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Goldsmiths, University of London

**The Place of Trust: Young Masculinities,
Relationality and Everyday Violence**

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**A thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths,
University of London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, January
2017**

Declaration

I declare that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of Goldsmiths, University of London is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated otherwise.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and friendship of a number of people. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Professor Vic Seidler for his continual patience, openness, probing questions, encouragement but ultimately belief in the project and in the little inklings I had throughout the research process that I was unsure how to approach and that I often did not think were worthy of further exploration in an academic context. A huge thank you to my mum as well, for her continued support and similar belief that the project was worthwhile in its undertaking.

This project and what it represents was as much about working as a youth worker and building relationships with young people as it was about conducting academic and sociological research, so big props to Chris for his friendship, guidance and belief in a relational practice working with young men, Ands for many hours of amusement, friendship, and sociological insight and George for sharing his years of experience working with young people and practice with me. Ian, Marvin and Krystal who all supported me as a youth worker, and I hope I gave support to them.

The Sociology department and community at Goldsmiths, University of London has been a wonderful home, and I give particular thanks to Les Back and Allison Rooke for their helpful and constructive comments on the thesis and the Embodied Narratives and NYLON research groups that I shared several years of PhD life with, especially Katharina Eist, Anna Bull and Miranda Iossifidis for their friendship. Lastly, love and thanks to my partner Carina for her support and critical insights.

Abstract

This thesis argues for a re-thinking around young men, masculinities and urban cultures. It asks how are young masculinities practiced and what are the tensions that arise for young men in maintaining their gender identity? As a five-year ethnographic study of young men conducted through youth work spaces in South London, it gives a detailed account of the ways young men do gender and the relational practices through which vernacular cultures are made, maintained and (re)produced. Young masculinities are over-determined in the urban imagination readily explained through crime, gangs and violence and stereotypical representations of cultural productions and resistance. Bringing together literatures on urban cultures and space, young men in urban contexts, and masculinities it offers an understanding of how young men and masculinities can be better understood in relation to urban cultures and spaces. Moving across four youth work projects it examines the inter-personal and group relationships amongst young men giving an account of their emotional life, to show how belongings are practiced and re-made in the active production of urban multicultural. Young men carry their bodies in certain ways and embody distrust operating an instrumental relationship to language. But these practices are also active in building relationships and are used as ways to address uncertainties and develop knowledge in gendered ways. The thesis shows how young men navigate their peer relationships and the complex belongings of urban life through navigating exclusions and threats and remaking local identities linked to place whilst focusing on their futures, by maintaining codes of humour, respect and trust.

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Preface

This thesis develops understandings about young working class men, masculinities and the way they build relationships. This preface section serves as a more personal introduction for the reader, narrating my journey coming to, and learning through a five-year engagement with young men as a youth worker. In doing this I show how my original ideas around the project changed and resulted in this account, where I feel, at least more comfortable in representing the young men I worked with and the times and spaces we shared.

I started this research with ideas of conducting an interview-based project, where I would identify a field-site, build some relationships and get on with doing the interviews. These initial ideas were questioned as soon as I began my fieldwork as a youth worker. Bodies felt closed off, language wasn't forthcoming, young men's bodily rhythms, their looks and quick answers questioned my place. Talk amongst them was similarly structured, competitive, short, questioning one another's experience. In youth work spaces, often defined by competitive gendered dynamics, young men drew on strategies of hiding weakness and promoting more certain, unflinching bodies. These early experiences opened up a tension between simple ideas of a shared language and the more complex relations of difference, place and belonging.

The body I found myself adopting mirrored those of young men, a body in search of respect, unsure, aware that trust was not automatic. The processes of bodily respect and embodied distrust in both youth work and the wider spaces we shared were antithetical to my ideas around quickly building trust; I did not want to challenge young men, yet I was drawn into group situations where I was one of them. These experiences led me to question my approach and consider the methods I was using in more detail in relation to what my original project goals had been.

In my consideration of an academic project and its separation from lived experiences I had not expected to be tested, and had relied upon developing trust through building a quick rapport on account of my perceived local identity. From this my academic framing uncritically took trust as a given. Yet this initial language based approach would have worked if I had spent a year or two doing research on knife crime and gangs, worked from interview data and written it up. Reflecting now, over my research experiences and the focus of much of the literature, I could have written a very different thesis than the representation I do make here about the same young men. As I did my initial 'fieldwork' and thought more about the relationships young men engaged in, those I was, and the idea of violence, the latter, as a research object framed through ideas of knife crime and gangs, started to unravel. These were less sociological and more policy-constructed objects, that is they were influential and came to frame public understandings and the objectives of youth work projects (in more or less direct ways) yet they did not attend to young men's relations or experiences.

What moved me away from these objects was the way young men spoke about them. In early Southgrove youth work sessions we discussed local issues and I had conversations with many young men about gangs, often getting the similar types of responses. Young men talked with bravado not about what they had done but about what they knew, whether they were involved or not. As a researcher posing questions I was asking them what they knew and when talking about violence young men were often keen to give as good an answer as they could. Whether they were trying to prove something as Lamar did, bashfully showing me who he knew on YouTube videos now serving jail time, or in a gang programme I came to run young men (who were not involved in gangs but were the only people the recruitment drive had managed to engage) talking disparagingly about those who were involved in 'causing trouble'; talk about violence rarely brought out questions or fears. Unsurprisingly perhaps, a more apt strategy when faced with violence is to take affirmative action. Avoid it or face it. Few young men had the researcher's time for navel-gazing. As Jamal, one of the more physically imposing and also reflective and

emotionally literate boys I worked with said to me, 'You have to back yourself. I go out in the morning at weekends, then get home before all the trouble starts'. His strategy was avoidance, but, 'because we're boys', he was matter of fact about it.

I became more interested in the dynamics that I found across the four youth work projects I worked in, the narratives young men told at different times and in different contexts, and the way they navigated themselves and their bodies in urban environments and amongst peers where real fears and mythical threats coexisted. My second guiding insight developed from this focus, and what I found in four South London youth work projects, as I was moved across them by changing youth work directives in search of 'the gang' towards 'ending youth violence' were spaces of social interaction, groups of young men defined by myriad social processes, embodied routines, bravados mixed in with uncertainties, and complex processes of belonging.

Throughout this project I built relationships with young men and learned the possibilities within these and also the limits. Respect and trust had to be earned but we often found terms beyond our original expectations of one another, and other times through the limits of access and different pathways these relationships suddenly disappeared.

1 Young men, masculinities, urban cultures and trust

Part 1: Difference and the right to the city

Introduction

This research explores the ways young working class young men build and maintain relationships in South London. I have conducted it through years of working with young men as a youth worker and the research is the product of the relationships built during a five year period during this time and drawing on four of the projects that I worked at between 2010 and 2015. The focus of this thesis is to develop a better understanding of the way gender, and specifically masculinities, are experienced and practiced by young men in relation to urban cultures in Britain, and more specifically the relationship between young, super-diverse masculinities and trust.

The research began as an investigation into young men's experiences of violence and specifically in relation to growing fears over 'youth violence' and what came to be known as the 'summer of knife crime' in 2008 (BBC 2008). I was interested in how we think about the relationship between young masculinities and violence and the ways young men navigated the threat of violence, real or imagined in their lives. But during the course of building relationships with young men the focus of the research moved beyond this. My early fieldwork experiences working with young men suggested to me that 'knife crime' and 'gangs' were epiphenomenal in the way violence operated in young men's lives and urban spaces and as such were ideological objects and reductive of young people's, especially young men's, identities and subjectivities. Furthermore the uncertainty and

distrust young men showed around everyday interactions within their peer groups and with youth workers led me to develop an interest in the interpersonal relationships young men practiced with their peers and the importance of trust and respect to the ways they practiced masculinities. Towards making clear the context for, and objectives of this project I want to start with a moment that was directly and indirectly experienced by all the young men I work with and that literally and metaphorically punctuated the period in which we knew one another.

In 2011 what have come to be known as the UK riots brought about an often one-sided debate over the causes and culprits of 'broken Britain' (BBC 2010). Early commentary fanned the discursive flames that stereotype, racialise, and further disempower all those deemed to be societies 'revolting subjects' (Tyler 2013). After disturbances on the Saturday and Sunday nights following the police shooting of Mark Duggan, an event which remains debated and shrouded in withheld information¹, I was doing youth work on the Southgrove estate.

It was the summer holidays and there were considerably fewer young people than we had expected; presently news began to filter through via text and instant messages that trouble was flaring in nearby areas. The youth club was closed early and did not reopen on the following two days. Ironically there was volatility in the United States (US) at this same time, known as black Monday, as US and global stock markets began to crash in the continuing global economic crisis of neoliberalism.

But the economic crisis foisted upon us by neoliberalism, the privatisation and disinvestment in public services, the unfair levy of austerity politics in

¹ Importantly *who* Mark Duggan was remains debated. Longstanding youth worker Clasford Sterling MBE from the Broadwater Farm estate casts doubt on the police representation of Duggan as a gangster, having known him since he was a child (BBC 2016). The Broadwater farm Estate riots of 1985, and the murder of PC Blakelock during them marks the Estate as something of a symbolic place around relations between residents (and more widely black and disenfranchised communities) and police. This remaining 'wound', histories of wrongs and mistrust, is something that Duggan's sister suggests he and his friends grew up in the shadow of, and paying for. This misrecognition of either side is something that is emblematic of the overall context of this thesis.

the UK and the rioting in cities and towns in 2011 are not disconnected phenomena (Allen et al. 2013). The 2011 riots were used to make changes to youth work that were already taking place, but were now recklessly translated into policy and hurriedly put into practice. This included an increased focus on the prevalence of gangs as widely affecting young people in urban centres and as a significant social problem, resulting in Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) teams being set up across several London boroughs. Directly channelling funding to these objectives went hand in hand with cuts to youth work services more widely and further reducing open access provisions for many young people. It also meant I was asked to work in the Denhill site on one of these newly formed teams, thus influencing the focus of this research.

The question remains as to how we explain such a widespread, and longstanding outpouring of resentment and rage (McKenzie 2013) in multiple urban locales, across ages, and cultural differences; were the riots political? Post-2011, productions such as *Riots Reframed* (Voiceover Productions 2013) have further questioned the simplistic representations of both the riots and urban cultures, adding nuance and a political voice. This continued discussion shows the riots have 'extended in time' and cannot simply be considered as 'events' explained by 'criminality' (Guardian 2011a, Millington 2016). But more importantly here why do I invoke the here as a starting point to talk about young men, masculinities and urban cultures? As Lisa McKenzie (2013) shows the riots are phenomena directly connected to longstanding class inequality and prejudice in Britain; significantly one of the negative and ideological representations reinforced through this prejudice is the figure of the urban male looter, hoody, gang member, thus also bringing questions of gender to the fore. Young men figure almost ubiquitously, if often implicitly, in representations of social disorder and urban criminality, creating a stigma and fear around their presence, and situating them in a web of already existing social and cultural relations.

The riots had a direct effect on many of the young men I worked with: some through involvement, more through missing the youth club on those

days, and likely all through the continuing and reactive changes to social provisions for young people and the on-going stigmatisation that is imposed on particular subjects in neoliberal Britain². Some of the young men I worked with were present amongst the disorder that night, as observers, as part of the crowd. If they were not there all of the young men I worked with knew people who were and most felt the after effects in some way of an increased focus on those who *look* like culprits. Most of the young men I worked with had stories of being stopped and searched and it happened to some of them a lot.

Many young people I was working with at the time felt their voices were not being heard in the coverage of the riots, and while there was less surprise at the events amongst them than the feigned horror offered by official political and mainstream media responses, this does not mean they were apologists for these events or held uniform opinions. The relationships they participated in and maintained in everyday contexts are caricatured by the representational and symbolic inseparability of 'race', criminality' and the 'inner city' (Millington 2016) and the associated focus on youth that the riots brought. Yet these representations also inform the social and cultural milieu and local contexts of everyday life. This does not mean that young people are simply victims of these circumstances, or feel that these circumstances as I present them necessarily define their lives. But they had little trust of those who would tell them, and everyone else, exactly who they were.

After speaking to many young men in the weeks and months after the riots, reading media coverage, talking with university and youth work colleagues and later attending several events on the riots, including work with a local school, I came to a realisation about my own research. The young men I worked with didn't mind me, and relationally they had the measure of me at least as much as I had of them, but many of them didn't trust me. Continuing with the singular focus of violence imposed into their lives appeared a clear act of symbolic violence and confirmed to me the

² In her ethnography *The Asian Gang*, Alexander (2000: xiii) talks about this as something the young Asian men she knew lived with on "an everyday basis".

importance of a move away from a fetishistic focus on violence and young working class men (James 2015), and towards the experiences of their everyday lives in relation to the urban spaces they inhabited.

How then do we think about young men, masculinities and urban cultures? Towards both developing and answering this question this thesis unfolds through an engagement with literatures on urban cultures and space, young men in urban contexts, and masculinities, to offer an understanding of how young men and masculinities have been conceived and might be re-imagined in relation to urban cultures and spaces. It takes an ethnographic approach as both method and as an epistemological perspective, towards an up-close engagement with particular contexts over a sustained time period, and a commitment towards understanding people's everyday practices and behaviours within these as constitutive of social life (Gidley 2013). More specifically the research draws on my engagement with young men in youth work spaces towards developing what I term a relational ethnography³ as a research practice focused on masculinities and difference.

The importance of building relationships with young men both as a way of working with them and also building trust, and thus as a process of *doing* gender, is central to the objectives and output of the thesis. I argue that this process of engaging in and developing relationships as method and mode of conducting ethnography, and as distinct from participant observation, is a crucial lens and practice for researching masculinities and for the presentation of the ethnography in the substantive and analytical chapters. This methodology develops a focus on the tensions young men navigate and embody in doing gender, towards considering ideas of different masculinities and the different levels of experience that make up young masculinities. The thesis looks to understand the tensions apparent here, between personal biography and wider historical and social

³ This term and an explanation of this as an approach to social research has been used by Desmond (2014). However I do not follow his approach here. There are some similarities and considering the way his approach might work with my own is beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice to say I am interested in the processes of relationships and use the term relational in this relation to this.

processes for young men (Mills 1959), particularly the ways hegemonic discourses of urban youth and masculinity are both enacted and resisted and the emotional tensions this creates.

These theoretical framings lead me to ask the following questions: what types of masculinities are available for young men? How are these both practiced and re-made in relation to vernacular cultures? What are the emotional tensions that arise for young men in relation to these gender practices?

Youth services: clubs, projects, spaces and practice

A note on the terminology used to describe youth work to provide some clarity for the reader. Throughout this thesis I use several terms to refer to these services provided for young people, including youth services, youth work projects, youth clubs, youth work spaces, and youth work practice. These are used to distinguish different meanings or contexts that I experienced as a youth worker.

Youth services refer to central or local governmental and not-for-profit provision of youth workers and youth clubs, together designating a bureaucratised and neo-liberalised sector of public service provision and related set of expected working practices. Youth work projects signal contexts characterised by the professional presence of the youth worker actively working with young people, either in the youth club and/ or the local area, for example doing outreach work. Youth club signals the physical spaces of the community centres or the bus that are detailed throughout the thesis. Youth work sessions are the individual daily and weekly sessions I worked. Youth work spaces refer to the particular spaces that existed when doing youth work, while *on* the wider project, in the specific club, characterised by who was there at that time, the dynamic and the relationships built and maintained. These spaces themselves being characterised by multiple temporalities and spatialities. Youth work practice is the practicing and engaging in a youth work conceived of as a

radical and alternative social educational practice, and often although in tension with the directives of youth services.

Throughout the thesis I draw on all of these terms, however I often use youth work spaces in place of youth work projects or youth clubs which designates the more active processes of engagement and relationality that were present in that situation, and not as simply characterised by the physical club or local area.

South London histories, East and West

The history and social fabric of the riverside stretches of South East London and the politics of settlement within the boroughs that extend southwards has long been a topic for writers, journalists and researchers. Historically the section of London extending directly south of the River Thames from Westminster, and what we presently know as Southwark, was known as a den of iniquity, the site of vice and pleasure, including the streets and alleys of *Oliver Twist* and a dockside industry to the east now called Deptford (Porter 1994: 269).

I worked on three estates in this area, lying little more than half a mile apart but located in different boroughs, with one straddling a borough boundary meaning young people head in opposing directions to school depending on which part of the estate they live in. A few hundred metres further east along the bank of the Thames a third borough boundary appears, while across the river on the Isle of Dogs the monuments of global capitalism at Canary Wharf form a near constantly visible skyline.

The history of this stretch of riverside like that of the capital is intimately connected with histories of imperialism and trade and was historically dominated by a combination of hard dockyard labour and industrial manufacturing (Back 1996). Known as the larder of London during the industrial revolution due to its positioning on the Thames the southern riverside saw the birth of several large companies, including the East India Company, and was renowned for importing foodstuffs from around the

world. As Evans (2006) notes dockside labour was both much needed but also insecure, and allocated based on either religious or kin affiliations and led to the development of a tight-knit white working class community.

The rate of urbanisation coupled with a rapid population growth in the late nineteenth century resulted in distinct and longstanding patterns of social segregation, with working class settlements developing to separate slums along the river banks from developing middle class suburbs further to the south, so that by the turn of the twentieth century a complete division had occurred between classes (Back 1996). A period of stability followed but the inevitable decline of empire also meant decline within those areas that had prospered: manufacturing industries ceased, slums were cleared and outward migration followed (Porter 1994), with this instability somewhat halted by international migrants arriving from Jamaica (Hewitt 1986). A period of social housing development followed that looked to build a better future for working people, resulting in the construction of two of the estates featured here and conceived as new, utopian urban environments (Gidley 2013). Shifting forward to the present moment, amidst redevelopment schemes and pockets of gentrification the urban landscape is still dominated by high rise blocks, a mix of remaining post-war and some recently redeveloped council estates, with these now associated with social problems and decline.

These industrial histories and the communities that developed around them, and more recently through the Greater London Council's allocation policies rooted in ideas of community empowerment that allowed local residents to be involved in the selection of incoming residents (Keith 2005), has meant that within the wider area particular pockets and tropes of white working class communities have remained. They have been the study of several in-depth ethnographies focusing on class, gender, 'race' and the complex relationships and belongings lived out through processes of social domination and decline such as racism, drug-use and violence (Back 1996, Robson 2000, Evans 2006, Whittington 2006).

Moving west from these boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham and Southwark, the South London riverside is bordered by Lambeth and then Wandsworth, taking us out of the South East and into South West London. Running for some distance along the Thames, Lambeth and then Wandsworth make up the western edge of inner South London. The fourth area in which I worked as a youth worker and that this research draws on, that I call Denhill, is located in the Southerly part of this wider area of South West London.

However differences exist between the historical and social development of this area of London and the one previously described, with the industrial core not as prevalent here, the areas developing through a set of largely residential towns as London grew. For example the borough of Wandsworth was part of Surrey until 1889, and prior to this was green fields and woodland, later becoming a London borough in 1965 (LBW 2012). Its history has been shaped by its position on both the Rivers Wandle and Thames and as a thoroughfare for journeys in and out of London to the west of England. As London grew the areas bordering the Thames saw the development of Battersea Power Station in the 1930's but the wider area remained what Dickens called, "cow fields, mud ditches, river embankments, [and] a waste of expanse that attempted to pass for country" (Porter 1994). The areas closer to the River Thames saw some of the best established working class areas in the first half of the twentieth century, similar to the South East areas previously described.

The changed politics of post-1945 Britain affected this demographic settlement of the Wandsworth borough. Existing as a tiny minority in the interwar period, Labour won control of South West council in 1945 losing it again four years later and only regaining it in 1962. But Battersea, at that point a separate municipal area until 1965, remained securely Labour. Over the post-war period there was a broad consensus towards the construction of council housing around Battersea but also across the borough and in conjunction with the then active London County Council who presided over what is now inner London. This meant that newly

arriving populations were often housed in the more northern and developed areas of the borough, becoming home in the 1960's and 70's, to Caribbean populations as a result of commonwealth migration and Gujarati populations following expulsion from Uganda by then president Amin (Butler & Robson 2003).

The areas further south from the Thames were slower to develop, and following later migrations from Pakistan and also large-scale displacement of Somali families following the civil war in the late 1980's have become home to sizeable populations (Anderson 1996, Frow 1997). This has had a strong cultural influence on local shops and restaurants and 20% of the Wandsworth borough population identify as Muslim. Many of the young people from these migratory patterns identify as both Muslim and British. So for example, while Wandsworth is a largely white borough with 78% of residents identifying as such in the 2011 census and only 6% of residents identify as black and 6.9% as South Asian, the areas I worked in had large concentrations of these latter populations (LBW 2011).

