having to acknowledge its 'truth'.

When I became aware of this unhelpful pattern, I focused in session on cultivating a compassionate understanding of Sam's experiences and fully 'staying with' him, working with him to acknowledge and feel the pain and the fear that were conveyed in these experiences. I also shared with Sam my thoughts that I seemed to be taking on a 'doubting' role, which I felt pushed him to explain himself to me, and sought his opinion on this. Sam reported that he had at times felt that perhaps I didn't quite understand the parental standards demanded by his religion. Notably, as soon as I focused fully on simply hearing and validating Sam's difficult experiences, he lessened his focus on 'how bad things were' and I felt we were much better able to explore things in a useful way, possibly facilitated by the subtle change in process between us, and my focus on acceptance (Gilbert & Leahy, 2007). However, it may simply have been that Sam's 'version of events' had finally been heard. Sam described how being able to tell someone everything that had happened had felt like a huge relief. He reported that he had always secretly doubted his memories, worrying that his mother was right and he was the one that caused all the trouble. We discussed how Sam was made to feel his reactions to situations growing up were somehow 'wrong', or due to a problem within him, and reframed them rather as valid emotional responses.

Whatever the reason, there was a marked shift into more emotional content in our later sessions. Sam's talk about his parents took on a very different tone, as he described their asking him to make the decision to leave home as the "most painful thing", that "excluded me from being human". He described this as "the worst part of my life" when "hope ended", questioning "if you love someone, why would you push them away?" Sam described not feeling loved by his mother, and that he had been a trial as her first child. He expressed his anger and confusion at his father in how he coped, which was to turn the other way. I viewed this shift from a focus on blaming his parents to expressing the pain and hurt he felt as huge progress.

We began to explore how Sam tried to make some sense of his mother's behaviour by understanding it as a "battle" between Sam and her, with Sam's parents being "wrong" while Sam reported turning to church teachings and developing "a strong sense of how things should be" in response to this. I hypothesised that Sam had developed this view of the relationship as a way of coping with the pain of his mother's treatment, and of empowering himself. This battle had in a sense continued as Sam tried to convince me of their wrongness and his rightness. However from being 'in' this process earlier in therapy, we had moved outside it and were able to gain from it important insights into Sam's ways of coping. We discussed Sam's approach as a very understandable way of coping with these experiences, but also of the importance of integrating positive and negative views of Sam's parents in allowing Sam to understand and move on with his life.

Towards the end of therapy Sam reported that he had been reflecting on the positive aspects of his childhood, and asked that we spend some time in session exploring these. Sam recalled happy memories of growing up in the countryside and recounted positive times spent with his father. I viewed this shift as a sign of integration and Sam being in touch with his feelings, as opposed to perhaps just needing everything to be 'ok', which had led to emotional avoidance in the past. My thinking was influenced by the fact that, interspersed with these happy memories, Sam reflected on how sad it was to remember this, and that he was not in contact with his family much now.

## Part three: Discussion and evaluation

### **The end of therapy and evaluation of the work**

Sam and I finished our work together as planned at 16 sessions. Though there was the option of extending within the service, we had mutually decided at our second review that Sam had made significant progress in understanding the unhelpful patterns of thinking that had contributed to his deterioration the previous year, and had made significant attempts at trying out more helpful approaches, which he would continue to do. Sam would remain in touch with a care coordinator in the EIP service as a source of ongoing support. Further, following discussions in therapy, we had mutually agreed that I would refer Sam and Laura for couples therapy within the service. I felt that to build on the individual work Sam had done by exploring these same process in the context of his relationship could be incredibly valuable.

At our follow-up session, Sam revealed that in the month since we had last met, he had organised a meeting with his parents, who he had not seen in almost a year. During this he explained to them how he had felt having to leave home, which it seemed they had not fully comprehended before. We discussed this as a good example of the benefits of Sam communicating how he was feeling, so that people could understand the impact of their behaviour on him, and I felt it to be a hugely valuable example of this for Sam. Sam reported that he had been trying to express how he felt more in his life, which he was finding to be self-reinforcing. He reported feeling able now to “question things more rather than feel not good enough”, which I took as a positive reflection of both his growing sense of his own voice, and his strengthening self-esteem. Sam further reported attacking himself less, and “not feeling the need to take the blame” so much, which allowed him to trust himself more, be more confident of his feelings, and “stop second guessing” himself.