More recently, as in South East London, the political consensus of disinvestment in social housing (Keith 2005) can be seen to have created social housing estates as spaces that are characterised by lower socio-economic status, deprivation, unemployment in both northern and southern reaches of the borough, as "inner city"⁴ areas that are also situated in the "outer-inner city" (Millington 2011). Such large (and smaller) areas of social housing have been regularly associated with poverty, crime

⁴ I define inner city here following Michael Keith's (2005) documenting of the relationships between 'race', tenure and residential space in British cities. He identifies areas of social housing – and specific estates in what was/ is inner South East London – that were, during the mid to late twentieth century, subject to acknowledged disinvestment and came to be locally defined by young people, into the twenty-first century, as the 'Ghetto'. Following Waquant's (2008) theory of urban marginality, whilst retaining Keith's (2005) warning to observe the differences that exist within what we might see as ethnic or cultural groups I would suggest that these vernacular representations of place can be translated to many estates across South West London and the city more widely.

and urban decline, a representation that is often more directly aimed at the populations living there (Eglin & Hester 1992, Foster and Hope 1992, Hanley 2007).

It is important to note here that the patterns of migration and urban settlement advanced so far are historical. These historical patterns are drawn on widely in sociological and related literatures, whereby ethnic minority populations have been characterised by post-war and commonwealth migrations and specifically migrations from Jamaica and migrations from South Asian communities. This is likely due to the largely positive social and cultural influences these changes to British society have had, and the attention paid to associated cultural forms reflects this with these earlier and dominant although still highly relevant and important, historical and cultural narratives, often understandably, dominating the tapestry (for example Back 1996, Alexander 1996, Alexander 2000, Robson 2000, and more recently Evans 2006, Gunter 2010). These histories of migrations and social housing development outline the histories of class and racialised segregations within urban space, having particular relevance in the local areas I worked in and operating as dominant cultural representations in the ways young people practiced belongings (chapter four). However more contemporary movements and processes of urban settlement and belonging can be seen to characterise urban spaces, notably 'what Vertovec (2007) calls super-diversity. These contemporary perspectives are dealt with in the forthcoming sections.

'Regeneration': Gentrification and Relocation

One of the main effects of a global restructuring has been the increased widening of income inequality in global cities. Although the causes of social polarization are debated (Hamnett 2003, Sassen 1991) there is widespread agreement that social polarization and spatial reconfiguration are enmeshed together and have exacerbated existing inequalities around 'race', gender, and class in the city (Butler & Watt 2007: 85). One of the clearest indicators of this spatial separation are the concentrations of

poverty and deprivation within housing estates in Britain's urban centres (Power 1997, Byrne 1999).

The result of this spatial organisation has social and therefore individual and emotional affects and has been argued to disproportionately affect stigmatised groups including disadvantaged youth and ethnic minorities (Pilkington 2003, MacDonald and Marsh 2005). Such realities are not helped by academic work that focuses uncritically on the social and historical contexts of social housing, for example using a geographical mapping of social housing to forward a thesis of 'gangland' across huge stretches of (East) London (see Pitts 2007, 2008).

Post the decomposition of the urban centre, and since the 1980's, London and other global cities have undergone transformations that have redefined the central locations of the city as spaces of power, decision making, high level consumption, and elite residential and professional spaces in "pushing the urban life of cities in fragments to the periphery" (Millington 2011:108).⁵ Increasingly this takes the form of revanchist policies that look to reclaim central areas of social housing, whose large physical footprints lay promise to huge revenue streams if they can be regenerated and ultimately, residents replaced.

Two of the estates lying nearer the river had been through a partial process of redevelopment. The Southgrove had been largely raised to the ground section by section and, for the most part had been totally rebuilt in lower density, and mixed ownership housing as part of the *Single Regeneration Budget Initiative*, devised by New Labour's Urban Task Force urban renewal strategy. This was framed as having a "wider range of people in the borough" but this is often language for removing some of the undesirable ones currently there? The regeneration strategy's objectives include "exploiting the potential for economic expansion [...] and to reduce the concentration of poverty in the borough" (Rogers 1999). The estate lying closest to the Thames, the Burlington, had recently had

⁵ Millington describes fragmented in the sense of spaces being broken up, made smaller, and bought and sold (2011: p110)

one of its high rise towers sold off to private developers to be refurbished as luxury flats offering riverside living and panoramic views, a process that was lengthily protested about by residents at the time. From a distance the three towers still dominated the skyline but one now had a shiny reflective white and green shell out of which its residents could view the spaces of 'urban difference' all around them. The proximal relations of inequality and of ownership, value and belonging within the urban spaces of London become ever more complex and fraught. The third estate on which I worked lay further west by half a mile, although its size extended it across a wider stretch of South London in a westerly direction. This estate was in a lengthy legal battle between the local council and residents over a full-scale redevelopment (and relocation of many residents) that had been contested and the initial round won in court by residents. At the time of publishing this thesis the battle continues.

This is not a nostalgic tale of estates in London, instead the very active dissent and resistance by residents specifically over being relocated suggest these processes are about power and profit rather than 'regeneration' for all. This is the city where the material problems of social deprivation and the associated social conflicts are being erased or at least diluted and dispersed, and in these post-political spaces difference can be enjoyed, if only from the heights of a privatised tower block that can view the urban sprawl and histories of industry and imperialism along the river banks from on high (Foster 1999). The redevelopment of London Bridge symbolised by the shard, and the redevelopment of Elephant and Castle with its proximity to the city of London just across the Thames, show this wider area as prime real estate that developers have been waiting to get their hands on for years. Redevlopments in South West London, particularly in the areas closest to the Thames were not far behind. Consultation phases were underway between the council and residents to 'see what residents most wanted'. Observing this in the context I have just outlined and have witnessed personally over the last ten years across South London is suggestive that "dispersal, securitisation and gentrification" as the defining and exclusionary features of the "radically re-

centred global city” mean that the metropolis being turned “inside-out” may yet be the future awaiting London (Millington 2011: 108).

I offer these histories of migration, social development, settlement (dis)investment, control and more recent regulation and evictions towards (re)claiming these spaces for economic and private gain, as a way of considering how patterns of migration have historically combined with social housing estates and governmental housing allocations and have been subject to recurring uncertainties and movements. These ideas and histories act as a grounding to begin to understand the particular urban spaces that this research has developed through. This is not to simply suggest similar circumstances across areas within London and reduce social housing to homogenised formulations of spaces, differences or subjectivities. It is to give a social and historical grounding to the areas I worked in, and the very real impacts these processes had on the ways young people experienced public spaces, the way these spaces disappeared and reappeared and the ways this was negotiated within cultural practices of everyday life.

In *Getting By*, Lisa McKenzie (2015) documents the exclusion and lack of value that is attributed to council estates and those living on them. She shows how the estate is located as being the container of social decline, violence and not only the spatial but also the *emotional location* of ‘broken Britain’. Thus she shows us through her own experiences the ways this polarization affects both self-perception and also informs everyday practices of belonging. Here the estate is not just stigmatized from the outside but generates real effects for those who identify with a place and live there. As Keith notes on the ghettoization of such spaces, they are “invariably the product of both political economies of residence and eschatologies of stigma” (Keith 2005: 61).

Young people, spaces and cultural productions

Linked to these processes of ghettoization and gentrification are the ways urban spaces are policed. Difference is at once attractive within cities as cosmopolitan spaces, yet gentrification also entails the clearing out of unruly, undesirable and dangerous elements. The city post 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London has meant increasing securitisation and a more hostile environment towards ethnic minority and marginalised groups. This means increased policing of those already desirable spaces but also of areas of 'unruly' culture that are designated as becoming part of these elite business focused centres (Zukin 1995).

The majority of the estates I worked on and their proximity to the centre were subject to these forces of what I will call *slow dispersal* – an unsettling, fracturing, and removal of the current residents. On a day trip I took a group of young men to a youth theatre, a bus ride from the estate and near London Bridge. We were early and went to Borough Market, the nearest 'public' space where I figured we could kill time without spending money, albeit one geared around the consumption of overpriced foods. They paused behind me and the eldest, Daniel, looked at me and remarked, 'This is a white person place'. This shows the boundaries of the gentrified city lie in close proximity to spaces, and people, that have no connection to them, and the lack of understanding of this by those that do.

Cities increasingly have important symbolic economies where culture is intertwined with capital and identity in the city's production system (Zukin 1995:12). Capitalising on the productivity, creativity and energy, but also processes of change and disorder of urban cultures requires both the privatising and militarising of public space since the power of culture to revitalise will be compromised by an aesthetic of fear (ibid: 11). The urban night, including the imaginary of gangs and gangsters, and the deep rhythms of sound-systems, illegal parties and now grime music and culture, together make up part of a wider urban imaginary, as spaces where more salubrious residents can consume the other. These cultures form part of the lure and excitement of a city whilst materially being kept segregated from the key sites of economic activity (this is discussed more

in chapter seven). They form part of the identity of the city defining what others are not but are discarded when economic expansion is possible. Young people I worked with understood these spaces of disconnect and how they were valued and seen within some urban spaces.

But the power of culture to (re)vitalise is not a one way street into the privatised spaces and of the city. Young people increasingly found ways to claim spaces within the urban as their own in spite of the policing, securitisation and revanchist tendencies of urban governance and profit. On the Southgrove young men filmed music videos that started with a range of frames documenting their experience, an introduction for the forthcoming track, setting the scene. These were at once stereotypical urban performances – the hood up, gun fingers at the camera, young men sharing a spliff – but also showed street signs with their postcode and focused in on the newly installed clusters of CCTV cameras placed high on spiked railings around the estate and the new football cage.⁶ In this context the practice of hiding their faces in the videos with hoods and scarves shows the distrust they felt about the increasing securitisation of their environments (Coleman 2004) and their awareness of police usage of YouTube music videos to group and identify criminal suspects. This is as much symbolic, as a gendered, ‘raced’ and classed articulation of a desire for privacy and an end to the gaze on *my* body, as it is about specifically concealing ones legal identity. I would often look at the security cameras while we played football during youth work sessions feeling that recording a space designed for young people to play sport was really suggestive that they shouldn’t be there. No matter I realised as I looked, the cameras were not actually watching us, they had all been turned to look up and outwards towards the bordering railway lines.

Importantly here, and for this thesis, youth club projects and the spaces within them could be claimed by young people as their own, the relational practices of youth work (mostly) allowing spaces of creativity and alternative social education to flourish. Chapter three looks at the ways

⁶ Tarmac football pitch surrounded by wire fencing on all sides commonly found on British estates. Those more recently refurbished often had CCTV cameras installed.

youth work can build relationships that allow young people autonomy and spaces to explore social relationships, while chapters four, five and seven look at the ways that young people found spaces of inclusion and were also excluded from peer spaces in youth work projects. What I am interested in specifically are the productions and practices of masculinity within the youth work spaces I worked in, how different masculinities are affirmed and the ways these are both constitutive of, and produced by urban cultural forms and spaces.

Part 2: Representing young men and masculinities in urban contexts

The second part of this chapter is a discussion of the literatures that have helped me to think through and situate my fieldwork experiences towards developing my research focus on young masculinities and urban cultures in Britain.

Problem 'youth': Fear, racialization, social policy, control

The stigmatisation of urban populations through classed and racialised discourses as variously pathologised, criminal and 'undeserving' can be traced back to at least as early as Victorian times (Bosanquet 1896) and continues to the present day (Orwell 1962, Guardian 2012a, Tyler 2013). Within the urban imaginary we can chart a history of anxiety around young people's development and their negative impact on society. As Alexander explains in situating her ethnography of young Muslim identities, the 'problem' of [Asian] youth connects to a well-established series of moral panics around 'race' and black identities, variously including Rastafarian drug dealers, 'black muggers', 'Jamaican yardies', and throughout recent history 'black rioters' (Hall 1978, CCCS 1982, Gilroy 1992, Alexander 1996).

The developments made by anti-racism activism, that dealt directly with this criminalisation of ethnic minority populations, have now given way to both public (and academic) ideas of post-race where difference is often overlooked, resulting in the suppression of a public language around 'race'. As Barker (1981) and Alexander (2000) have recognised, this has led to discourses around the 'other' shifting their focus to cultural descriptors and values but ultimately remaining rooted in ideas of 'race' and ethnicity. Such cultural 'others' are recognised through the 'violence of their culture (for example the debates around terrorism in Britain and the attribution of this to Islam and by proxy all Muslims). And contemporary framings of young, working class groups in Britain's public consciousness continue to crystalize in the symbolic and representational figures of the hooded, 'chavs' and the 'gang'. Importantly here then there are shifting terrains of racialization in relation to culture and class stigma, where 'chavs' become socially excluded on account of their whiteness being 'other', not being white enough – ideas that I later show are rejected and re-figured by young peoples through their practices and relationships.

This fear of urban young people increasingly legitimates an intervention-based approach that is directed towards their surveillance, management and control. As a practice, youth work has historically looked to provide leisure activities for youth (Davies 2008) but for at least last twenty years has become increasingly interventionist, with providers bidding and often framing young people as 'in deficit' as a way of trying to secure funding while youth workers similarly talk up the problems of young people in the hope of maintaining their roles (Cooper 2009). Jeffs and Smith (1999) show how terms like 'adolescent', 'teenager', 'youth' and 'young person' are often used interchangeably.⁷ But importantly the term 'youth' is almost solely employed with a focus on the behaviours of young people in the public sphere and as such we find it commonly linked to words such as

⁷ Jeffs and Smith (1999) show the different terminologies that are used for young people, the ways that terms are gendered, and also the ways that they have more positive or negative connotations. They make the point that 'young people' indicates 'clienthood' in youth work, which explains my own adoption and (uncritical) use of the term throughout the thesis.

'crime' and 'culture' – consider the popular terms 'youth crime', 'gang culture', 'youth gangs', 'disaffected youth', 'feral youth'.

Regarding gender these fears take on specific forms. The unmarried single mother has been and remains a figure of contempt as Lisa McKenzie (2015) shows. While the face of disorder, rioting, crime and violence in the public imagination has long been the figure of the young [urban] male. Further the predominance of men occupying positions of privilege in public life, alongside the idea that young men are a threat to public life and therefore social order, means that talk of young people, specifically though the term 'youth', takes on the inherent masculine assumption (see McRobbie 1994). As such there is particular stigmatisation around young men. Within the urban genre of film, examples being *Kidulthood* (Dir. Menhaj Huda 2006) and *Ill Manors* (Dir. Plan B 2012), the dominant representations of masculinity are via youth gangs and violence and shown as the formative aspects of life, with the nuances in characters masculinities on the sidelines. This narrative and these particular films are genuine cultural productions and not produced at a distance, but I feel that they often fall prey to misinterpretation due to the over-determination of the racialised, classed and gendered figure of 'youth'. In this figure gender is regularly implicit, a singular masculinity where the more dominant are top is natural and accepted, rather than being seen as a socially constructed category that is then open to interpretation, investigation and critique.

As I have noted the most particular incarnation of the gendered, classed, racialised figure of youth is the gang member. What we have seen in Britain for at least the last twenty years is a language around essential(ised) cultural differences, irreconcilable and fundamental, natural (if not biological) and innate and what Martin Barker (1981) termed *The new racism*. The gang, like the terrorist is this cultural but ultimately racialised object. Following this populist discourse recent years have witnessed a proliferation of academic interest in the phenomenon of the gang both in Britain and across Europe following a much larger body of

work in the US⁸. Within the recent literature that focuses on the existence and rise of gangs in Britain, Pitts' (2007) study *Reluctant gangsters: the youth gangs of Waltham Forest* has been influential amongst policy makers.

Pitts' criminological approach describes the prevalence of gangs as the "changing face of youth crime". Extrapolating out from his Waltham Forest site, in a narrative that can be seen to underpin media and governmental commentary after the 2011 riots, he sees Britain as being under attack from urban street gangs who are armed and whose use of violence ranges from rape to attack dogs (Pitts 2007, 2008). Pitts' study draws on the object of knife crime, where teenage killings in London rose from a stable average of seventeen a year to the death of twenty-six teenagers in 2007, the majority of which died from stabbings (Muncie 2009); identifying a high number (thirteen) of discrete gangs in Waltham Forest through interviews, Pitts' ranks these gangs on a *harm assessment scale* which he then uses to detail the formations of gang structures. Operating as "large corporate structures" through "forcibly recruiting members" this structural explanation sees areas of high social housing as "gang-ridden estates", with progression from "wannabees" and local delinquency through to more serious offending, and resulting in the controlling of drug distribution lines and the gang as an organised crime unit (Pitts 2007, 2008).

Let us first deal with the idea of a changing face of youth crime and the moral panic over knife crime, gangs, and serious youth violence detailed in the introduction. Pitts seems to overstate both the novelty and the significance of the gang in following this media fuelled moral panic. In his auto-ethnography after many years researching the existence of gangs in Britain, Hallsworth describes his experiences growing up amongst "skinheads, teds, grebos, boot boys, hells angels, all of whom were capable of extreme, collective, violent activity" (Hallsworth 2013: 38).

⁸ For an overview of street gangs in the US context see Sheldon et al. 2004. For a review of the way research and policy frames the gang in a US context see Klein et al. 2006. For a more nuanced account of the way gangs and the relationships within these might be conceived see Denfield 2007.

Following this and the rich tradition of research on sub-cultural groups within Britain (Hall 1978, Hebdige 1979) we can find groups that can fit every differing definition of 'the gang' regardless of academic focus and persuasion, but that instead should be correctly recognised as youth cultures and longstanding element of working class culture, and not gangs. This is not to equate idea of the gang, the reality of fluctuating murders rates in Britain of young men (largely by other young men) and the importance of holistically approaching violence, with youth and working class cultures. It is to clarify that the positioning of the gang as a new formation that is the container of increasing levels of crime and violence displays a lack of historical perspective, instead creating an object borne from living in "the infinite novelty of the moment" (Pearson 2011: 20).

Pitts' work has been used most notably by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) with whom he helped develop the definition of a gang that has been subsequently used by much government policy.⁹ The CSJ (2009) report *Dying to Belong* is a cobbled together complex of information that looks to solidify a definition of the gang. It critiques the chaotic approach that has come before it in defining, approaching, and tackling gangs and gang violence, but pulls together a bombarding two hundred pages of information using as many terms and categorisations as it can to create a wall of certainty around the existence of the gang. The interchangeable usage of gang and violence is important to note here, as with Pitts' work, where the search for the gang as a discrete object situates it as the cause of violence and unrest. Drawing on Elijah Anderson's (1999) ethnography *Code of the Street*, set in Philadelphia, the CSJ report takes socio-culturally specific terms developed by Anderson¹⁰ and applies them without any consideration of societal dynamics. Again drawing on an interview methodology the report claims 6% of young people are in gangs without any proper consideration of the nuances of how gang membership is defined by young people.

⁹ The definition developed by Pitts' with the CSJ was used in the EGYV programme run across areas in England.

¹⁰ Anderson's ethnography is looked at in greater detail shortly. His work draws a distinction between 'street' and 'decent' families in extreme urban poor environments. The social hierarchy and segregation on which he bases his work is specific to the US and not as easily translatable as the CSJ report assumes.

Pitts himself notes that for some gang affiliation is a pragmatic, but reluctant, response to securing some semblance of safety in high-risk situations and is preferable to being victimized by it (Pitts 2008). Similarly the CSJ recognise that young people can be impressionable but do not consider the uncertainty that may exist in navigating threatening environments and peer groups when producing their more certain report. Further following Pitts toward making the claim of a Britain-wide epidemic the report uses recorded gun violence figures from Liverpool and Manchester that were largely due to specific gangs and their activities, and where police intervention reduced recorded gun violence almost fully. These specific events are coincidental with the report and its policy outcomes rather than the report and its outcomes being timely. Yet the figures are used to make a case about massive gang activity and a framing of “lost generations” when there is simultaneously an acknowledgment that a “minority” of youth are involved (CSJ 2009: 125). We see here a situating of violence as resulting from a complex range of inter-related societal factors, with a total lack of linking violent events back to these factors and into a wider society, instead focusing ever downwards in a causal explanation to position the guilt as pathology.

On the gang as an object

The attempted nuance around the idea of gangs and response suggested by the CSJ report is in some way positive. As a report it ironically confirms that as a singular concept, category, or social object, the gang does not exist. The fundamental problem here is its subsumption of so many social processes and phenomena into ‘the gang’ when one of the initial statements made in the report is “an understanding of the true nature and scale of gang culture and membership in Britain remains limited” (ibid: 35). The pre-requisite for such reports appears to be not to question the sociological validity of an object but to provide all the possible links and explanations towards it; co-opting youth workers and professionals to add a veneer of authenticity and cement an illusion of truth. Considering the range of ages, social and cultural issues mentioned in the report, the question of how the gang can remain a relevant object of analysis must be

asked. Yet in the CSJ's framework social housing leads to alienation and young people develop a new set of rules through the 'code of the street' and under the rubric of 'the gang' (CSJ 2009: 26). What is at work here is ideology, placing complex and pressing social problems directly *within* the spaces of social housing and further reducing them to the gang in an attempt to redraw the boundaries of the state and welfare, creating a framework that increasingly defines subject(s) value(s) through neoliberal agendas and modes of (self)-regulation. The result in practice is not a focus on the breadth of the social, cultural, economic, political, and Political issues mentioned or implicit here, but to focus on the created object: the gang.

This, from my experience and from others I have worked with in youth services, YOT teams, and third sector organisations means that working with complex issues becomes difficult, compartmentalised, and young people's access to support divided through imposed categorisations. What remains glaringly absent in the CSJ (2009) *Dying to Belong* report and Pitts' work (2007, 2008) is a consideration of the relationship between 'race', class and inequality in Britain, and the ways culture and power inform one another.

Critical commentators have referred to research and intervention as a 'gang industry' within the US and a here a similar development can be seen within academic research and policy circles in Britain (Hallsworth 2013). In my own experience as a youth worker I have had discussions with fellow professionals who have highlighted the way 'gang work' is becoming the key way of generating funding and is spawning increasing numbers of books, 'experts', and consultants on gang problems.) For Hallsworth and Young this growing industry in Britain and Europe can be thought of as the result of "gang-talk and gang-talkers" (Hallsworth and Young 2008). They note that "for the thesis of gangland Britain to have substance we would expect to see compelling empirical evidence of its existence" (ibid: 177), where the CSJ's (2009) drawing on Anderson's sociological findings and a range of empirical examples from the US is firstly an example of the lack of evidence of the 'violent youth gang' as a

British phenomenon, it is more worryingly a transposition of a international context defined by the political economy of 'race' onto the context of Britain in an attempt to reify racialised notions of gangs as a social and cultural reality.

Contrastingly, looking at Sanders (2005) *Youth Crime and Youth Culture in the Inner City* can help to both consider the conceptual import of the gang and the value of ethnographic epistemologies and methods towards researching urban cultures. Sanders research began as an ethnographic attempt to discover the US style gang in Brixton, London, but working with YOT's in the Lambeth borough he found no evidence of similar groupings, instead finding a mix of youth cultures that did not correspond directly to types of crimes nor involvement. There was however at this time significant gang activity in and around Brixton as defined by the police and within local youth vernacular. What this suggests is that the attempt to conceptualise the gang as an explanation for young peoples' cultural outputs, lifestyles, peer group memberships, belongings, involvement in crime and associations and navigations with violence is flawed. There are too many additional factors to consider and the term gang is used in everyday life in too many contexts with different meanings attached for it to have sociological significance in Britain. In this way Sanders research experience mirrors my own experiences. The gang is an object that exists and then shifts. It is an object with allure as much to policy makers and youth workers as young people. In fact as Joseph and Gunter argue the research around 'gangs' likely "precludes to the most part the possibility of examining urban youth away from the 'gang'" (Gunter and Joseph 2011: 3).

The importance of cultural context

This section reviews a range of literature that has been applied to the study of young people, especially young men, in urban contexts in the US that I found useful in developing my thinking about young men and masculinities in urban contexts, especially around the situating of gangs and the explanations of violence.

Ironically one of the first texts that helped me consider the ways I was thinking about young masculinities in urban Britain was Elijah Anderson's ethnographic study *Code of the Street* (Anderson 2000). His focus is to explain, "why it is that so many inner city young people are inclined to commit aggression and violence toward one another" (ibid: 9). The answer to this lies in the dichotomy of "street" and "decent families" and the widespread adoption of a "code of the street," where threat and violence operate to deliver "street justice". Anderson makes clear from the outset that these are "labels" that people use "to characterize themselves and one another" and warns against reifying them as distinctive groups by stating "individuals of either orientation may coexist in the same extended family" and that "there is also a great deal of 'code-switching'" (ibid: 35). But throughout the text he relies more heavily on this dichotomy as defining specific individuals and families – where being street or decent becomes a more fixed orientation.

Ultimately Anderson's framing of a behaviours as defined by a code reduces individual autonomous action to structured practices and denies the process and inventiveness that can exist in everyday situations and porous group contexts. Anderson's work is useful for its attempt to focus in on micro-level interactions that begin to explain the relational aspects of conflict and violence within urban environments, although his attempt to illuminate these complex dynamics of lived experience ultimately fails by not detailing the embodied experiences and interactions that would better explain the working of a code of the street, which he initially suggests this code relies on. However the detailed examination of urban contexts and the way individual lives and practices are situated within wider social contexts led me to consider the contexts of my own research in more detail.

Garot's (2010) study *Who You Claim* looks at the ways young people find spaces of belonging within volatile peer groups, and makes a direct critique of much of the US gang literature through its nuanced account. Working in an urban alternative school in the US, he demonstrates that gang identity is a carefully coordinated performance with many nuanced

rules of style and presentation, and that gangs, like any other group or institution, must be constantly performed into being as one of many ways for youths to "stylistically remake the world" (Garot 2010: 78). Group membership is seen here as a tool, used to young people's needs and discarded as they grow-up, drop-out, or graduate; gangs are not so much things or objects one can be 'in' as they are things played with, avoided, and very occasionally, practically invoked.

This resonates with the way that the 'shadow' of the gang could be seen to exist in youth work projects and urban spaces as a more cultural and transient object rather than as a structure in young men's lives. While maintaining that the gang has a flawed epistemological relevance in the analysis of young people in urban centres, as a result of its importation from the US as a cultural text and a social control it has ontological significance to varying degrees within the lives of young men I worked with depending on how they chose to position themselves. The 'gang' performances in grime and rap videos are a good example of this: the gang was at once a significant marker but simultaneously always a playful representation. It was hard to know the seriousness of a performance recorded and destined for YouTube. Much of the closer engagements I had with young men came through studio sessions where they would record their latest 'bars'¹¹ and these moments often engendered the most obvious tensions in the attempts at embodying and delivering a threatening persona.

Talking with Tye after several years of getting to know him I asked why his lyrics had moved away from violent warnings and exclamations of cold-heartedness to more sanguine depictions of his life growing up in the 'hood'. 'It was just lying. 'Bout how you gonna do something when you ain't' he replied, 'I'm jus about making P's now'.

In this way more nuanced analysis must find a way to understand the fixity and fluency of group membership. This approach to social groups, as one of process and movement has been crucial to me as an ethnographer in an attempt to understand the complexity and changing meaning within

¹¹ Lyrics.

young men's immediate and wider peer groups. "Gang-talkers" (Hallsworth & Young 2008) frame the gang as group, leaving no place for individual transgression of group boundaries. What is important is *how* we write about groups: what the definition of the group *does*. Groups are not a defined object, but rather are contexts that are defined by relationships both of, and outside of, the group; feelings are brought in to the 'group', body's carry emotional weight, but also interact in space.

Paulle (2013) tries to consider these ideas of group membership and formation and the ways that relations (and violence) are embodied through the ways structural inequality works on the bodies and social relationships of young people. This compares two international contexts – one in the US and the other in the Netherlands, with Paulle paying close attention to the ways that ethnicity and 'race' are practiced as fluid, in his argument around poverty and by proxy educational failure and violence being determined by social structure rather than these individual characteristics. Instead "concerns about gendered peer group dynamics were typically framed less in terms of ethnic categories than in terms of the gangster to nerd status continuum" (ibid: 12).

Paulle's focus is on the "emotional dynamics" and "senses of educational settings" (ibid: 19), and offers that "the gendered and gendering practices of, and the somewhat racialised perspectives on (or ways of making sense of), social cleavages were always already part of the taken for granted background understandings that all the experienced insiders shared" (ibid: 39). Drawing heavily on Bourdieu (1986) Paulle advances the idea of 'interchangeable subject positions' in which subjects inhabit social roles determined by embodied and stylistic practices of cultural capital. The school is a co-ed so these performances and embodied practices are situated in relation to an overall hierarchy of "ghetto fabulousness" that both male and female students adhere to. Paulle's focus on the ways that wider socio-economic structures come to be embodied as responses to continual exposure to high stress situations (including violence) has been useful for my own research in thinking about the way young men built relationships within the specific national and more local context of the

youth club and with youth workers, but also with family members, and in wider social contexts when we were on trips or in public spaces.

However there is a silence around pupil's experiences through his focus on embodiment and the body never being in the words of those he is writing about. In his attempt to reposition violence as distinct from "ethno-racial categories" he ultimately positions it within the gendering framework of hegemonic masculinity (this is discussed shortly). Thus the subjectivities and experiences of young men (and women) are situated within this structure, with those reduced to the lower positions in the status hierarchy tied to a more peripheral notion of masculinity. This is an example of the hegemonic framing of young men's experiences where emotional responses are reduced to ritualized patterns of stress response.

Although Paulle does give voice to young men who navigate and choose alternative paths within this environment there is no account of embodiment accompanying this. In this account of young men's experience in urban contexts there is a focus on gender as embodiment but the subjectivity and the emotional life of the body is rendered insignificant. A tendency to rationalise young people, and specifically young men's experience prevails. This is to suggest a focus on the emotional life of young men and how young masculinities are lived with a focus on 'race', ethnicity and class is an important addition to the sociological literature on youth. Towards understanding the experiences of young men in inner city contexts in the period of late capitalism this research looks to engage with these complexities around masculinities and to develop a nuanced account of both the pressures young men face and the emotional spaces they inhabit.

Interestingly in terms of the use and pervasiveness of violence amongst and between young men Paulle notes that violence was regularly and normatively part of everyday interactions in the US context and much less so in his school in the Netherlands, although incidents of serious violence did occur in and around the school. A Unicef report in 2007 on the well-being of children and young people in 21 industrialized countries ranked

the UK at the bottom, the US second, and the Netherlands at the top (UNICEF 2007). This provides an interesting context for this research as taking place both in the UK and within projects designed to tackle young men at risk of being involved in youth violence.

But there is a strong body of work that suggests subcultures, not gangs, has best explained the British condition (Downes 1966, Gilroy 1992, Hall 2006, Muncie 2009) whereas in the US gangs were and continue to be seen as a major social problem (Whyte 1943). Subcultural theory shows social groups as complex multifaceted phenomena (Hall 1976, Hebdige 1979) in contrast to the US-centric explanation of gangs used by authors such as Pitts that rely on a hegemonic framing of both subjectivity and group formation and processes. Corrigan and Frith (1974: 195) have suggests that “an understanding of the political implications of working class youth culture must be based on an understanding of working class culture as a whole”. Importantly today this must also include a focus on ‘race’ as part of a complex political economy of domination (Gilroy 1992, Mills 2012).

A good place to start looking at literature on working class masculinities is Willis’ (1977) seminal study *Learning to Labour*. Willis looks at the ways young, white, working class men make the transition to employment, from resisting and subverting the middle class value system at school and going on to get working class jobs. Willis suggest the young men are having a laugh by not paying attention and gaining cultural capital through this in the eyes of their peers. This was useful for me in considering ideas of resistance, but also the place of humour and the relationships across class differences and in gendered terms. It helped me to re-think the ways I read young men’s behaviours in the formative stages of developing my project and what the possibilities and relevance of trust was to my methods and more widely within the thesis.

The key differences between my research and Willis’ are generally framed as a ‘crisis in masculinity’. The first difference comes from the significant changes to the social and economic landscape and the effects of these

structural changes on male identity (Nayak 2013). So in the contemporary landscape of increasing economic instability, uncertainty over employment and education opportunities, global interconnection through new technology yet simultaneous state and corporate surveillance of individual's everyday life identities and belongings are more fragmented, differently rooted and routed. Thus we need to reconsider what types of gendered subjectivities are available to young men, and importantly when, how, and in which contexts are they available?

This leads to the second, related, difference. Willis' work does not deal with gender as a questionable category because the labelling of 'problematic behaviour' of the boys and by teachers, is largely viewed as a misreading of what are seen by Willis to be cultural norms around strength and toughness attributable to 'race' and/ or class. Thus for Willis these behaviours are not questionable through a gendered lens, instead forming the basis of a culturally normative masculinity. In relation to the contemporary moment there is a clear absence of a consideration of differences in gender identities, and whether tensions exist for these young men in practicing their gender identities. This can be somewhat contextualised through the generational and social contexts of the research, but also opens up questions over the researchers academic focus, methods, and the positionality of the researcher. In this research, hierarchies and various types of status existed and played a role in everyday life. But gender was practiced in different and more complex ways in relation to both culture and opportunity and employment than in Willis' study.

Critiques of Willis and subcultural theory more widely have questioned the approach of celebrating resistance, as imparting researchers bias regarding the actual motives of resistance or cultural identity, suggesting motives may be much more banal. In the contemporary literature this is debated as either youth politics or self-interest and consumption; the debate over strategies of resistance or competitive individualism continues (Hall et al, 2008, Winlow 2006 & 2013). This debate is important in terms of new spaces of dissensus and youth engagement with politics and

although I do not attend to youth politics directly here, it is important to consider alongside the thesis. Willis' ideas do retain value and import, particularly in relation to education where the effects of 'race', class and gender on pupils levels of achievement and progress continue to cause both concern and debate (Archer et al. 2010). However the limitation of the educational setting is that researchers can struggle to position the institution or the behaviours that are recorded within a wider societal context. Schools are necessarily and generally authoritative and disciplined spaces and behaviours and levels of subjectivity are arguably specific within these settings. More recent accounts, with a similar focus over a crisis in young men's behaviour and attainment as crisis, attribute this to absent fathers or role models (Pollack 1998, Lammy 2011) and the impact of feminism (Kryger 1998).

Thus far I have considered framings of urban youth, and literatures by Anderson, Paule and from a British context, Willis, that variously look to explain young, marginalised male identities. What I argue ties these together is a lack of focus on gender dynamics in relation to other, diverse axes of difference that can give a credible framework to represent contemporary urban belongings.¹² Gender is either implicit, or more explicitly normative in most of these accounts and one explanation for this is a historical and continuing idea of what characterises men and their gender identity. The idea of a crisis in masculinity can be seen to co-align with the problem of urban youth and a focus on crime and violence as stereotypical representations of men's experiences. While Barker (2005) shows that men are likely victims of violence, and that young men also

¹² However, Clare Alexander's (2000) *The Asian Gang* does detail the ways the nexus of race, youth, and masculine identities is wrongly simplified by the popular discourse of the gang, exploring the intersections of these markers in young men's lives. Alexander deals with the idea of a 'crisis' around young men and the ways that race, gender and youth are often presented as individual markers that are often wrongly used to provide explanation for particular social practices and predicaments. This resonates strongly with the current discourse around young men, violence, and gangs.

engage in harmful behaviours, there is a the lack of nuanced explanation on how young working class men, in super-diverse urban contexts practice gender in different ways. Linked to this are silences around emotional life, something my early fieldwork experiences highlighted. Thus I have found a silence within much of the literature on young people, that was also mirrored at times by the young people I worked with, over diverse masculine experiences and the framings of masculinity that offer (academic) credibility.

Within the urban and youth work spaces I have identified particular subjects have value, and particular 'raced', classed and gendered subjects do not. What are the impacts of this on young men? How is 'race' class and gender lived out? If as Cooper (2009) and Batmanghedlidjh (2013) suggest it is a period where many children are unhappy, and where intervention has reduced trust in not only the state but in cities, then what do the riots show about resentment and latent feelings? If youth work is about interventions but also might be practiced with educational and social ideas in mind, what are the terms of delivering this, what are the possibilities for trust? What types of young masculinities are available for young men, how and when do they draw on them, and how are these shaped by and shape urban cultures?

Young men and masculinities

The symbolic representation of 'youth' as a racialised and classed object includes an implicit focus on young men. This object operates in the public consciousness through the fear of the 'black' body¹³ (Alexander 1996, Hooks 2004). 'Youth' is embodied in the body of young men, in the 'black' body, the criminal body, the group bodies of teenagers. The 'black' body is a source of urban fear, brought to life as the 'hoody', the 'gang' member, but also beyond 'racial' categories as the 'chav', incorporating class and race as the group body to fear. The discourse that accompanies these

¹³ I use 'black' in scare quotes here following my earlier explanation of the symbolic representation of threat in the inner city, and how this is defined through intertwined histories of prejudice and static understandings of 'race', class and gender.

images that has circulated so prominently in the context of the 2011 UK riots is around 'mindlessness', 'thuggery' and manifests in young men's everyday lives in the inner city in many ways, one example being the accession of joint enterprise policy to law and the criminalisation of groups as one body (Pitts 2012).

This framing stems from colonial discourse and western epistemologies where as Seidler (2007a) shows the "un/civilised" come to be identified with bodies, sexualities and desires, yet to make the transition from nature to culture. Within this history men are associated with mind, reason and consciousness but the 'black' body is more closely associated with a lack of 'self-control', and 'animal nature' (ibid: 9). The historical arguments around this and 'race' thinking are well versed (Fanon 1986).

The expectation from policy focusing on young people marginalised in society and social mobility, including education, youth work policy and related to welfare access, is to show resilience, to develop 'grit', and to be responsible for their own circumstances and outcomes (Cameron 2016). Young men here are both reduced to (pathologised) bodies and simultaneously disembodied though the expectation that they develop a resilient and rational masculinity and the denial of emotional life. In this way an 'enlightenment vision of modernity' has endured in the popular postmodern consciousness that can "make it difficult to explore the relationships between men, bodies and emotional life" (Seidler 2007a: 9).

Stemming from this long-standing framing of men as rational is the assumed practice that men should remain silent around emotional issues in public life.¹⁴ The assumption around men becomes that they are not emotional, that they do not speak, and that emotional life is a feminine space. This remains a consideration in conducting research on masculinities in that there may be a lack of language around emotional

¹⁴ While I have focused more specifically on media and policy, the public perception related to these, and perspectives from within the social sciences so far here public life is used to include these but also disciplines that have been formative in shaping scientific, public and accepted 'knowledge' around gender as a natural category. For example men are associated with reason and women with nature, a position that is often critiques starting from the Cartesian split.

issues through which to fully explore experiences and the connections across race, class and gender, on behalf of participants and also on behalf of researchers. Within working class cultures there have historically been male identities that are founded on hard work, physical strength, and distinct social roles and with this histories of masculinity that require men to be stoic, to grin and bear it, to man up.

The prevalence of somewhat static ideas of masculinity can be best seen through what I argue is a misuse of the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). This has been one of the most pervasive concepts within the development of a literature around men and masculinities and shows an ideal type masculinity as the normative model that men follow, although not normative in the number of men that enact it, or as actual practice. In this way hegemonic masculinity can be seen in part to draw on fantasy figures and unattainable ideals of what masculinity and men might be.

However as Beasley (2008) identifies there is slippage with the term and its meanings both in Connell's work and in the wide range of scholarship in which it is used. Beasley sees this slippage as occurring between firstly the meaning of hegemonic masculinity as defined by the idea of hegemony, and thus as a political mechanism. Secondly it is used to refer to cultural and moral ideas of leadership as rightly defined through masculinity. Thirdly as a descriptive term for the more dominant or socially accepted versions of being a man or manhood. Lastly it is invoked as an empirical reference to specific and actual groups of men (Beasley 2008: 88).

This slippage is relevant here because the attribution of the term hegemonic masculinity to specific groups of men must be critiqued in the way that elements of working class masculinities are idealised (as in forms of black culture like rap and grime that are largely male terrains) yet must be seen as simultaneously subordinated and marginalised (economically, politically and culturally). In this way I argue that a relation exists between the 'raced' and classed urban youth, the implicit gendered assumption,

crises in masculinity, and the hegemony of the use of hegemonic masculinity as an explanatory concept of what men are like.

In becoming the most prominent conceptual term through which masculinities have been positioned and understood (Messerschmidt 2012) we can say that hegemonic masculinity has become hegemonic and has meant that even within literatures on young people and the ways that they are situated within relations of power that work through differences of class, race, ethnicity and sexuality there is a reification of the 'natural order' of masculinity and a limited account of the ways that men's emotional lives are experienced, and importantly embodied.

In light of similar criticisms the hegemonic masculinity concept has been reworked by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) in the context of post-colonial scholarship and the global movement of population that make up the urban contexts this research is situated within. Within this they suggest scales of local, regional and global through which to position particular examples of hegemonic masculinity in practice. What is important though is that both authors, and especially Connell herself, maintain that the use of hegemonic masculinity as a concept is geared towards the analysis and delegitimising of patriarchal relations that maintain the dominance of men and the subordinate status of women and some men.

Thus following this more specific focusing of the application of hegemonic masculinity, it is questionable whether the young men I worked with are involved in the maintenance of patriarchal relations. Certainly, a wider scope within this thesis that considered the role of young women, mothers and female presence in young men's lives would require a more critical engagement with this concept, through the understanding that gender identities are relationally constructed. However here I have chosen to use the terms dominant masculinity or dominant masculinities to signal the ways hierarchies were maintained and (re)produced between young men.

Young masculinities and emotional life

Recent research by Parkes and Conolly (2013) looks at the pressures and importance of acting tough and 'manning up' for young men, within the context of neighbourhood risk. They examined the links between subjectivity, peer relations and neighbourhood risk for a group of boys living in London where the area was characterised by high crime, gang activity and socio-economic inequality; and the ways that gendered subjectivities are shaped by the specific social context. Their findings were that "tough masculinities" were performed by boys across many arenas of everyday life, and exerted a powerful, although not all-encompassing, influence on their subjectivities and was prevalent as an ideal (although much less as a personal aim) across class, ethnic, and cultural contexts. This is something I have found working with young men across peer group contexts and can mean that a connection to oneself and the possibility of maintaining an emotional history and a language around emotional life is often difficult. Discussions of everyday life experiences could often be opened up with those I had gotten to know well, this happening across ages or ethnic and cultural identifications; however a few too many questions and young men regularly ended that direction of conversation. Parkes and Conolly's (2013) research is useful for me to consider some of the themes I have found within my fieldwork and youth work. But there remains an importance on finding ways of researching young men's subjectivities and how gender is lived and experienced in different ways within particular local contexts.