Sam’s therapy led to some pivotal insights regarding his thinking patterns, which, importantly, he was able to translate into changes in his thinking, some of which had proved to be very helpful and thus self-reinforcing. However, I was left with the feeling that, in Sam’s case, being provided a space to explore his upbringing, and have his experience of it validated, was perhaps the most valuable aspect of therapy. This re-authoring of a client’s narrative may be especially pertinent when working with obsessive beliefs or presentations of psychosis (Rhodes & Jakes, 2009), as there is often an ‘unheard’ aspect to experience that leads to such stuckness. Sam reported the

most helpful aspect of our work to have been the idea that “if that’s how I felt, then that is how it was”, referring to our work on validating his feelings, simply as feelings, that were real and were there and could not be taken away by others’ reactions.

### **Use of supervision**

As discussed, my supervisor had conducted an extended 6-session assessment with Sam while he was an inpatient, and so had a good understanding of his presentation, which was hugely beneficial for me in her supervision of my work, and I think allowed Sam and I to move to the essence of his problems more quickly than we would have done otherwise. It was further a somewhat unique and very valuable opportunity to compare Sam’s current presentation to my supervisor’s understanding of him when he was in a state of acute distress. This elucidated the coping mechanisms Sam typically employed (which were evidently not working sufficiently when he was admitted), and thus notified me to their presence in our sessions, which I might otherwise have missed. For example, my supervisor described how Sam treated the inpatient assessment as a confessional of sorts, convincing her of how ‘bad’ he was. When I met Sam however, he was less in touch with these painful thoughts, on the surface coping with them through a focus on others’ behaviour and assuming a morally superior attitude. Had I not had this information, our therapy may have taken a considerably different path, which was interesting to reflect upon.

Supervision was central in bringing my awareness to the role I was assuming in sessions with Sam, as discussed above. Even after I became aware of this and was working with this knowledge in session, there continued to be times when my supervisor would highlight how I was implicitly sympathising with Sam’s mother, and the impact of this for him. I feel the function of this input in illuminating these processes for me to have been invaluable. I found consulting my supervisor on what aspects of this process to share with Sam, and what would be unhelpful to share (in this case my feelings of frustration towards him) to be an essential resource. Overall, the experience highlighted the necessity of supportive supervision when working with complex presentations.

### **Professional and personal learning**

Of the many important learnings I feel I have taken from this work, both the most illuminating and most challenging relates to my own process and the potential for me to

assume a critical parental role in therapy. I found myself quite surprised and somewhat disappointed when I was made aware of this dyadic pattern, as I had centralised the importance of validating Sam's view of the world. It demonstrates, I believe, the challenge of being the therapist that we want to be for our client, and, perhaps the real challenge, recognising when we are not. The reactive patterns we as therapists bring into the therapeutic encounter or that the client elicits in us may be viewed as ingrained, if unknown, ways of being, perhaps explaining why we fall into them despite every intention not to, and the need to remain always mindful in this regard.

It is reasonable to assume also that my adopting this role was elicited in some part by Sam's own beliefs and behaviour in session, highlighting the power of the client's beliefs in influencing their environment. And further, the power of therapy to bring these patterns to a client's awareness, and through exploration, shift them from entrenched ways of being. Lastly, my work with Sam has taught me in a way only experiential learning can the importance of sourcing and working with the meaning behind a client's ideas and beliefs, as opposed to needing to make sense of or challenging these. This may be particularly relevant when working with entrenched beliefs, such as those held by individuals with a presentation of psychosis or obsessional thinking, but would seem to extend beyond this to be a guiding principle for all client work.

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## Appendix: Cognitive formulation

### Predisposing factors

- “Clashing” with mother, not being defended by father, leading to feelings of rejection.
- Childhood experiences of being put down, criticised, not “being taken seriously”, being blamed for problems within the family leading to self-invalidation.
- Parents avoiding or denying importance issues, giving confusing and conflicting messages, leading to self-doubt.
- Church teaching from an early age that people are “good” and that thinking is akin to doing.
- Being positioned as the explosive one at home, leading to fear of self as aggressive.

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### Core beliefs

- I’m bad
- There is something wrong with me

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### Assumptions – Conditional beliefs – Rules of living

- I must always be good, if not, I am wholly bad person.
- I must try to make sense of everything, as uncertainly is terrifying.
- If I have ‘bad’ thoughts, then I am a bad person.
- If I do not achieve things and do things perfectly, then I am useless.

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### Compensatory strategies

- Always be good, put others first, always do what my wife wants
- Strive to achieve to avoid feeling useless.
- Externalise ‘negative’ impulses or thoughts to other people (e.g. morally superior attitude)/ outside sources (e.g. voices).
- Look for meaning in everything to ease anxiety around the world being a confusing place.

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### Precipitating factors

- Wife’s illness and subsequent moving meant difficulty finding a house / job.
- Inability to feel like a “good” husband and provider.

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### Perpetuating factors

- Wife’s similar religious background, need to see people as good etc.
- Wife’s criticism at times feeds into low self-esteem.
- Parents different account of past leads to ongoing frustration/ confusion.