In terms of research on emotional life the focus has tended to be on young women, and more recently young men. Studies of young women and their emotional worlds are more plentiful (McRobbie 1978, Gilligan et al. 1990, Evans 2013). Poststructural accounts show the fragmentation of identity and the effects on young people of social re-organisation around consumption but focus on gender power but render the body obsolete. There are in-depth studies of young masculinities namely Frosh and Phoenix (2002) and Mac an Ghail (1994) again, both set in schooling contexts. Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman's (2002) work was useful for me in

the way that they build a methodology and subsequent focus around young men's perspectives and emotional worlds. In doing they consider differences of gender, class, and race as relational and shifting practices, looking at the different responses young men show with interviewers of similar and different ethnicity.

There is also a body of work from more psychological perspectives on the ways boys become boys (Chu and Way 2004, Way 2011, Chu 2014). I found this a helpful body of work in considering the way boys develop gendered ways of being, albeit set in a US context. While a lot of this research deals with boys between the ages of three and eight, this did help me consider the deep processes of gender socialization and consider the both silences of young men I worked with and of myself, towards finding a method and way of working with young men that tried to undercut these gender relations of power (Seidler 2008) which I cover in the forthcoming methodology chapter. The literature on masculinities, informed by the advances made by feminist scholars on the relationship between social forces, the body and emotional life, has helped me to develop a focus on multiple masculinities and also the diverse experiences and complex identities that have emerged through diasporic and transnational migrations (Seidler 2007a:10).

What I want to consider here is the emotional lives of young men and the focus of this thesis – the place of trust. Mental health of (young) men is an increasingly prominent issue. Cooper (2009) notes that New Labour policy failed to deal with the unhappiness and the increasing disadvantage that young people have to navigate, while Batmanghelidjh (2013: 8) notes that more children are locked up in the UK than in any other European country and 95% of young offenders have mental health problems. What are the emotional experiences of young men living within super-diverse urban contexts and how are these embodied? How do young men feel about the uncertainty of their future, cuts to Educational Maintenance Allowance¹⁵ (EMA) and the near removal of (economic) pathways to university? What

¹⁵ Educational Maintenance Allowance gave support to poorer students for non-compulsory education in years 12 and 13 was cut in 2010 in England

masculinities are available to young men in urban Britain? Are they Council House and Violent – CHAV's, as Ben Drew better known as rapper Plan B is concerned to ask in his film *III Manors* (2012)? Or are these depictions what me might call 'the worst of the scale' and more widely young working class men in inner cities face a 'poverty of attainment' as Rafael, a youth work colleague, framed it to me.

As Seidler argues "we need to be able to engage with the very different gendered and sexed experiences of generations of men who are challenged by different issues than those that have shaped prevailing theorisations of men and masculinities" (Seidler 2007a:10).

Urban spaces, super-diversity and belonging

The dominant migratory histories offered in part one of this chapter have shaped urban cultural formations in formative and on-going ways. However transformative changes to the urban fabric via more contemporary migrations from the African continent often as the result of civil war and displacement, from Eastern Europe and from South East Asia (Anderson et al. 2007) mean that the simple understandings of communities of shared ethnicity in urban spaces no longer offer an explanatory power.

Thus there remains a need for relevant cultural and sociological analysis of specific areas of urban life and the way 'race', class, gender and other relations of power manifest and intertwine in individual lives. Vertovec (2006) suggests this complexity of urban life can be seen as 'super-diversity' – something that is beyond anything Britain had previously experienced in terms of cultural and social transformation. This is characterised by "a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade" (ibid: 1).

Areas of large social housing and estates are particular examples of urban spaces that are affected by these changes. But it is important, following McKenzie's (2015) intervention that the estate is not the container of social decline, that we also do not see it in a related way as the container of difference, where relationships and identities are defined by and within its boundaries. As Ben Gidley notes the traditional anthropological idea of the ethnographic site as a discrete or homogenous bounded site is obsolete when applied to the super-diverse housing estates and urban spaces of inner, and increasingly outer London (Gidley 2013). Thus, Gidley shows us the importance of opening up our ethnographic imagination to the challenges representing the lives of people, and the social life of an estate pose, and the importance of thinking through the terms of super-diversity and urban space.

This is not simply about ethnicity, but also about the multiple temporalities and tenant or housing circumstances of individuals and families find themselves in, and discussed previously as the ideas of the revanchist city (Keith 2005). Urban space is characterised by multiple temporalities and spatialities, as we will see young men came and went from youth projects based on where they were living, another area of London or another continent. Some attended youth projects because they did not leave the estate or local area, showing the strong sense of attachment to local place that can come from cartographies of exclusion (Rätzl et al. 2008). This can open up multiple identities for young people, the estate, the ends, South East or West London, and meaning identifications are contingent to individual configurations of situations and local and global scales. It is these levels of diversity in relation to urban space, that we can consider as *urban multicultural*, that interact with the spatial segregation and appropriation of the places young people live and the withdrawing of youth work services and closure of community spaces, in influencing their practices of belonging (Gidley 2013: 366-7).

This more clearly situates the contexts of the youth work projects, estates and local area of Denhill as I experienced them and also the issues of researching the complexities of young lives, that I try to do justice to in the

forthcoming substantive chapters. The research literature I have drawn on here, linking urban space, culture and super-diversity is useful because youth work with young men in urban centres invariably and often by necessity takes place in multiple spaces on and around the estate and the wider local area. Furthermore, we can now understand these spaces themselves, and what I have called youth work spaces throughout the thesis, are inflected with multiple spatialities and temporalities.

In characterising youth work spaces through these ideas of urban space it is important to think through some of the specifics of the youth club, project, service and the spaces these allow. The way these services run, as much as young peoples relationships with urban space beyond the youth project, within the estate but especially more widely, often determine the ways young people can be engaged and the type of services that reach them.

One example of this is are mobile youth clubs (double decker buses, studio equipped vans) that travel to different estates to provide young people with a youth club space and thus navigate cartographies of risk and exclusion. This does raise the question however of how much these services themselves allow the dissemination of more stable youth work services. Are the mobile spaces of the bus that arrive and leave without trace symptomatic of uncertain economic and reactive political agendas? Or does this mobile service create spaces within the city for young people to claim as theirs and belong?

Another example of this tension is the way more intervention focused services (and specifically the EGYV work I did in this research) target individuals and peer groups, requiring travelling to and working in multiple locations at different times to enable contact and engagement with these target lists of young people. Youth work policies and programmes can reify bounded notions of the estate, locality, gangs and ideas of community, attempting to situate young people's identities as constituted by these, which precludes the possibilities of multiple identifications in different spaces and in different ways, and thus similarly closes down the possibilities for young people of changing and transformation.

Importantly then, what more radical youth work attempts is to work with the multiple identifications and belongings present in young lives lived out in super-diverse urban contexts. In the forthcoming methodology chapter and throughout the thesis, I show that through a more radical youth work practice focused on building and maintaining relationships across difference and that attempts to navigate young people's complex belongings, we can both begin to consider the relationships young people have with urban spaces and also the ways that urban space is constitutive of culture and particular practices of belonging, and active in the processes of emergent multiculturalism (Gidley 2013).

The complexities of super-diverse urban multiculturalism pose a set of multiple differences, identities, spatialities and temporalities. Thus the question that arises for research methodology in relation to urban spaces is how to account for multiple intersecting positions of ethnicity, class, gender, age, sexuality and other social divisions (Berg and Sigona 2013). These theoretical and methodological developments linking super-diversity with urban space thus give a grounding towards understanding the complex ways that young lives are lived out in relation to cultural and class-based differences. Much research on working class men in urban contexts has focused on the intersections of 'race' and class, where new ethnicities are formed (Hall 1991, Back 1996, Harris 2006). However it is these cultural and class based differences and belongings that also mediate and shape gender dynamics and practices. Social class and 'racialised' differences have been shown to exist in terms of boys everyday experiences of masculinity and thus gender identities are both racialised and specific to class positions (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2002, Tizard and Phoenix 1993). Further, within the context of super-diversity, multiple cultural histories and thus gendered practices are brought together and practiced as place specific belongings. This raises the question how does this affect the doing and shaping of gender? What I am concerned with here are the ways that what masculinities and difference are experienced; specifically the way practices of super-diverse, young working class men create, maintain and (re)produce masculinities.

In this way a focus on young masculinities can enter into a welcome dialogue with the literature on super-diversity and urban space, enhancing understandings of place based belonging, whilst also bringing the ideas of how cultural differences are experienced in and through urban spaces, into conversation with theories of masculinities and how gender is lived.

Explanations of young men in urban contexts are plentiful, but I have argued that their subjectivity has become overdetermined, not least by ideas of 'urban life' but further by the implicit idea of an ideal and singular masculinity. The particular crystallisation comes through the objectification of urban youth and what I suggest is the implicit use of ideas of hegemonic masculinity across popular, media, policy and academic discourses and literatures.

Chapter outlines

Chapter two discusses how, in an urban context youth work has typically operated in these working class and multi-ethnic areas, and is now an increasingly surveillance based service offering interventions, in-line with the reduction of it as a service overall. The effects of these policies serve to reproduce racisms, and stigmatise working class young men further. I have shown an alternative current in literature by youth workers and academics that focus on cultural productions and resistance but also on the problems faced by disenfranchised populations including young people. Following the outlining of the wider social and historical contexts of the areas the research was conducted in, the ways that young men are discussed in the literature on urban contexts, and how we can think about urban space as characterised by super-diversity, this thesis looks to consider the emotional and relational worlds of young working class men and the way we think about young masculinities and urban cultures. More specifically the research focuses on the way young men build relationships and the place of trust, how they do gender. Towards this, following a methodology chapter the thesis develops through five substantive chapters, and ends with a conclusion.

Chapter three provides a discussion of the research methodology as a relational ethnography that considers how to research young masculinities and issues of trust. It does this through introducing the youth work projects in a chronological way, to show how the research methodology developed in relation to the contexts I worked in and over time, and as a way of maintaining specificity to the temporal and spatial moments of the research. The chapter shows how I developed my research focus through initial and on-going interactions in the field, specifically related to researching urban cultures, and towards a focus on the particular issues around young men, masculinities, emotional life and trust.

Taking a more thematic view for the purposes of the reader, the chapter details how the focus of my research developed away from initial ideas around violence towards processes of building trust and young men's peer relationships. I discuss the politics of researching young men and masculinities and the rationale for the specific focus on this. I then discuss how spaces and temporalities shifted as youth work services closed and appeared, and how these changes allowed and curtailed relationships between young men and myself to be built and maintained. This shows the similar challenges I faced in different youth work projects and the ways that funding trends affected where I was able to work and more importantly what services young people did or did not have access to. I then discuss the importance of building trust through doing gender and as presence, an opening up of spaces through a willingness to engage. The chapter then looks at the multiple spatialities and temporalities of the youth club and beyond and the importance of a relational practice. Finally I offer an account of my ethical practice that was regulated by both the ethics of practice in social research and also by my professional practice as a youth worker. I consider the possibilities and impossibilities of a uniform and rigid ethical practice in contexts where ethics are negotiated and reformed inline with the everyday. The chapter concludes with a summary of the methodology

Chapter four introduces two keys themes that run through the thesis in relation to on young men's emotional worlds, namely trust and respect. It

shows the ways that entering youth work spaces I found them characterised by particular forms of embodied communication and the ways that young men navigated these spaces as bodies. Trust was not a given in relationships here that were often based on carrying bodies and interactions that blunted or shielded emotional sensitivity in order to maintain respect for oneself and inclusion in group spaces. I show how group spaces were competitive and the ways that young men were excluded and through this the bodily reactions that they showed. The chapter pays close attention to the importance of embodied narratives in considering young masculinities and emotional life, through providing a detailed ethnographic account of the ways that young men build relationships and the silences that can operate across relations of power and difference. But also the way a close reading of bodies reveals that the relational insensitivity often associated with masculinities and particular behaviours is not a full reading of young men's emotional life and not always how they wish to interact. In doing this, the chapter opens up questions around the uncertainties of trust and the ways young masculinities in inner city contexts can be re-thought.

Chapter four considers what it means to belong for young men in urban contexts. Having characterised these as 'super-diverse' spaces of 'urban multicultural' the chapter argues that particular attention need to be paid to the way global histories inflect local contexts and to consider the way this creates particular subjectivities. The chapter looks to understand the ways belongings are negotiated, contested and re-made through multiple spatial and temporal locations and histories. Different places had their own histories of settlement and division and the chapter brings together these local histories of settlement and migration with more contemporary migrations and movements. The idea of movement is also considered in terms of the uncertainty in young men's lives though unwanted engagements with institutional life, and wider structural forces that impacted on where they belonged, or for how long. Following the overall argument of the thesis the ethnographic focus is on how masculinities are lived, embodied and the emotional life of young men. I also advance an important argument around the non-essentialism of differences in the

ways that belongings over 'race' and ethnicity are at times re-made by young men and simultaneously reinforced, but importantly through locally situated gendered and embodied practices. This considers ideas of 'race' and ethnicity but also gender as something that operates hierarchically through competitiveness, but is importantly contested, arguing that belongings are not structured around hegemonic hierarchies as much research implicitly or explicitly suggests.

Chapter five explores gendered relational practices and the emotional responses of young men to these. Following on from the idea of belonging and the way relationships were, at least openly in peer group contexts, competitively negotiated. Exploring the practice and process of 'banter' I consider the way young men challenge and test each other around who they are and what they know. The chapter advances the argument that while a competitive and untrusting attitude to one another seems prevalent, that humour must be understood contextually, both locally and in relation to wider factors and uncertainties in young people's lives. In this way I draw out what ideas such as truth, knowing and getting it right mean for young men, considering these within wider histories of masculine knowing and certainty. The process of banter and of testing others claims shows the importance of experience for young men, and helps consider why particular young men might feel inclined to prove themselves in some situations. In this way while banter as a way of relating could appear to be aggressive, it is better understood as both attempting to develop and gain experience for oneself and also allowing a space to exist in relationships to test things out and for uncertainty to exist. However, ultimately I argue that this is a hard game for young men to play. The final section considers ideas of closing down and learning not to show feelings as a way of negotiating the intense interactions and tests young men offered one another. These arguments link in to the wider arguments of the thesis regarding the ways that emotional life becomes embodied in particular ways and how a focus on this can develop more considered ideas about relationality and young masculinities.

Chapter six focuses on the place of violence in young men's lives. The prevalence of a broad idea of violence throughout my time as a youth worker and researcher was hard to overlook. This chapter argues against such broad applications of such ideas that reproduce the reductionist framings of populist narratives and ideologically focused policy drives. I consider these as symbolic violence and thus begin to expand on the way we might think of how violence exists in young men's' lives in urban contexts. The interactions between young men in competitive peer contexts meant rather than simply closing down there was conflict and at times this was physical. These were the moments most clearly came to the fore, not necessarily as violence to another, but often in the violence young men felt in themselves in the tensions they were trying to deal with. The chapter goes on to consider how this need to face up to violence might be negotiated more widely in young men's lives and does this through ethnographic examples that consider the way young men identified with the possibility, and the regular threat of violence as something that had to be faced as a young man. I consider the idea of choices here and the contexts when responding through violence seemed the norm and when it was harder to consider what choice to make. Importantly I consider these ideas in the context of emotional life and embodied responses to help bring out a more nuanced account of the relationship between young masculinities and violence, and how this impacts on young men at these ages. The chapter concludes by considering the context of the 2011 UK riots as moments that have extended in time through the ways they are rooted in histories and a more general feeling of distrust in society around inequality and prejudice. I consider violence throughout as operating on and across individual and group bodies, that maintains a complex but regular presence in the way young men have to negotiate their gendered, classed and 'raced' identities.

Chapter seven, the final substantive chapter, looks at the ways young masculinities are positioned and lived in terms of the future, employment, aspirations, and becoming a man. The way youth work provisions have changed in the last twenty years but also the local and contemporary

temporal and spatial manifestations of these changes are considered in the ways they impacted on young men's lives and how they dealt with this. In this way, following the way local contexts are multi-sited the chapter responds to the overall argument of considering young men's personal and emotional lives with regard to immediate contexts and relationships but also beyond these, looking to wider connections and relationships. The chapter looks to argue against simplistic portrayals of masculine experience as the thesis has done throughout, and challenges dominant narratives around the ways class, 'race' and gender are lived. It does this through questioning young men's relationship with education, considering the importance this was afforded and the particular circumstances that led some young men to find their way through difficult periods, or others to decide they could not. Following this the chapter argues for the importance of alternative spaces of education and the complex ways these are negotiated in youth work provisions by youth workers and young people. I show the successes of these spaces but also the limitations through the professional, and Political, requirements of youth services as increasingly interventionist. The chapter brings these arguments together around the idea of resilience, which has become increasingly prominent as an idea around developing particular types of young people in the context of austerity politics and the wider context of neoliberalism. The chapter concludes by considering how young men already considered ideas of becoming a man, and how the responsibilities they had, felt, took on could be situated in relation with wider structural factors, and also impacted on their personal lives as young men.

The thesis concludes with chapter eight, by considering the original aims, namely an exploration into the relationships between young men in group contexts in inner city South London, and a more specific interest in the relationship between young masculinities and trust. To do this I return to the individual chapters to draw out the ways trust can be considered in young men's lives throughout the research contexts. The conclusion details the main findings of the research, namely a consideration of the place of respect and trust in young men's lives; how respect was relational and given in different contexts, when trust was granted, and also the limits

of trust. I argue for the strength of a relational method that considers the temporality and spatiality of multiple belongings in young lives, but that can also consider the ways difference operates through these myriad spaces and the relevance of the body, as an emotional, lived site of identity and a carrier of embodied histories that can form important ways of relating to oneself and others if time and space allow.

2 Relational ethnography: working with young men and building trust

From 2010 to 2015 I worked as a youth worker across London. Most of this work was in South London and here I draw on four of those youth work projects. The forthcoming chapter describes the process of developing a relational way of working with young men that more specifically focused on what I term a masculinities research practice.

Youth work spaces

Grounded by a specific location or object, a borough or institution that they unpack, ethnographic methodology is often rooted in the pastoral idea of the anthropological site (Gidley 2013). This ethnography has been conducted through several years, across borough boundaries, in different spaces and characterised by shifting temporalities. The regular (re)structuring of youth services and projects and my role as a youth worker within these has had an influence on the places, times and people I worked in and with. Youth work as a *service*, increasingly defines its purpose, those it works with and 'targets' through deficit models. The stop start, short-term gap filling, fire fighting nature and regular re-positioning is indicative of both the short-termism inherent in youth services funding and policy, and public services more widely in neoliberal times. There is a continual quest for youth work as a *practice* to prove its value, a related, yet conflictual search for funding and thus the increasingly common necessity to respond to policies designed to tackle the problems of, or faced by marginalised young people, meaning the spaces in which youth work is practiced are disjointed, temporary and shifting.

This has meant working with young people in a range of spaces, including estate based youth clubs, community youth clubs set up to serve a wider

area, mobile youth clubs, sports and activity centres and trips away. In addition, specifically targeted work means home and school visits, street work, and meeting at different times, and different days. Therefore the role of the youth worker is not confined to a singular space or place and my relationships with young people were defined by the changing logics of youth work; weekly and then curtailed, in the youth club and at the local train station, in McDonalds then cooking dinner, with few ingredients on an open fire in woodland while young men worried about spiders. In this way we might understand this project and these different spaces as what ethnographers have termed multi-sited. In the previous chapter I set out how we can think about youth work spaces through the concept of urban multiculturalism, the interrelationship with spatial segregation and appropriation of the places young people live through policing and re-development, as services and community spaces that are being withdrawn. Thus there is the further consideration that these youth work spaces themselves are characterised by multiple spatialities and temporalities. The methodology set out in this chapter draws on these ideas and the tensions identified in the other areas of the literature, to set out a way of conducting ethnography that tries to come to terms with the complexities of researching young people and their relationships in urban spaces.

This chapter develops through presenting the youth projects in a chronological narrative. This narrative approach enables a viewpoint of the ways that spaces and temporalities opened and closed and how these allowed and curtailed relationships between young men and myself to be built and maintained, while also retaining the ability to situate these youth projects within the socio-historical and theoretical contexts offered in the previous chapter. It also shows the similar challenges I faced in different youth work projects and the ways that funding trends affected where I was able to work and more importantly what services young people did or did not have access to I discuss how I adapted my methods to different contexts, showing the practices I used as a youth worker to build relationships. In this way I show the reader the way that the research developed based on these different contexts and around the themes of

masculinities, trust, and emotional life and urban cultures and in relation to youth services, projects and spaces. This chronological narrative is interspersed with methodological reflections detailing the rationale and practice through which the ethnography emerged.

The first three youth projects I worked at were all situated on estates namely the Southgrove, Avondale and Burlington, across a three-mile stretch on the southern side of the River Thames in South East London. The fourth site was an EGYV team and I draw on work with young men from one particular area that I have called Denhill. The Southgrove is where this project and the processes of building relationships begins and it was through the two organisations (here-on called Organisation A and Organisation B) I worked with that I came to work on the Avondale, the Burlington and also in Denhill. In contrast to the Southgrove my time working in these other projects was defined by my own inability to continue there in the case of the Avondale, restructuring of the service in Denhill and by the short term funding of the Burlington project.

Part of this story, then is young men's relationship to these services, of which I was a part as a youth worker. In some way here I was both insider and outsider – someone who worked on the estate or in the area, who provided a support service that could seem more trustworthy than other public services, for example police or schools that young men were at times in conflict with. But simultaneously through my white, middle class identity and the changing face of youth work as intervention focused I was also an outsider. These positions were further complicated by the ages of young men I worked with and their own experiences and identities in relation to institutions. The wider context of youth work, as we will see, is an increasingly neo-liberal turn in public services including increased citizen surveillance and a period of intense austerity politics in Britain.

On the other hand this is a story about young men's lives in London, about what it means to belong as a young, working class man in a global city. Local identities and the politics of place (Keith 1993) play out within a globalised social and cultural landscape. Histories of 'race' and class take

root in local contexts and are re-made through migrations and movements creating new belongings in the global city. How are these new belongings practiced and what types of subjectivities are available, and hidden?

Embodied beginnings: Southgrove

My fieldwork began with an email request for a PhD intern sent to Goldsmiths from Organisation A, based at the newly built community centre on the Southgrove estate. The organisation had recently been rebranded as a social business having previously been registered as a charity, following the direction of youth services and public sector provisions towards an increasingly neoliberal agenda. It ran as an Integrated Youth Support Service¹⁶ (IYSS) on the estate, providing generic youth club sessions and specific interventions for those involved in and at risk of crime. This targeted work was done through two caseworkers based at the community centre who worked with 'at risk' young people on the estate – those excluded from school or committing anti-social behaviour. Caseworkers jobs involved liaising with the local authority housing, schools, and police to target and work with these identified young people. The focus of this service was to keep these young people involved in their wider peer networks while giving them additional support in one-to-one and family settings. The service manager had asked for someone who could evaluate the work they were doing. I responded to this as an opening that allowed me to work with young people in a setting that suited my original research ideas around young men and knife crime.

As I walked under the thick railway tunnel that edged Southgrove estate and turned down an alley to walk inside its borders I closed up a little. Pushing my hands slightly deeper into my pockets I hunched my shoulders. I was aware about the uncertainties I had around my research but was surprised to feel a bodily sense of insecurity simply entering this estate for the first time. Reflecting back I was partially projecting the

¹⁶ Integrated Youth Support Services were run by NGO's or social businesses in conjunction with the local authority. A relationship based on a growing privatisation of public services and one that would come to influence my fieldwork throughout.

research topic onto the estate, an urban space marked by the fear of crime based on stereotypes of urban natives and I entered the Southgrove unexpectedly embodying some of these fears. This was not my first experience of such a space by any means, so I was also carrying myself in a way I had become accustomed to as a younger man in London. Embodying a particular masculine persona borne of ideas of particular tropes of tough masculinities and the way navigating unknown parts of the urban landscape brings a sense of the unknown and sometimes the imagined and real possibilities of risk and threat.

I arrived at the centre and met the services manager. We discussed our different views on what research a PhD intern might conduct and I produced an outline of my research in the form of my original PhD research proposal. Full of abstracting jargon and competing theoretical concepts this looked to investigate the contemporary panic over knife crime and looked to understand the place of 'race', class, and particularly gender in young men's involvements in violence.

Heather was keener on research that evaluated the services effectiveness, but more caught up in the imagined possibilities of my forthcoming research I was unwilling to commit to focusing on what I worried might develop into a formulaic piece of research on the workings of the service. What we were both keen on was some support work with young men that could operate with and alongside the services current support systems. I was offered a role as a sessional youth worker and started work there a couple of months later following the necessary checks. The need for available part-time workers was a similar feature of all the youth projects I came to work at in the next few years. Some were more formalised roles as I will show, but they were often roles that came suddenly vacant and required someone with experience (ideally) to fill the role. As my project progressed I came to these more and more in the mind-set of a youth worker in contrast to my start at the Southgrove where I had ideas around research firmly in my head.

Both juniors and seniors sessions operated as 'generic' sessions in the large and newly designed community centre. 'Generic' meant a range of activities and open to all-comers and sessions were well attended with the odd exception, often bringing thirty or more young people through the doors at both sessions. Young men made up the majority attending, and the spaces of the youth club areas were marked by gender divides in the ways that the boys occupied particular activities with the girls keeping to themselves most of the time. This meant football sessions took up half the hall with other activities sharing the other half; the hall was often physically divided during sessions by pulling the huge dividers across to create an enclosed walled off space where football would take place. The result was a concentration of bodies, intensity, and continual action, while across the rest of the centre young men disappeared into computer rooms, corridors, and into the outside area.

After working one seniors session, which covered the ages of thirteen to nineteen, I was scheduled to work several weeks of juniors sessions, an age grouping of eight to thirteen, the separate sessions reflecting educational age divisions between junior and senior school. The seniors sessions, run on a different week night, seemed more popular with staff members and preference was given to those who had worked at the service longer so with the exception of the odd night, it was a few months until I got to know the seniors well. Juniors session ran on a Tuesday. Boys and girls who were so small that they could never have been close to eight stood at the entrance and with the confidence of an adult pronounced they were old enough and pulled out their mobile when questioned saying, 'Call my mum'. Somewhere between not wanting to accept this challenge and not wanting to turn them away we let them in. I made an early habit of remembering and greeting young people by name as an initial method of building rapport. I figured if I was recognised on a personal level then it began the process of building trust I imagined taking time. So I would ask some young people what my name was after meeting them, and expecting the, 'Dunno', would remind them with a smile; after a few weeks of sarcastically pronouncing, 'Hello BBRRIIAN', most happily addressed me by name.

Working with the juniors regularly was high-energy and all consuming; they saw the youth club as a playground, freed of school uniform and the authority of teachers or parents. In these sessions I felt comfortable relatively quickly, my authority was recognised by young men meaning I felt in control as a youth worker, although my idea of acceptable levels of noise and behaviour seemed more relaxed than some other workers. I often ran the football area in the juniors sessions and young men were keen for me to be involved in football games as a mediating presence but also an authority figure they could playfully challenge, and who could quickly level the scores prolonging the possibility of not losing and through this regular practice I started to build relationships. The young men in these juniors sessions were open with me, saying hello, asking me questions, or if not they were generally happy to engage in activities that they saw the staff were running, but there were limits. As I got to know some of them better and began to start conversations around school or football they did not want to talk and jeopardise their free time at the youth club. Realising I had something non-authority related to ask them they would quickly tell me, 'Not now Brian. I'll chat you later yeah, yeah, yeah.' offering a few more, 'Yeah's', as a gentle put-down to my interruptive presence.

The senior sessions were different. Being there with the seniors – or getting involved was not as easy. I found their bodies more closed. Not all of them took part in organised activities such as football in the way most of the juniors would. Instead they would move around the hall a lot. Finding quiet spaces, in different rooms, holding the couches in a closed group. Even less interested in me than the juniors I felt stifled about how to approach them in terms of asking questions towards my planned research output, and not wanting to create a relationship where they felt I was trying to ask unwelcome questions.

Preconceived objects, silences and changing relationships

I had begun the research with ideas around masculinities, subjectivity and emotional life and was keen to continue with these as the focus of my research. Fundamental to researching these, was that I would develop trust with young men. From this position I could ask questions and hoped that young men would open up to talk about their feelings and experiences. But the expectancy of drawing on some perceived, or imagined authenticity towards gaining respect and trust became an obvious early oversight; in other words the complexities making up the everyday threw any ideas about how the project was going to be conducted. As chapter three details respect and trust were important factors in young people's lives and were also mediated by a complex of interrelated factors.

Primary amongst these was that I was an outsider in these local contexts. There are several examples of this positional framing of the researcher in conducting ethnography (Alexander 2000, Harris 2006, McKenzie 2015) and the possibilities and difficulties of negotiating it.

The second important point I want to make clear here, around the difficulties of this research and related to my newness of presence, were the silences that existed around me being here but also in terms of masculinities. To suggest these existed because of the more obvious differences in subject position between me and young people is likely true but also fails to show the ways that this varied with ages and in different contexts, and also how this changed over time.

So with some young, white men, such as Ryan on the Southgrove they often commented on my presence, dress, and speech through notions of differences in class. For many young men we communicated through more ritualized norms of dominant masculinity, where they tested me out around my aptitude at football or my willingness to enforce the rules of the club in response to their behaviour. For those young men more engaged in these dominant ways of doing masculinity, several chose to offer silence, and I felt that my whiteness¹⁷ and position of authority was the

¹⁷ For me in this context whiteness was a class based identity and also related to an authority position, rather than simply being white.

major factor in our initial interactions. However all men of similar heritages did not act in this same way requiring a consideration of locally situated practices and cultures of masculinities. How these responses can more aptly be considered in the context of the wider project is that they were silences around trust; a lack of trust existed around who I was as an individual, a youth worker and a researcher, operating to different levels with different young men but alerting me at an early stage to the way this would affect a project around young people's experiences and emotional lives.

Working with different age groups forced me to consider the impact of being both a researcher and a youth worker within this space in a different way. Juniors were open, would give direct answers but often with a questioning face, as if they were waiting for verification from me as to whether it was the right answer. The seniors were more closed, wanting to suss me out and not keen to engage in conversation beyond acknowledging you were there. In terms of language as we will see in the forthcoming substantive chapters there were different levels, hiding different layers of experience, that a simple interview based project could not come to terms with.

These early fieldwork experiences around the ways language was used instrumentally, the different levels of language thus present in different spaces and the power relations running through these spaces led me to consider the relationship between language and trust in young men's relationships (Jackson 2012). In her ethnography of life on the St Ann's estate in Nottingham, Lisa McKenzie makes the point that "in working class communities [...] one phrase can explain a whole essay of practice", which she positions as the opposite to academic practice which takes 10,000 words to say what can be said in one hundred (McKenzie 2015: 147). This was also an important realisation for me: that young men did not necessarily have a need to articulate themselves to me in great detail, and furthermore were perhaps not, like many of us, experts in their own lives. As Les Back notes, "we have to allow the people about whom we write to be complex, frail, ethically ambiguous, contradictory and

damaged” (Back 2007:157). While I was searching for a way to explain everything about the contexts the young people were busy getting on with it.

The realisation around the assumptions I had made regarding the choice of methods and the possible applicability of these also facilitated a re-consideration of my research object and the ways I had imposed ideas of violence on to the Southgrove as a ‘site’ and the people I met there. While not the procedure of social research methods manuals (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) I decided to abandon the assumptions I had adopted from elsewhere and focus on the process and importance of building relationships through youth work practice (Ruch et al. 2010).

Doing gender and the politics of research

I want to pause here in the narrative to offer the reader some reflections and insight into how the ethnographic methodology for the project developed from these initial experiences on the Southgrove. I had become clearer of the importance of researching the ways that young men practiced their gender identity, how they engaged in *doing* gender, and more specifically the ways they built and maintained male-to-male relationships. These ideas retained a consideration of the relationship between masculinities and violence, which has formed the basis of chapter six. But they also considered what the over-determination of urban young men’s identities might mean in terms of how we think about forms of urban culture. Is masculinity implicitly figured in the singular, as opposed to masculinities, when we think about young men in urban contexts? How do young men practice their gender identity and what are the tensions in their experiences of this? Might a focus on considering practices that are not simply exercises in dominant or hegemonic masculinity, but instead give meaning to different gendered ontologies and belongings develop our ideas of young men, masculinities and urban cultures? If these ideas run counter to some of the literature that I have used it is because the internal dialogues I had with these authors has felt

productive in unthinking some of the assumptions around masculinities that I found explicitly and implicitly in their work and in my own thinking.

Gender is not seen here as simply an identity, something that can be tried on and discarded, easily reworked and adapted. The insights of poststructuralism have taught us that gender is culturally and socially constructed, and that gender identities are fluid (Butler 1993), thus young men do not axiomatically practice masculine identities, and masculinities are not inherently tied to the male body. However, the making and (re)producing of gender, as an active social process, occurs in relation to particular contexts and thus as localised and more globally inflected cultural practices, and importantly is made in and through the body (Connell 2005).

My focus on the ways gender is done developed through empirical observations and experiences of the ways young men practiced their masculinities, including the instrumental use of language and the presence of silences as detailed above. There were particular coded and ritualised ways that gender was reproduced between young men that dominated the group contexts of many youth work sessions and spaces.¹⁸ To access these it required a partaking a doing of gender towards being accepted into, and sharing these spaces. I discuss the processes of positioning myself, the difficulties of listening or being allowed to listen and the importance of presence in more detail shortly. This allowed a consideration of the way masculinities were done, but also developed a basic level of trust where many young men operated embodied practices of distrust. From here I was able to build relationships with young men where an understanding was possible of the different masculinities that

¹⁸ It is important to note here that my early time on the Southgrove and then the Avondale was working in large open access group sessions, and these sessions were formative for the research practice around young masculinities I am describing here. When I began working on the Burlington and later in Denhill I was in smaller group contexts, often one-to-one and the dynamics were different and might have allowed a different methodology had the research only been based here. As it was however, the early experiences on the Southgrove and Avondale developed a confidence in my approach to both youth work and my research practice that I carried, embodied, into the other projects and was able to draw on in building relationships.

were practiced and that were also occluded through more dominant interactions. This is to consider both the ways masculinities and difference intersect, and also different masculinities or different levels of men's experience. My specific focus on young men's relationships with other men operates as a way to consider masculinities and the doing of gender. The process of this was embodied and thus gender operates through the body, and as the body, not just as performed but as emotional bodies. Young men were not simply performing gender identities of, say, distrust; instead I have referred to these as practices. They are not simply performances as discursive ideas of identities suggest, because the practice of these identities is not something young men could simply put down or take off. Gender "is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body" (Connell 2005).

Thus gender was done through bodies, gestures, bodily movements, in a sense putting your body on the line, but these practices are also bodily experiences and are themselves emotional states. Carrying and practicing these emotional body's also means a tension is present, through a hiding of the self, and thus this tension is something I have tried to draw out in the ethnography. This tension in young men's experiences of their male peer groups and in relation to our understandings of masculinities and urban cultures is one of the key contributions this research brings to the understanding of young masculinities.

This takes young men, rather than masculinities, as an almost ethnographic category in itself, to develop ways of thinking the tensions that arise for young men in subscribing to, and practicing gender, the ways that more rigid and dominant practices of gender are navigated and potentially undone, the ways that different masculinities are practiced, both towards the political goal of identifying and practicing gender identities that are not defined by gender relations of power and towards developing our understanding of masculinities, difference and urban cultures. This develops the understanding of how gender practices are relational, and the rationale behind a masculinities research practice.

A further point is necessary here on gender as a relational practice and the politics of my research methodology. Gender as relational, necessarily means that masculinities are practiced in relation to femininities. The dominant practices of masculinity that I have suggested characterised the urban and youth spaces that I worked in, does not mean that young men exist in a sphere of their own, regardless of the majority of youth work sessions being distinctly gendered through activities or specifically boys only sessions as many were. Young men had strong relationships with mothers, female youth workers were present in all the session I worked bar one-to-one meetings, a large amount of young people I worked with attended co-ed schools. Young men talked about girls, bantered about girls, and worried about their masculinities in relation to girls. Why then, the focus on a specific sphere of young men, proceeding as if women are not a relevant part of the analysis?

This thesis draws on and allies itself with the perspectives of critical studies on men and masculinities and a radical youth work practice towards thinking through ideas of hegemonic and importantly considering the possibilities of different and plural masculinities. Thus following Hearn (2015) and Seidler (2006) and a gender activist research focus, this research is strongly aligned with the feminist theory and practice. As oriented through a radical youth work practice conceived as a alternative social education (Batsleer 2013), this thesis is concerned with on the ground work focused on masculinities, gender relations of power and the goal of building gender equity (Hearn 2015: 112). To be clear I do not ally my focus on young men with work done under the title 'Men's studies', where men and the difficulties they face are the focus, and women's interests are often not, either explicitly or implicitly. Rather my focus is one where men, and young men, are both "a social category formed by the gender system and, often dominant, collective and individual agents of social practices" (Hearn 2004: 49).

The purpose here is twofold, on the one hand to consider the ways that young men 'do gender' in the making of urban culture, towards rethinking

masculinities in super-diverse urban environments. What is at stake here, and why such a focus is important, is the regular emphases on young working class and ethnic minority boys/men that suggests change as men is necessary, yet regularly frames men's gender identity in similar concepts and terminology, offering few options towards thinking and practicing this outside of the very frames of being that are the object of critique. My wider aim in the presentation of this thesis, as a focus on the practices of masculinities as necessary, is towards developing an activism around gender relations of power and better considering the ways that these relations are reproduced in everyday practices. As Beasley argues, "rendering gender and masculinity visible offers a challenge to existing power relations and their continuing reiteration" (Beasley 2008: 87).

On the other hand, relatedly, this focus on masculinities and the ways they are lived, the tensions in doing gender, is especially relevant for the conceptualisation and practical support services of the personal issues faced by marginalised young men.

Developing a research practice around young masculinities meant not only engaging with young men as a youth worker, researcher or activist, but it required engaging in an active process of personal transformation. At an early point in the PhD project, as my supervisor and I discussed questions of young men and violence and that early framing, they asked me to consider the ethical and epistemological implications of asking questions of others that you have not asked yourself. This was the beginning of thinking through and developing a relational approach within ethnographic research, a consideration of the power dynamics of me as researcher and youth worker as class, whiteness, age, authority, an outsider, and my presence there, amidst the histories of the estate, the personal and family histories of the young people. This means taking the subjectivity and positionality of the researcher seriously and developing what Seidler (2006) has called a critical self awareness within the research process. This is something akin to the idea of reflexivity but importantly in this research, considers the personal transformations that occur for the researcher within the research process as a way of reflecting on and critically assessing the relationship between research object, researcher

and research participants. This meant remaining attentive to my being in these spaces, the masculinity I was embodying and how I carried my body and the ways I was engaging in relationships, as a way to critically assess how this might be affecting the ways I was affecting the relationships and behaviours I was observing and crucially participating in.

Changing temporalities and spaces

It was after I had been working on the Southgrove for a year and a half that things were first called into question. The organisation (A) I worked for and the housing authority that had built and owned the community centre were, alongside the borough council, debating funding for the forthcoming year.

At a similar time a second organisation (B) had started working on the Southgrove, run through mobile youth clubs and operated on a different night to the other services, and for a period of a little more than a year I was able to work for both organisations, regularly working youth club sessions three or four times a week.

The community centre had been built in the heart of the currently semi re-developed estate, as an open provision but with twenty-five residential flats above. In the years prior to my arrival I became aware from talking to some parent of young people attending the youth club, the estates residents had been promised that their existing community managed space would be replaced with a new, better equipped and larger space for residents to use. When I finished this research six years after starting on the Southgrove this space was often unused but locked, hired out privately to an educational establishment, and largely unused by young people. There were sometimes week long activities during the summer holidays, but these ran in the same week that the organisation (B) I had moved to and now worked with on the Southgrove also ran their summer programme. This was indicative to me of the way young people had been marginalised by the privatisation of this local community space and the way these activities could benefit them not fully considered.

Under the terms of the redevelopment, and inline with government planning laws, the development team was required to compensate the community for the essentially free land they were receiving with something new being provided. In the end a community space was built to replace the old one, yet later taken away. Further funding for community activities was promised on the basis of so many flats being built and the obvious financial gain from these but never materialised. This then is an example of the process of marginalisation of communities and access to resources through the re-development of urban space by vast sums of capital that I documented in the previous chapter. Although this was by no means the worst-case example of this of the estates I worked on. This story of privatisation and withdrawn access works alongside the cuts to youth services that I detailed in the previous chapter, although it is tempting in the light of this information to view the cuts imposed by central government policy to local government as being used not only to cut youth services because of the inability to absorb the wider centrally imposed cuts but also as a useful way to redistribute land and material resources in the interest of private profit.

At that point we were advised the service would change and our jobs were at risk. Several workers left due to the responsibilities of supporting their families and the service manager moved on to a new full-time position. Other less experienced part time workers replaced them and while the IYSS closed the generic provision continued. Even after this short period I was one of the more experienced and better-known workers. Amongst the juniors I had good rapport and while I was not given the role of managing the sessions (largely due to the experience of one remaining worker and the desire of Abdul, an incoming worker) I was scheduled to work all the juniors sessions and as staff morale and numbers faded all the seniors sessions.

The mobile youth club sessions that Organisation B ran were provided via decker buses that had been converted (here-on this mobile youth club is generally referred to as the bus). They boasted seating areas for groups and three flat screens with games consoles linked to them. One of these

was in an exterior panel, allowing young people to stand outside and play in groups and two were upstairs, the larger of which was at the back of the top deck and was called the Playstation zone – one of the regular spaces this ethnography focuses on due to its popularity and thus intensity of interaction amongst young men. The bus also included a basic music studio at the front of the top deck, laptop computers with internet, table spaces for other activities, some board games and a small staff area linked to the driver's cabin where we could prepare snacks for those attending the sessions.

Organisation B had a more secure source of funding by account of their project. The bus, rejigged by MTV's pimp my ride team meant that the youth work team could travel to estates giving young people a space to attend whilst avoiding the 'postcode issues' that were behind the 'gang problem' and continued youth violence. David Cameron the UK prime minister visited a project, which he subsequently publicised well. The approach of the bus was likely flexibility in the ability to deliver provision, and lower costs than renting a fixed space, rather than anything to do with postcodes initially but its mobility neatly fitted the narrative (and sometime reality) of the ways young people's was limited.

For the following nine months Organisation B ran a swap with Organisation A, sending a female worker to the girls session that Organisation A ran, while they sent a male worker to the bus sessions in return. I will make clear here that the bus sessions were boys only on request of the young people in the area given that a girls session was already running, and on the whole the youth clubs in my experience were attended by more young men than young women. It was a popular space amongst young men and I worked here for almost five years almost every week barring a few short period of absence and breaks for school holidays when youth projects do not generally run, apart from short holiday programmes. In this way it formed a fundamental space and time in this research project. The space of the bus was tight, close-knit, meaning that unlike in the wider, open spaces of the community centre, or the fluid fast paced movement in the outdoor football cage, interaction was regular,

people sat next to one another because there was nowhere else to sit, and space was contested because it was limited and everyone wanted the better seat, to be next playing on Fifa football¹⁹, or to be in the little music studio with those who were practicing their latest bars.

Furthermore working for both organisations I was working with the young people four times a week for the next nine months. This meant I regularly bumped into young men on the estate as I came and went, seeing them in different groups, with parents and getting to know them better. Similarly working for both organisations I saw them in different contexts which developed our relationship and although I now felt much more like a youth worker than a researcher, I was viewed less as a figure of authority and more like someone who they used to seeing around, very much still a youth worker, but beyond the singular context of the youth project and youth service agendas.

After this nine-month period of sustained access the generic sessions on the Southgrove closed for the final time. It was close to two years after I had started at the Southgrove the staff were made aware that new funding had not been secured beyond the end of the year with just two weeks left, although we were sold the false hope that it may continue.

When the Southgrove generic youth sessions closed for the last time in December 2011, we gathered the thirty-two who had attended and sat them down, standing facing them across the hall. As the lead worker Abdul addressed the seniors to tell them the news I positioned myself to the side, but in between the group of young people and the staff, not wanting to face the young people as they sat on the floor and I stood opposite them. I knew I was staying working with the other service and perhaps I wanted to separate myself from this bad news. Similarly I was positioning myself, my body in a space that suggested I wasn't happy with the news. The young people were told that we were closing and weren't likely to be re-opening. Keon looked across at me and we held eye

¹⁹ Fifa football, here-on referred to as just Fifa, is a yearly releases football video console game that directly mirrors developments in the professional game allowing those playing to choose from a range of teams from around the world with up-to-date squad profiles.

contact. He raised his eyebrows in a lack of surprise, a gesture that also signalled his disappointment for what he was hearing, but he also acknowledged that he knew I felt it too.

Although the running (down) of the session and the way the management delivered the news of closure frustrated me for the young people who used it, in truth I was as disappointed for myself as I was for them about losing the space. I had done regular write-ups of the sessions I had worked, but I felt I had only just begun the process of building relationships. The young people there had enjoyed the twice a week access, and three times a week for seniors and at the time could not fully take in the simple explanation that was offered to them at the end of the final session. The juniors, busy as ever were simply told we were not opening in the New Year but would probably be back. It was only over the following months, and years that I was regularly asked, mostly by the younger boys, 'Brian when is the club coming back?' It is not easy to offer an explanation that seemed tangible to young people other than – there wasn't enough money to run it. But as I have argued this is not a question of money but a question of value, of who and what generates economic value. The final Organisation A project was about becoming a 'peer leader' and ran on past the official withdrawal into 2012 and ended in April. At this point I volunteered my time to Organisation B to continue working on the Southgrove and my role was included in the new funding bid a few months later allowing me to continue for another three years in a paid position.

The politics of listening and being present

There was a similar issue I found in all the places I worked with young men around listening. Being seen to be listening to what people were saying was not seen as acceptable. This was about the politics of listening and presence and I became aware quite early on that it was not possible to be a passive listener here.²⁰ Conversation between young men would often stop as I either drew near, or more actively joined them. This doesn't

²⁰ This is related to language use as gendered, as what is said being regularly challenged and young men's awareness of the accountability they will be required to show for what they have said (see chapter five).

mean they were simply guarded, sometimes this was the case, but rather that they almost always acknowledged my presence in their conversation, either actively including me and questioning why I was standing there listening, while maintaining their conversation to test how much I really was listening and how I would react; or more actively excluding me from the conversation. Even with the latter it was not always the case that they didn't want you to listen, rather that in some way they did; showing that you weren't being allowed to listen as a participant was a mode of communication to show that speech was occurring but that you couldn't access it, a power dynamic around space and belonging. In contrast when young men did want to talk privately they just left the shared youth work spaces. If they didn't want interference youth workers left them to their own devices, it was a voluntary relationship.

So this politics of listening was also a way of communicating and acknowledging to those listening that they had been made visible, within the power dynamics both as excluded but also as witness to the power dynamics within the closed group. At times I was required to be an excluded witness, the use of my presence was as listener and observer to the power dynamics between young men, while simultaneously being closed out of the group. From this was a realisation that, in the negotiation of these spaces, they were as interested in my reactions as I was in theirs. I was not simply researching them, but often felt like the most self-conscious person there through trying to be involved rather than listening in, with young men aware that they had the power in determining the relationship. In this way being here, as a body in space was constituted by these relations of doing gender. The positionality of youth worker or researcher were not stable positions to inhabit and provided no invisibility, rather were positions that young men played to, and on, in the routines and responses they offered.

This made me much more aware of my own body, of my presence and the uncomfortable feeling of being rejected, either as youth worker or researcher. Part of developing a listening practice – of engaging in these spaces where listening was challenged to be active, to be open – was

about the positioning of the body. Gidley (2009) writes of awkwardness and ethnography, asking what use is the craft of ethnography? Describing it as a “perching on the edge” (Gidley 2009: 529) I felt I was often doing exactly this trying to feel or seem comfortable amongst groups of young men, in the way that, continuing the bodily metaphor “the ethnographer is always at an angle to those they study” (ibid). In using my body as a communicative medium, a holding out and embodying of the tests of (un)affected masculinity, I felt an awkwardness and a being on the edge that was a crucial element of the critical self awareness I developed as part of a relational ethnographic practice.

In becoming an active listener through participating and in so doing developing a relationship with young men, I was in a way putting my body on the line. Not in any sense of physical danger, but rather in terms of the possibility and type of relationships I was building as a youth worker. By being challenged as present and to be a part of the group I didn’t want to dismiss tests offered to me, but similarly didn’t want to participate in and reproduce the gender relations that were dominant in young men’s peer groups.

Chapter five talks about how experience for young men was very present, there was no gain in saying, ‘I know about this, I’ve done that’. This was not proof and served to build distrust. Building a relationship was about showing you were present, not saying you were present but being present by taking part in what young men were doing. Sometimes that meant sitting around when they were bantering with each other, and this opened up a tension in being a youth worker whether to enforce the rules or not. Opening yourself up in this way and allowing them to engage me and see that I was engaged and was considering my position was a key part of understanding trust as one of the key elements to young men’s gendered relations. As Hearn (2015) discusses in developing theoretical and practical tools for gender interventions with men and masculinities, “allowing space to engage with men’s vulnerability is a key element in exploring masculine identities, as well as allowing men to feel supported and accepted, rather than blamed and judged” (Hearn 2015: 117).

Building new relationships quickly: Avondale

In order to not complicate the narrative for the reader I have told the story of coming to work for both these organisations on the Southgrove uninterrupted. But during this period I was also working at other youth work projects; some were short-term projects or specific deliveries around a particular issue and I do not draw on those experiences in this research. But I also started at the second and third youth work projects that I do draw on here, and that were in the wider area of the Southgrove. I came to both of these projects through the two organisations. Both were closely connected to the Southgrove through their geographical proximity. One or two young men would come to different sessions based on school friendships, and through school many of the young men knew each other, or at least when talking with their more immediate peers knew of one another other at these three youth work projects. These connections helped to develop the perspective of the project as a whole.

The bus visited this second estate on the same day as the Southgrove running a directly after school, similarly open access session, before heading to the Southgrove for the evening session. I had met some young men from here on the summer camp I had attended and decided to work there as an additional site that gave me a wider view of young men's relationships within what was a geographically proximal area and I have argued characterised by particular historical and contemporary social and political forces that impacted on its social, cultural and economic fabrics. I spent a year working here and then travelling with the team in the bus to work the Southgrove sessions. Making up a huge area behind a trunk road running north-south from near the Thames out towards South London the Avondale was a short distance from the Southgrove and many of the young people from either estate knew one another through school or family ties. The sessions here were busy, heavily attended, and had the feel of the early Organisation A sessions in their energy and movement. With as many as fifty young people attending these sessions the two floors

of the bus were intense spaces of interaction, bodies crammed into the top deck and seating areas throughout.

I had a free role here, but spent a lot of my time there in the football cage, which drew a constant crowd of young men every week. The sprawling estate, less geographically isolated than the Southgrove, is an area in itself. As a result of this a much larger number of young people passed through the spaces of the estate and the mobile sessions we ran, often bringing the wider relationships and encounters young people had with them. During the time I worked there the Avondale was going through what there then billed as the final stages of a full demolition as part of the regeneration project that also saw the demolition of the nearby Thornton.²¹ While my time on the Avondale was significantly shorter than the Southgrove it served to help me consider further the ideas of young masculinities and trust that were developing as my research focus. The regularity of attendance to the football cage provided a useful comparative and supplementary field site alongside the Southgrove, and as noted above their proximity meant that conversation around similar issues or events, or indeed particular relationships could be had with different young men that knew one another.

What I want to return to here are the ideas I raised around my research focus in the last section resulting from my initial fieldwork experiences. Through working on the both the Southgrove and Avondale sessions I had developed a good relationship with another worker. Winston was in his forties, and had two children. A South Londoner, with Bajan and Jamaican heritage, and philosophy that enabled him to see things from the young people's perspective, he was the bus driver but also worked as a youth worker during sessions. He built relationships easily with young men and knew many of the young men at the Avondale already. When I arrived I found that with several, particularly a group of similar age and poise to Keon's group, I was again faced with silence.

²¹ There have been several court cases around this which have ruled in favour of residents associations and put the demolition on hold based on findings of improper practice on behalf of developers and local government officials

Ryan was one of these men and came over to greet Winston as I stood with him in the cage. Touching fists, Winston put an arm on Ryan's shoulder and said, 'Yo Ryan, say 'ello to my man B'. Ryan looked me up and down, said hello, and continued talking to Winston, a little more relaxed than when he had initially come over. In future weeks he afforded me raised eyebrows as we crossed paths in a similar way that Keon had come to do. The difference here was the approach Winston had, and the authenticity he had in the eyes of many young men, in comparison to other youth workers. He brought people in, he removed the uncertainty over not knowing someone, he made people feel at ease. Rather than giving a detailed description of Winston and his own methods of building trust here, which he laughed at the suggestion of, I will say that he embodied a gender identity that was certain yet approachable for young men and other youth workers. The way these his methods of doing gender built trust and respect amongst young men are detailed further throughout the substantive chapters of the thesis.

The year I spent working on the Avondale while I also worked on the Southgrove brought the importance of embodied narratives and bodily communication both as a method and as an object of ethnographic research in terms of working with young men and research on masculinities and emotional life more clearly into focus in terms of my overall thesis. It also made me aware of the importance of relationality amongst young men in group contexts in a wider sense and to consider the ways my subject position could be mediated not just through my own embodied practices but also by others such as Winston (Ahmed 2004). I had spent time considering the place of silence and the different levels of language that exist in terms of working class practices, masculinities, and emotional life and now also considered the place of the body and the ways young men carried themselves as important ways of considering different masculinities and urban cultures.

A space to talk: Burlington

I came to the Burlington youth project in the latter stages of the slow withdrawal of Organisation A from providing youth services in the borough, and this forms the third of estates lying in close geographical proximity. Situated along the riverside of Deptford it is a short walk from the Southgrove, and similarly to the Avondale young men here had relations or knew of young men from the Southgrove. Remaining youth workers under Organisation A's umbrella were still applying for funding left overs and having been granted some of these to run a gang-exit project for gang members in a particular ward of the borough, and after taking a while to get off the ground due to issues recruiting the target audience, the project finally went ahead in mid-2012. There was no one else to run it, so I was asked to. It was made up of twelve young men who were referred to the project by local youth workers who knew them, and who lived on the estate, none of whom were involved in gangs.

The specific purpose of the gang programme I came to run on the Burlington estate was to make an intervention in active gang membership and evidence changes in the behaviours leading to this, as outcomes justifying the local authority grant. While there was the obvious problem with targeting and recruitment of the correct demographic the young men attending had a more complex view. They suggested that there were not currently any gang problems on the Burlington, not long before renowned for its crime in folk and media accounts of the estate. But that most of the young men that had been involved in anti-social behaviour, crime, and violence with other young men and groups, had 'grown out of it', some now had young children of their own, those few that hadn't found a different focus were 'nitties or in jail'²².

The Burlington became a useful site within this research through the space afforded me to talk to young men on a regular basis, around the issues of my research and their opinions in it. The focus of the proposed programme was gangs and changing behaviours but since none of the young men were involved in gangs we talked about behaviours and their lives in a wider sense around these issues, and the ways they saw many

²² Nitties or Nitty are/is a drug addict.

of the issues surrounding young people in inner cities. The dynamic due to the small peer group attending was more focused similar to the smaller group or one-to one session I did across other youth work projects, but in a more relaxed and regular group context. Furthermore the peer group attending were just keen to use the space, give me a go and get the free food on offer. They humoured me very patiently as we had lengthy discussions about their lives and experiences.

Working in this smaller group context, regularly, and with a semi-specific focus I found it much quicker and easier to build relationships. This may have been down to the young men attending who, while they got bored at times of my suggested group discussions, also used the space to have some engaged and debated discussions about growing up, belonging, and their experiences. The make-up of this smaller group was a micro-cosm of the wider area, and the previous two estates but in this smaller and particular peer group context there were no obvious issues around 'race', class and trust. It became a space of talking in a more positive way about the different histories and belongings that were often contested through more hegemonic gendered practices in the other sites (chapters four and five). In this way it was a space that allowed me to take a more external and comparative perspective across place and different spaces, and of my framings of young men I worked with.

The Burlington is not enough of an example to say that gangs do not exist, but it is enough of an example to show the disconnect between some projects ideas and aims, and the reality of their delivery, and importantly engagement. In this context we have to ask how policy is formulated, how is knowledge about young people collected? What is the purpose or idea of targeted youth work? This was money thrown at a situation that could not be found, if largely due to timeframes. Nevertheless the project was, beyond my interests, in some senses a success. The young men attended regularly, we completed a programme around 'gangs', safety, being a young man, and futures that I devised, and went on several trips, that were part of the 'reward' scheme of the programmes funding.

Interventions: EGYV

As funding directions moved towards targeting gang members in the reactionary aftermath of the 2011 UK riots Ending Gang and Youth Violence (here-on EGYV) teams were set up and the Denhill site became my main place of work with Southgrove sessions still running on Tuesday evenings. I worked here for approximately a year in what was described as an intervention-focused role with young men aged between fifteen and twenty five (although almost all were between fifteen and seventeen). Similarly to the other three youth work projects young men I worked with here knew each other beyond the confines of the youth club or the sports centre, through school networks, family ties, and through their membership of rival groups, that they variously described as a gang and we're not a gang. Familial and school ties crossed the boundaries many of them adhered to with some young men related. The changes to targeting particular young people non-ironically provided me with 'data' that would have very neatly fitted my original thesis but this is not simply about access to the right research participants. Young men that were not on the list came regularly, the definition of gang was blurred, the complexity, the presentation of their lives was similar to many other young men I knew on the Southgrove. They spoke the same language, in words, but also in feeling. These urban youth cultures can be read in a factual or positivist way. In EGYV programmes many young men fit the definition of the gang; the definition was written about them. At the Southgrove or Burlington very few, or much less were in 'gangs'.

Within this programme the first young person, or client, I had was called Joel. He was polite and agreeable. We met again a week later and played football with a couple of his friends. 'Who are you'? They asked me. 'A youth worker' I replied. 'Police'? 'No'. 'Police'? 'No, why'? I questioned. 'You move like police'. The programme operated by targeting young people who the police unit Trident – refocused from black on black crime to gang crime – had listed as involved in gang activity. Young people were referred to as clients with detailed monitoring forms filled in after any contact, individual meeting or group session towards evaluating the

effectiveness of my work as an intervention. Once his friends left he approached me directly, 'I know how this works, what can you do for me?' He asked. Discussing my remit in my own words his response was clear. 'You seem like a good guy', he said, 'But you're just another worker, in a year you'll be gone'.

In this more intervention based setting my methods did not change and ironically there was less negotiation around our identities initially. This was because both sides entered the relationship through pre-defined identities: gang member and gang worker. However this does not mean these wholly defined our relationship and as in other youth work projects I found that through activities, particularly music, we built relationships that while they were never based on trust beyond the immediate momentary context of the activity (in terms of young men towards me).

Ethnographic Multiples

I want to return back to the discussion around urban space, super-diversity and belonging at the end of chapter one, and consider the ways that youth work spaces can be thought of as a lens onto to wider everyday multiples of urban experience, and the ways multiple temporalities and spatialities can be seen to characterise the youth work projects, estates and local areas I worked in and conducted this research.

Everyday life in the youth clubs was characterised by journeys between both real and imagined spaces. Some young men moved between the different sites, sometimes physically visiting friends and family, but also when they found I worked there through the stories they told, and people they knew. Their spatial belongings in the inner city were often mediated by these other, or similar, spaces through psycho-geographies of fear and threat, becoming spaces they 'knew' as much through not going there (chapter six). The youth work spaces were also inflected with more global belongings and movements; everyday life was discussed through global spaces (chapter four), how young men are disciplined in African countries providing a relational example but also one removed enough for a group

on the bus to laugh with me about it and the way they were less watched by the community here.

The temporal rhythms and logics of everyday life were similarly complex. The youth projects came and went, meaning some young men were omnipresent but others lost their connection and did not follow on to attend the new service. They attended other youth clubs and talked about them as the same place and as if I had been there with them, yet questioned why the club had not been open 'for so long'. Similarly my presence was not uniform, with breaks in provision for summer and other holidays on the Southgrove meaning young men would sometimes act as if they didn't recognise me when I returned, reclaiming the space and their autonomy over relationships and who is allowed in. On the Avondale and Burlington estates, and in the area of Denhill, my work was characterised by significantly shorter time frames and shorter memories of my presence.

Young people were connected through new technologies, to friends on the same estate and simultaneously the latest trap video to come out of Chicago. They drew on older migration histories as local residents and also experienced new migrations and histories more directly through family members arriving, leaving or returning from time abroad (chapter four). Some young men were in and out of school, spending long days hanging around or sleeping at a young age with no one to look after them, while their peers returned from school and we convened in the youth club. Others were so busy with football they could not attend the youth club regularly and were busy pursuing more aspirational futures (chapter seven). While the educational emphasis on age groups structured relationships at school and more widely (chapters six and seven) young men of similar ages were also growing up in different ways, moving through different stages of life. In this way emotional lives complicated the way life was experienced and lived and brought multiple temporalities to each youth work site.

Following this the uncertainties and short-termism that characterised youth workers positions both opened doors, and closed others throughout the

project in terms of where I was able to work. In this way the sites of this research were not necessarily what I chose, and ultimately my project determined by youth work opportunities, and their locations, which could be sporadic, uncertain, hard to maintain and unreliable in start time and duration. But the choice of these work opportunities as represented in this research also reflects where I got support. Often I was required on the basis that they needed youth workers, but overall on the basis that providing youth work was (mostly) a collaborative effort on behalf of the workers. This has enabled my relational method, as one that considers the contexts and the consistencies and breaks in these, both through my coming and going and young men's, the ways this affected relationships, towards thinking about young masculinities, emotional life and trust.

Been there or being there? Experiential and relational practice

My youth work practice became my way of continually re-considering my research and I became very involved working 'full-time'²³ for most of two years. To say that my position as a researcher was ever abandoned would be false; the consideration of 'gathering data', of 'finding a way in' was regularly on my mind. But the intensity of youth work, of both managing groups of young people, while trying to build relationships on more than an authoritarian level was all consuming. The challenge of being 'a good youth worker' became something that forced me to continually question my role as a researcher, the focus of my own research and the focus, purposes and practices of academic research more widely.

While, on the whole managers were supportive of youth workers there was generally an emphasis on keeping law and order through the way that youth clubs were run. Most managers had no contact with young people, organising team leaders and sessional workers to do this. In this way there was a disconnect and a culture of enforcing rules became the norm in some settings. In other settings where work was on a one-to-one basis

²³ I put scare-quotes here because I was not employed in a full-time role but the nature of part-time youth work often means you are paid for contact hours and working across different youth work projects and including travel I was often spending forty hours a week completing my shifts.

there were not these rule focused structures, but as a worker I had to make one or two reports on each session in terms of progress. This was a feature of short-term 'targeted' work – targeting a young person is about making an intervention, and achieving a target.

But not every organisation took this approach. The approach of Organisation B to youth work was committed and based on building relationships and they were rightly popular for the engaged work they were doing. I was also well supported in this setting to continue my research, towards our shared goals of an engaged and long-term approach to building relationships with young people. At times I considered their prosperity amidst the cuts to be as much about the good work they were doing as the way their focus on 'gang' issues neatly encapsulated a solution to the youth violence problems that the current government wanted show they were doing something to tackle, regardless of their methods of support.

More specifically around masculinities there were different approaches to what was considered effective youth work. Ideas around masculinity, or put differently the perceived effectiveness of a youth workers ability to engage with young people, were also mediated through 'race' and class positions. This can be framed as an experiential approach, where youth workers share similar ethnic, cultural traits and/or similar life experiences based, largely, on class positions. There are obvious strengths to this approach based on positive identifications and the potential to build trust quickly. I am not going to offer a critique on this as a potentially important part of building relationships, but I want to suggest that it is not, in itself essential (although may be more than just useful, and fundamental to working with particular young people long term in relation to their identification with male role models that are culturally similar to peer and familial networks as I will consider in the thesis conclusion). What I want to suggest is that a relational approach in working with young masculinities, across social and cultural differences, is a more important basis of building respect and importantly trust (Real 1997).

During my time on the Southgrove, six months before Organisation A withdrew and the community centre became a restricted space to local residents, a new youth worker arrived keen to progress and confident in his methods with young people. He was twenty-five and quickly built rapport with the young people I thought. During his first session he took over control of the juniors football and announced we would have a tournament. I joined a team and became young person for the session. As we watched other teams play Casim said to me, 'why are we doing this it was good every other week. In a tournament we can't play we just have to wait and watch'. As teams were eliminated and two remained the final was played and the pressure that had built up amongst the wider group over competing and wanting to win was released in a physical dispute over the winning goal. Having lost Julian stormed out of the club enraged. This was not Abdul's fault, but his entrance had been imposing having never met any of the young people before. He did not work any juniors sessions again, preferring to work seniors and not 'with kids' as he told me. Amongst the seniors he built a respect, bantering with the more dominant young men and positioning himself within the existing power structures of the youth club. Interviewing him later I asked about his method, 'always go for the top boy, once you've got them everyone else will respect you' he told me.

At a later date we watched a video, and Abdul prefixed the viewing with a story from his own life. In sum he told the young people that living a 'bad life' would not get you anywhere and recounted the experiences he had been through and the difficult and dangerous things he had been involved in. Some young people rolled their eyes. This was a double-edged sword in terms of building relationships. Young people were swayed by bravado at times, yet they seemed to want to decide for themselves whether you lived up to that billing. Telling them and recounting grand tales only served to position you as trying too hard and for all they knew lying. Experience was important, but it needed to be proven (chapter five).

Some months later when the service closed and I remained working with Organisation B I spoke to Keon, who was the young man Abdul was

referring to. 'He was alright, he was cool, but he wanted to be like us'. It warned me again to the importance of difference, less as a divisive signifier and more that trying to be someone you weren't was not an effective method in gaining trust. This is not to denigrate Abdul's approach or character, but in targeting particular young men and situating himself through their subject positions he side-lined other young people at the youth club, who were less obvious characters, in order to make his presence felt. I felt that he had a positive impact at times, but overall it was not an approach that I saw as productive youth work. His outward presence and focus on controlling the club endeared him to the current management, and appeared to bring an energy to the youth club, yet internally it felt divisive.

The approach around more direct role models, often associated with 'stronger masculinities' by managers, and the assumption this led to more direct, and influential interventions was something that I had to negotiate in terms of professional practice and ethics in sometime tension with the approach I believed was beneficial not simply for young men but in terms of what I was able to offer the relationship. There is no doubt my research biased this approach, and this was an unsustainable approach financially, in that it was necessary for workers to maintain employment and thus had to follow funding, where as I maintained my position on the Southgrove going unpaid for a period. But I was also supported in the way I worked by several line managers with years of experience that helped me to focus my youth work both towards the needs of young people and also in a direction that was generative for my research. For them working relationally was both a necessity in terms of time frames and the speed of change in young people's lives but also in terms of working specifically around masculinities and the issues this presented.

Developing a relational practice involved building relationships in a way that I believed would develop trust. At the start there was no blueprint for this, no methods manual. It was me, at that moment, there. Towards doing this I enacted a way of relating, a type of masculinity, that was non-threatening, that was at times competitive in games or group contexts but

not directly towards individuals. As will become clear to the reader football and music were key spaces of engagement across youth work projects and in the research for this thesis. Both spaces provided a conduit for young men to express themselves and their masculinities in positive and also sometimes more negative ways. These were particularly important spaces with boys aged fourteen and over allowing a shared experience and a space where tensions played out, sometimes with negative consequences, but they remained a relatively controlled space through which to engage. For example Keon took interest in my research following my own interest in his music and this began a space of engagement for us that definitely helped to build some trust.

Separated from young men's worlds by my age and my position of 'authority' and building trust beyond this position of authority required an undoing of the power relations between us, engaging and attempting to find levels and spaces where we could share experiences. As I have hopefully made clear this varied in each context, and was based on the understanding that age, 'race' ethnicity and class as power relations all affect the ways subjectivities are brought into relation with one another (Hollands 2003). Based on these complex dynamics, while my class and 'race' never disappeared for me it was mediated in different ways. Amongst younger men on the Southgrove both class and 'race' seemed to play less of a role. At this age they had less contact with teachers, police, social workers and authority figures - this no doubt playing some part in this. Even those that had experienced conflict with institutions at an early age such as Jerome who I worked with closely, were very trusting of me. While gender socialization happens at an early age,²⁴ and although the youngest men I worked with aged eight and nine were definitely already well versed in the hierarchies and tests that made up affective parts of their peer relationships I found that they were more trusting of me as a male figure than older boys. 'Race' also seemed to play a lesser role in how they responded to me but both of these did undoubtedly play a role in their expectation of me, and how they saw me.

²⁴ Chu (2014) suggests, similarly to earlier work by Gilligan (1993) that young men begin to emotionally close down and embody gendered ways of relating between four and seven

For those who were teenagers, and were aware of my presence in different ways to younger ones I could not always draw on my own experience to understand theirs, where a common ground was not accepted as a starting feature of sharing the space. This meant developing a way of engaging and building common ground through our embodied interactions and everyday practices. This required drawing on a way of relating that is not covered by literatures that talk about masculinities in terms of cultural capital and hegemonic hierarchies. It involved looking beyond these framings that can be useful but can also operate as hegemonic themselves, to consider the emotional literacy that was present even in its silence, and that I found hard to equate with certain articulations and presentations of masculinity that I had learnt and come to expect.

Ethics

Throughout this chapter I have detailed how I operated as a youth worker and researcher, and the ways that I attempted to practice youth work. My commitment was to conduct research with young men that in no way jeopardised them or made them feel uncomfortable. If these are concerns, variously described by ideas of 'rapport', access via 'gatekeepers', 'well-being' and 'safe-guarding', that must be adhered to by the commitment to ethical practice a sociology researcher necessarily undertakes (British Sociological Association 2002) they were also concerns I had in terms of the space and time I allowed young men, within and through which to consider and represent themselves. This was of course related to my initial ideas around researching violence and considering that what they revealed might be difficult or harmful for them. If these were oversights in terms of what I might achieve through a practice that was not focused on asking direct questions but rather letting young men reveal things in their own time, particularly in terms of the timeframes in conducting research and my initial entry as an unknown, they were not oversights in terms of ethics. On reflection the initial importance of considering masculinities as both positions that benefit from patriarchal power structures, while

acknowledging that particular masculinities are also structurally disadvantaged though 'race', class and gender relations of power, meant that as the focus of the project changed, this way of considering young men's subjectivities, emotional lives and thus the respect I paid to this became more central to the project and the methods.

One of the guiding principles of my research was the ethical position required in being a youth worker and working with young people. Checks were done on me yearly by each organisation. The position of the youth worker amongst staff and young people was largely about maintaining order and exercising authority; this was generally done to the same standards across youth work projects but through different methods, resulting in different relationships, and thus I would argue different behaviours. In this way I enforced the rules as I had to, not begrudgingly, but perhaps gently, although as my experience grew I became less bothered about upsetting young men as I came to realise they were not particularly bothered about being told off – my intervention often validating their behaviour in the eyes of others. But on the whole as a youth worker and researcher I operated in a way that I thought was not judgemental on their behaviours.

I did not overreact to insults or when aggression broke out instead dealing with it calmly and some youth workers were surprised when they first saw me do this. 'Good for you' Charmaine, the lead worker, said when I ejected Tolga from the club and threatened him with a ban. 'What do you mean?' I replied, but I knew what she meant and she smiled in response. My way of working with young men was based on not reproducing the types of masculine behaviours that were dominant and based on not being nice to others. As Chu (2014) recognises young men she worked with wanted relationships with other boys but their masculinity was about not being nice, as opposed to girls, it was instead about bothering people. In this way taking a more gentle approach to their tests and not putting them down in response, either through return 'banter' or though using my authority, meant that I found they stopped testing me in various ways, and

became more open, but still saw me as fair game as part of the relational structures that existed.

As I have noted these positions and relationships were based on the interrelationship of class, 'race', and gender. As the following chapters will show I was often uncomfortable with both banter between young men and the physical threats some regularly offered to others. But I was also unsure about how I read these and the representations I offer in my reading. A major part of this research has been a process of interpretation of these practices and a consideration of how to situate them and relay them. In considering these moments my whiteness, and my middle-class background often felt highly visible to me, as I think it regularly was to many young men. Yet as I became more ingrained in the youth clubs in each context (to different degrees based on time) I became more involved in relationships and often I worried more complicit in the behaviours I was considering in my research.

Reflecting back I obviously thought about my subject position in relation to young people a lot more than they did. They were rarely concerned with me and what I was thinking; but this thought process confirmed to me where I was situated amongst the people I worked with and helped me to both develop a relational practice around this while also attending to it and maintaining its relevance particularly in making clear my own positionality and subjectivity in writing about the times we shared. However I have felt discomfort throughout the research process about the representations of the young men I worked with that I am making. Some of these are attended to in the forthcoming chapters to deal with them in the specific contexts they are raised.

In terms of the gendered ethics of the youth projects I am also aware that my willingness to position myself in spaces of 'boys activities' suggested a particular masculinity to the young men that was perhaps less 'transformative' than I imagined. However as the majority of youth work projects I worked in were boys only projects this was a feature of the context, and where they were not I tried to build relationships with all

young people as most youth workers did. Furthermore within these projects I worked closely with female members of staff. However something I was not uncomfortable questioning them on were there homophobic insults to one another, their qualifications of 'no homo' when they were talking about relationships with male friends, and the ways that they talked about women sexually. In group contexts I did not always call them up on everything they said, as I have noted and we will see in the forthcoming chapters I felt part of building relationships was allowing a space for feelings and perspectives to be aired rather than shutting them down all the time, however I acted on behaviours that were both derogatory and also permissive to misogynist practices, particularly in terms of age, most of the time.

As I moved between projects, to different places, and operating under different rubrics of youth work practice in terms of the spaces I met young people in, or the requirement of that provision in terms of the expected outcome of the relationship, there were elements of my practice that necessarily changed. For example in generic provisions there was a requirement that a youth worker was not alone with a young person and another staff member was present. In later projects my role was to work with young men one-to-one which required checking in and out with my line manager to confirm my safety as much as the young persons and also to make clear both my and their location in case of any offences committed. I was required to make more direct interventions in these projects so these became something that was discussed with young men more regularly.

I negotiated these ethical requirements but overall my practice and ways of building relationships did not change. I wondered perhaps as a youth worker, particularly in the current moment and the way the services are run, whether my method was an effective intervention? And at times I felt my youth work and research practice was in tension with the requirements of an intervention focused youth work agenda, and also with the types of masculinity that some youth workers used as a way of building respect which seemed to be effective quickly and were thus supported by some managers. However I was always strengthened in my resolve by some of the managers and colleagues I worked with who were both interested in

my project but not surprised in any way by its focus because they saw a relational practice and a consideration of masculinities when working with young men as fundamental basics to effective working practice.

As I became more of a regular fixture in youth work projects I worked at for longer periods these boundaries could become blurred. Young people approached me on the estate if I was handing out flyers and wanted to help. I was often accompanied to the shop against my assertions about my job because they wanted me to buy them food. But I managed my contact with young people consistently to the rules of youth work and government practice. Similarly boundaries were tested around criminal behaviour and activities as young men got to know me better and as a result of building trust. It may have inhibited the project but in these moments I gave the required youth work line of if you tell me, then I have to report it, and they were savvy enough to look after their interests. Another area of conflict was young men and the way they would test their peers with physical threats and punches. As I became more trusted there were times they tried this with me. In those moments a line had to be drawn and this was universally accepted throughout my time across projects.

Obtaining the process of consent was a continual process that I negotiated based on young men's requirements while adhering to the requirements of youth projects and the guidelines in conducting social research. Young men's preference, particularly some of the young men who feature more prominently in the thesis, was to not sign things and not ask their parents. This, they told me, would result in parents thinking they had done something wrong and coming to the youth club. This was nothing more than more testing on their part and performing a particular identity but the majority of consent forms I gave to young people initially were unreturned. I operated in each youth service provision with the consent of my line manager and the awareness of my fellow colleagues and provided a statement outlining the research to each.

In terms of presenting my research to young people this was generally done to small groups, and individuals rather than to the group as a whole. Initially I was wary of jeopardising the fundamental focus of this research in a group context, that being building relationships and the ways young men trust. There were a large number of young men who were untrusting of authority figures on the first two youth work projects who were influential amongst their peers and I explained my ideas to them in smaller groups. Further the young people attending varied weekly while in generic sessions there was never a moment when all attending could be or were sat down. As sessions started a queue developed with pushing and shoving, others rushed through the door and had to be followed and caught up with to sign in, and this was part of the territorial negotiation and contestation of the youth club space. But those attending across youth work projects were regular and I spoke with all of them on as many occasions as I was able to bring my research up.

I did not work with any young person who refused consent, rather to the extent they were interested they were keen to be included but also wanted to know what I was going to say about them. I regularly told them it was about growing up and emotions, which they often found strange, and I always explained that it would be Anonymised. Regarding the focus on emotions Aadan asked me, 'Why, there's nothing to say about that'. In the latter two youth work projects the groups were smaller and dynamics between them quite different, as I have outlined. At the Burlington the young men were happy with my research ideas and similarly requested I did not visit their flats but confirmed they had told their parents and had consent.

On the EGYV programme young men joked that I was a 'fed' from the outset so were not worried about what I was writing when the police were taking notes on them at every available opportunity. However working closely with these young men I was able to obtain parental consent from those that were under eighteen. Finally, the estates, areas, borough names where they relate directly to youth work projects (although borough names are used when the focus is on the more general area of London), youth work projects, clubs and community centres and the names of both

youth workers and young people have been Anonymised in this thesis. This is based on my concern in writing about young people, and also to protect young people's identities for two more specific reasons. Based on the thesis spanning several areas, and secondly due to the description and analysis around emotional life that young men may feel uncomfortable being named in. As I have mentioned while there were standardised rules across youth projects the ethics of each context were not only governed by adults authority, but also by the ways young people contested the space. Youth clubs function as spaces that are designed for young people and do not hold the regular authority of other institutions, yet are necessarily a space of commonality if they are to be available. In light of this I have tried to pay attention to the professional codes of practice of both youth work and sociological research while simultaneously considering the everyday ethics in which I was engaged with young people.

Summary

In this chapter I have detailed the process of developing a relational methodology around researching masculinities that though attending to embodied narratives considers different levels of experience. Through this relational method I sought to listen to the complex belongings young men navigated within the different contexts of the research, and develop an awareness of the ways that belongings and identities are experienced and lived. This necessarily includes a focus on the ways cultural differences operate to create particular subject positions and the way these influence processes of building trust. This practice also necessarily includes the positionality of myself as a youth worker and researcher, both roles situating me as a body, through class, whiteness, gender within the contexts I worked in, as an intersection of all three.

The emphasis I put on building relationships in non-competitive ways attempted to consider the power relations at work in each context without reproducing them and simultaneously being attentive to the ways that they

were reproduced brought up questions around masculinities and how gender is experienced alongside class, race and age.

In particular considering my practice more specifically around young men, the ways masculinities are practiced and lived and a focus on emotional life meant becoming aware of and considering the importance of silences; and as the project developed of the importance of the body, embodied narratives and emotional histories. This helped to consider individuals biographies and the way histories are embodied and carried, informing the present and the complexities of young lives in London as a post-colonial and global city. Following this enabled a consideration of the project as urban spaces individually through the complex temporal and spatial processes that make them up. In these ways the practices and methods I developed in conducting the research helped me to become more attentive to young men's subjectivities and the messiness and complexity of the everyday and its irreducibility into pre-conceived frames and schemas.

3 In search of respect and the uncertainties of trust

Entering

The seniors, aged thirteen to eighteen, Wednesday evening session starts. People come in and start to move about, and I stand there and wait to get a sense of what people are doing and where I can get involved. Keon, Hasaan, and Harry run in, straight to the other pool table as I perch on one a few feet away. They laugh with each other, firing balls across the surface at each other's hands, trying to catch each other out, they are frenetic with energy. Keon's eyes move to where I am standing and signal a recognition of the space around my feet and beyond, and of my presence. Involved in the game he is also aware of my presence and my proximity. I wait to make eye contact as he pauses and his eyes fix purposively on my feet, but he does not look up at me, he switches back into the game; This was a non-acknowledgement. Pauline crosses the hall and includes me in her route 'just talk to them' she says and smiles. Looking back she probably saw my discomfort.

For the next few weeks I worked in the juniors sessions until Keon and I crossed paths again. During the session as I crossed the hall I looked up and saw him walking directly towards me, his stare fixed and for a moment our eyelines cross but our eyes never meet. He passes me without saying anything, looks right through me and is looking just past me, always just behind me.

I would come to know Keon and many of the young men here well as they grew up over the next five years. Keon held an important position on the Southgrove in relation to me as an outsider wanting to do research. He was respected amongst his peers and unofficially held the position of leader of a group that dabbled in and out of petty crime. In this way he

often mediated access to people through influencing group dynamics and peer relationships. He was charismatic, but carried himself with an air of confident disinterest, often walking silently past the sign in desk in an open show of irreverence when he arrived, or answering 'what you been up to' with a simple 'nothing', eyes averted, and without a break of bodily flow as he moved off. Other times a raised eyebrow and a smirk dismissed a reproach or a question or attempt to build conversation was met with a noise or a shriek. None of the staff had much control over what he did and he engaged on his terms or not at all and with two older brothers in prison and recently expelled from school he was on the radar of the borough's support services. This moment began a long process of Keon and myself building a relationship but serves here as an initial example of the ways that we came to navigate one another and the spaces we shared.

My initial interaction with Keon was not an outlier; young men often did not want to talk, and if they didn't actively ignore me as Keon did, they instead offered a smile in jest as they drifted past. Those that did say hello generally had little interest in talking further. Interactions with many older boys often consisted of a 'hello', from me as they walked past, bodies attempting cool insouciance that became a kind of confidence. Some young men, in their late teens and early twenties pulled this off with ease that Keon himself was mastering, moving around me as if I wasn't even there without altering their line, and practiced enough doing this to not bat an eyelid or show the faintest sign of recognition. It is important to note that across the spaces we shared, not all of the young people engaged in a confrontational way; Some were polite or navigated the spaces amongst their peers and workers quietly. The more obvious rules around not snitching²⁵ aside (that almost all the young men felt it best to adhere to) language use was regulated by group contexts and through the ways that young men exercised their masculinities. It was a key part of my job remit as a youth worker, to get, and maintain recognition in the face of active practices of disinterest or irreverence.

²⁵ Reporting on or about someone to others.

These early interactions left me in an uncertain position regarding the interviews I planned to conduct, with silences characterising everyday exchanges. I had expected these at times in conversation, particularly around difficult topics, but had not expected to feel so challenged around opening a conversation. I spoke with several youth workers about it throughout my research. Some time later, working with the same young men, and discussing the challenges of building relationships my colleague responded to me, 'What do you say? So how is school'? Signalling that it was not just me and that one could either take their time, or operate a more 'professional' air that other youth workers used of seeming slightly irritated yet ultimately above it, 'if they don't want to talk it's up to them', he suggested.

Feeling this closedness was immediately apparent when I worked with teenagers and young men in their twenties but less so with younger junior age groups where the young men were between seven and twelve. I consider this as more than just bodily confidence, but as a particular gendering and enacting of the body, and thus a particular consciousness and way of relating. Older boys were a lot more aware of their presence in relationship to my own and navigating the spaces in these sessions led me to hold my body in a particular way, unthreatened but full of uncertainty, sometimes to the point I was conscious of how I was moving. Reflecting back on my initial encounter with Keon and similar moments in this first year I found myself almost preparing my body beforehand and once the sessions were underway I became aware I was holding my body in a certain way, unaffected, slow, almost disinterested. This was an embodiment of a certain type of masculinity that was necessary to ward off the eyes watching you and attempts that young men made to unsettle those deemed as outsiders. As we will see, in juniors sessions I felt the young men to be more open, often pleased to see me by calling my name out and I built good relationships with a lot of them quickly. Some of these younger men could be disinterested and closed off to being engaged, but this would come across as a withdrawnness or shyness, and they rarely brought how they felt as a direct challenge to me.

Finding a Place and Feeling Excluded

Football was continually one of the most popular spaces for young men within the youth clubs and was used as a tool of engaging across age groups. Whilst playing winning was the most important thing, but when the seriousness of this almost stopped the game then being able to continue playing was the most important. In this way these, and other popular activities, were forums for engagements and contestations between and amongst young men. However the popularity of these activities also made them definitive spaces through the ways young men were included or excluded. In this section I show how people were included or excluded from these popular spaces.

Having played a lot growing up I quickly gravitated to the football area in seniors sessions at the Southgrove as a way of both engaging with young men more directly and allaying some of the bodily uncertainty I felt. Showing similar affinity [to this space] as the young men, the managers at the Southgrove seemed to recognise that something positive was taking place as they left me to run the football sessions and said little about it. Football sessions became a key space of engagement as a youth worker, from juniors sessions at the Southgrove to the later EGYV sessions that, working directly with a football charity, targeted young men between the ages of sixteen to twenty-five. Drawing on years of playing, that allowed me a bodily feeling of authenticity within the space, my skills were too rusty (or perhaps not good enough initially) to win the respect of the boys whose plans involved football as a career. But participating here was also a way of looking and being focused within a group activity and therefore avoiding the possibility of being rejected through a need to be included elsewhere in the hall; this was both a hiding from not having trust and being drawn into a game of respect.

While I participated in football sessions, as Keon and some friends held the corner of the room with the sofa's, I noticed Lamar, who often hovered at the opposite end of the football area, almost as if he wanted to join in, yet far away enough to suggest this wasn't why he was here. Lamar had

just started coming to the seniors sessions, and although he had lived in the area for a while he attended a school that many of the others didn't so was finding his feet amongst the other boys within this space. He developed a friendship with Keon, and I came to know him well as he became a less peripheral figure within that peer group, but for now he had not found his place to fit in. Tall and heavily built for his age Lamar was one of the biggest boys attending, but his bodily gait belied his size; standing there with one foot turned slightly inwards, almost twisting on the spot, as if he was being pulled towards the activity in the club and clusters of other young men he seemed to want to join whilst simultaneously holding himself back, unsure of what to say, not feeling he could approach them. His body seemed as if it was trying to hide itself, and at a glance his stance simply looked uncomfortable. I approached him sometimes asking if he wanted to join in and he looked through me, away to his side then at the floor as he answered me hurriedly shaking his head, 'Na, na', so I would leave him alone. I was exposing him, and he had little interest in talking to me. I was not going to give him kudos amongst his peers. I did not realise it at the time, but he was in something of a similar situation to my own and how I felt in that initial encounter with Keon. There is no doubt that being included here meant very different things to us, but unsure of what to say and not willing to risk being shot down, we both hovered, biding our time, announcing our presence, albeit uncertainly, holding our bodies. Football was not the area Lamar desired to be recognised in, and I left him alone.

I continued in this way in both juniors and seniors sessions at the Southgrove, while also looking for openings to speak to young men about my planned project, but even when one occurred it was brief, they didn't want to stop for too long, they were more interested in their peers than me. Looking back at these experiences across age groups I was learning the importance the feeling of an engaged body²⁶ gave me in navigating myself amongst these different groups.

²⁶ By this I mean a body that was participating and thus felt accepted, rather than a tense body that felt surveilled.

I was learning the importance of respect, and carrying my body in particular ways towards earning this. While I was aware this was in some tension with the politics underpinning my research methodology, it also seemed necessary. Yet I also was wary of participating in and enacting what I perceived to be dominant group dynamics, and/ or forms of dominant masculinity, and thus reifying the gendered practices and relations that I had arrived expecting to observe – discursive constructions of masculinity through which behaviours could be defined such as the gang and inner city youth where boys will be boys.

In other words I was building relationships through embodied routines of sharing, compassion, and trust, while also building respect through engaging in embodied repertoires of competitive masculinity, and trying to understand the tensions between these across the different groups and contexts. Yet the navigation of group processes both for young men (and myself in the way that I had positioned myself within the rhythms and movements of the groups) always meant that group processes seemed to thwart individuals attempts to build a more equal settlement outside of the emotional and social norms, what Paulle (2013) has called “embodied gender regimes”.

Like football, music was a popular outlet for creativity. But young men were often cagey around allowing access to the space once they had control of it, to both staff and their wider peers. The control of these spaces was both a very public display of who was excluded as much as who was included, as much as it was a guarding of privacy and personal space. Popular spaces or activities within the youth clubs were either controlled by dominant peer groups or contested by the wider group. Such ‘specialist’ spaces as the music studio were mostly controlled by older boys and more dominant peer groups; some young people wanted to be involved knocking on the door and asking to be let in although most had no inclination to keep asking and being rejected. I look at the ways that young men practiced belongings and situated themselves as more or less dominant in the next chapter.

In Denhill the peer groups I worked with had a more direct framing imposed onto them through the project being part of the governments EGYV programmes that came into force as a response to the UK riots in 2011. It was impressed upon them that it was to be us, or the police working 'with' them; with the EGYV programme it was voluntary participation and their choice if they engaged. Those that engaged saw youth workers as the less restricting form of intervention and the added opportunity to benefit from access to leisure facilities and receive support. In this way the more interventionist framing of EGYV immediately defined our relationships and made the contestation of who we were less relevant, and therefore less open. I spent many sessions in the studio with them and it became clear that through the way our roles had been positioned there was less negotiation about who we were in comparison to the young men on the Southgrove, as they constantly reminded me and for the duration of our relationship, 'You're feds,'²⁷ right'.

EGYV Music Studio Session, Denhill youth centre

Sean turns up to the studio, body bouncing, and his oversize chain swinging left to right in decided show of confidence. I am in there with a group of young men I do not know and who do not know me. Sean has invited them due to Joel and Dexter's absence from the studio this week, with who he has been recording over the last year towards getting a YouTube channel up and running.²⁸ Without Joel here Sean is dominant presence in the group. Jordan openly questions him about the chain, asking him, 'Who do you think you are, do you think you're big'? Sean doesn't flinch, offering neither eye contact nor verbal response. The arrow disappears into thin air. It didn't touch him, and it leaves Jordan with a silence.

While listening to them talk I feign a sort of indifference, as often the attempt to be involved in too obvious a manner means getting shut out immediately. The group act as if they don't want people to hear,

²⁷ Police

²⁸ Towards popularizing their music and developing sources of income.

in mumbles and murmurs, shorthand and slang. Young men exercise and protect their information and at this age their right to privacy closely. This is a feature of everyday life where we are often suspicious of people wanting to know our business. Young men have regularly declined to give their names to me as way of introduction; an active distrust is the currency. Some find themselves constantly asked by the local police and for those involved in low level delinquency and perhaps a current case still pending, trusting is not an everyday action but a potential hazard. Beyond those involved in crime though many young men use not giving out their name as a technique they have learned that is simply the easiest opener as you are testing who is who.

‘Who told you about this session?’ I asked on my arrival, as an attempt to find a shared contact. ‘A friend’, Jordan responded, immediately looking down at his feet. I looked across at the other three young men. Two stared straight ahead, the third, Darius, sat slightly separated and made eye contact with me. I smiled back and sat waiting for the sound engineer, Tayo, to arrive. He does, sets up and looks nonplussed at not recognising the young men, assuming I know them.

Once we are set up and Tayo is ready, we wait for Sean to arrive. When he does, and after his greeting with Jordan, he takes the lead and begins to read his bars off his phone, looking at me every few words as he does. I look back and looking past him see Darius sitting, still silently, and now totally uninvolved in the group. He seemed happy to sit in the studio but as we sat there longer I came to feel his discomfort and how he was not seen as ‘on the level’ by this peer group even though as individuals they knew him as a friend. This was masked initially by my own feelings, by my intervention into the group’s dynamics. But after half an hour he spoke to break (his) silence saying to the group ‘Hanin isn’t coming Hub, I told him to come, so whys he not coming?’ No one responded.

For Darius I could feel and identify through my own experiences his attempt to be involved. He wanted to be involved by knowing Hanin who the group also know and hung out with; being able to be the judge of Hanin's failure to meet with the group or respond to Darius' suggestion to come and meet could bring Darius into a position that people would relate to (and respect). Quenton looked at Darius momentarily. The look was an acknowledgment that he had heard and was perhaps deep down a thought to offer a show of recognition. Aware of my presence he caught my eye, his face mirrored how I felt for Darius. And in that moment he quickly straightened his body and disengaged me. It was clear to me that he empathised and felt sorry for Darius' but it is more important to protect yourself and not give yourself or your own position away. In Quenton's look was the understanding of how unforgiving young men's peer relationships can be; a mixture of compassion and disgust. Darius sat there ignored for a few minutes, but then rose to leave, and as he did looked at the others for long enough to see that they weren't forthcoming with any goodbyes but not enough to be snubbed again, and he exited the room without a word.

This game of being included is something that I had forgotten as I grew away from adolescence and found myself making attempts to build trust with young men and being often faced with silences. Some of them may talk to me to say hello, but many will walk past on purpose. Breaking the ice with them often renders no response, a raise of the eyebrows that isn't an acknowledgment of me but a purposeful show that they can hear but aren't listening. I ask names and find uncertainty regarding responding. I explain who I am, breaking through their front with an expectancy and confidence I have learned from three years of youth work. Uncertain approaches do not work as timidity is something boys do not want to recognise in themselves, and it makes them uncomfortable, a mirror of insecurity that they are keen to disassociate from. Affirmation is more important to the idea of male identities for young men have worked with, affirmation from others and affirming themselves, their knowledge, their certainty as young men. Seeing weakness leaves them facing something they are learning how to reject and gives them an opportunity to practice

this rejection and thus build their own position of strength. In this way boys project their weakness onto others when they recognise it in themselves. Rather than a coming together it is a chance to climb over and above. This is the pressure of the group and within it the uncertainty of how to act as a young man – what your peers might think.

The youngest men I work with do not show a similar self-consciousness over this basic relationship building offering trust and names more quickly. At twelve they start to question me more openly at the age they enter secondary school and move from being the oldest boys to the youngest men. So with boys entering their teenage years there is a need for to exercise some (street) wisdom of not giving anything away. It is not 'cool' to be mugged off and therefore one appears smart through acting suspicious, but it is also an attempt to confuse and cloud the situation, to close down communication and hide their own uncertainty rather than to clarify (my) intentions and purpose on entering their world. Uncertain of how to act and caught between acting tough for their peers respect or engaging with me as an adult they close down into a muddle of misinformation. In this way boys practice avoidance and distrust over trust.

Contested spaces

The PlayStation zone on the bus was another popular area. With blacked out windows, sofa spaces and wide screen TV's, and situated at the back of the top deck it was a more secluded space, and everything young people who choose the seats at the back of public buses might want them to be. Keon and his friends would often claim this space, younger boys arriving and looking in, seeing a busy area and moving away. There were a range of game choices available, but this was the home of battles on Fifa, and also much more personal contestations within the context of peer groups.

In these group-wide activities more dominant young men such as Yusuf would arrive, and observing that this was a peer group they felt comfortable in, he announced 'look who's here, you man are gonna get

merked,²⁹ pass me the ball, pass me the ball, Tray what team you on? [Then] I'm on Tray's team': Full of bravado and desire to prove himself. Other young men approached group activities less certainly, coming in and looking around to see who was where and if an obviously free space existed for them to participate. A year younger and with a gentler manner Asim entered the cage and observing the football game, waiting at the edge until the movement of the game had pushed me towards him asked, 'Sir, sir, can I play'? These were relational displays; it depended on who was there, how young men would enact their masculinity. The practice of entering group spaces became something I noticed again and again, young men's bodily rhythms and the acknowledgments they chose to make. It was not so much about individuals but the overall social hierarchy they moved in.

The difficulty of engaging with some young men was that they guarded their space so carefully and, particularly for those who seemed to be the most popular for example Keon, were mostly surrounded by others within group contexts, rather than involving themselves in more open activities where they were exposed to engaging on others terms. Activities like table tennis were popular, providing a one-to-one match up that fuelled the competitiveness that young men seemed so drawn to. Table tennis lasted about 5 minutes, and revealed a clear winner, yet provided fewer opportunities to be included than football did. Similar to football I measured my efforts here, games with me were always close for my opponents, and I was able to balance the win/ lose ratio so that bravado and disheartenment remained in check while building closer more intimate relationships I hoped. However these spaces still provided little chance to talk, young men being engaged in the activity and quickly moving off once it was over.³⁰ One Wednesday evening I picked up the boxing pads and beckoned Cyrus over. With an initial interest in boxing through his ability to land a punch, he operated on the edges of Keon's peer group, sometimes included if someone willing to throw their fist was needed, other-times

²⁹ Mugged

³⁰ don't let things settle- movement

mocked by them with age-old yet unchanging insults, 'Gay', or 'Grass'.³¹ Cyrus donned the gloves and we spent ten minutes with him practising pummelling my hands as hard as he could and twice threatening to redirect a fist through the pads at my head. Afterwards he looked at me holding my gaze; I looked back, and then offered some words of encouragement. In these embodied encounters there were often the seeds of a questioning of whom I, or who we were, and therefore the communication required to build a relationship.

However these moments seemed fleeting to me, and I was if not impatient, still uncertain about the direction of my project due to the ways that these moments always seemed cut short by the affect of the group and the resulting bravado or uncertainty that young men embodied. For young men it was a negotiation of the space, of authority, and physical presence, and although they did not match up to me height wise as they did their peers, they questioned me the same through bodily swagger or furtive, uncertain glances.

Some of the younger men, aged eight or nine that I worked with such as Jerome and Tray carried their bodies in ways that mimicked the more stylized postures and gaits of the older boys. Tray was nine and would often arrive and push to the front of the queue, brushing aside the complaints of others with, 'Shutyamouth', repeated several times in a monotone block, making it impossible to speak. His older brother, Kam, was transitioning from between sessions when I met them, wetting his feet in some seniors sessions before leaving the comfort of the juniors where he could waltz through the opposing team in football matches scoring at almost at will. Kam was flamboyant, confident and well liked, and with the respect he received from his peers didn't require much from the staff. He gave me short shrift and found his feet quickly in the seniors sessions making the transition that a lot of others seemed to find more difficult, some disappearing from youth club sessions for a year and reemerging when they felt more comfortable within the peer groups attending.

³¹ It was who you tried to be in the group that excluded you; Keon's immediate group excluded Cyrus, but others like Otis saw him as gassed due to his 'trying to hard' to fit in.

Unlike the rest of the young men in the juniors' sessions, and perhaps following his brother's lead, Tray more actively ignored me, exercising a confrontational and aggressive stance and rejecting interaction with comments like, 'Don't talk to me wasteman'. Both brothers were especially good at table tennis and we played many times; Tray would catch my attention in sessions and just gesture, silently but affirmatively towards the table tennis table with his bat. Ultimately he wanted to beat me, and I made sure our games worked as a space of engagement by keeping the scores more or less even so that we could play again, and he used these games as an opportunity to hone his game for upcoming tournaments his school selected him for. He would talk about these with pride, and we would discuss tactics, such as not trying too hard to win when it seemed close which could mean losing concentration. But he would often, almost visibly, check himself in these moments, and end the conversation, and shut me off. Gradually, amongst others he began to acknowledge me in juniors sessions, but building a more embodied trust with him through activities happened more easily and was also easier amongst his junior peers than the older boys.

Thursday evening juniors session, Organisation A, Community centre

Once the football comes out the early arrivals are full of life, jumping around, eager. As the session progressed the ever-popular games console often lay abandoned as the energy of football on the other side of the hall sucked everyone in, and not long after, the game becomes too serious, full of competition and individual battles. Alongside the emotional openness the boys in juniors sessions displayed, conflict often developed quickly. If this perhaps sounds simplistic, that younger boys were simply more emotional than their older more rational counterparts, the important point is the way that the immediacy of their reactions was a sharp contrast with the openness they more generally showed, and further the difficulty they had in performing this switch.

Some boys take it too seriously, determined to score. This is not a team game: no one passes. Other boys try to get a look in and there are cries over a suggested foul; Tempers flare. Arguments and physical altercations could develop quickly especially in activities that were centred around competing and winning, with young men as young as seven or eight standing tall to one another with tensed bodies and screwed faces. Verbal disagreements aged in a moment into old feuds with narrowed eyes and threats, 'I'll wait for you after', the reaction often suggesting an incident of much greater seriousness than what had seemingly just occurred.

I asked myself in these moments what it means for young men to feel good? What is the space that young men have to say, 'I'm enjoying myself, I feel good about this', when the relations between them are already so competitive? As they celebrate winning, feeling good often seems to only surface through this experience or from proving their winning to others through getting the sweets I hand out to victors, even though ultimately everyone receives some. Here I am asking about the emotional repertoires young men develop and how can we think these relations alongside the idea of an emotional vocabulary? One way to think this is through the body and the ways that for many of the young men I worked with distrust appeared as embodied dispositions as much as it was enacted through language.

The following week, we play dodgeball instead of football; a staff decision resulting from, what perhaps appeared from the outside as, a group confrontation at the end of last week's football. Dodgeball is technically non-contact, if you consider throwing a ball as hard as you can at someone not making contact, and the staff can clearly manage the rules. But breaking the rules here is part of the game, 'It didn't hit me... it didn't hit me', says Ricky. Everyone is doing it, yet there is total outrage at someone cheating, and horror if they themselves are deemed out³², in distinct contrast to the little amount of concentration they put into the game. The boys are

³² You are out if you are hit by the ball.

concerned about the rules of the game, the staff about the rules of behaviour. A disagreement over who has been 'hit' (by the ball) and whether they are thus out turns into a confrontation between Darren and Asim. In this moment neither will even suggest they will let this go. I bring them together and ask them to forgive and forget, and understanding what this means, they refuse outright, there is no persuading them. They refuse to look at each other. I am forming a welcome barrier for them both to escape this conflict, yet my presence is also bringing it to the fore, by being there and observing them, which makes it harder for them to remain in control of their performance of toughness. Asim clenches his fists, Darren tries to talk his way out of it. The physical hierarchy already established amongst them means both boys know Asim will win this fight. I pose shaking hands and saying sorry which again is rejected outright. They openly acknowledge to me that they fully understand this way of resolving issues but suggest that it is simply not an option for them here. Backing down will not just be about today, it is about the way they will be seen by others who are here.

The fierceness and stylised posturing of this younger boys over innocuous comings together surprised me a little, and the seriousness with which they approached any conflict showed this was more than just about football, and other battles were being played out here. These were performances where younger boys were learning how to relate and react to perceived slights and indiscretions. But contrasting with the more nuanced interactions we saw earlier from the older boys, where bodies were held tighter, less given away, and more was signalled with just a look, the younger boys attempts at managing respect used their bodies in a much more immediate way, and also with less ease.

When I go to Asim after letting them go separate ways with the situation unresolved he is still visibly angry. 'Why are you angry, it was only an argument over a game'? He does not answer. I ask him if he is ok to try to break the ice and he wells up. Leaving him might have been the best thing to do because the more I try to

soothe his visible distress the more the tears come and he desperately tries to hold them in. He will not talk, desperately mops at his cheek and stares at the wall. Then he punches the wall. 'Talk to me', I say. 'What's wrong'? 'Nothing', he forces out, 'Nothing'. He says this without any belief and his eyes continue to flutter as he holds himself in. Tears are never far away in these juniors sessions. Beyond this I am not sure what to say to him fully aware that my intervention is engaging him and thus upsetting him further so I take him to the foyer, get him a glass of water and leave him to swallow his rage.

Some months later in pre-session debriefs for the juniors session the lead worker outlined the activities looking up to confirm, 'Football – not this week', leaving me to wonder if they expected the raucousness and outbursts to be better marshalled. Being an effective youth worker means engaging young people, although it often seemed like engagement could take second place to enforcing rules. But for the following weeks boys made straight for the far side of the hall usually designated for football and loudly complaining, 'whhhaaaaaaaaaaat, no football! Brian can we play football', would ask and ask again, and as unruliness spread throughout the session the staff gave way realising that the competition and anger of winning or losing (personal battles) on the football 'pitch' meant containing disorder within this section of the hall and maintaining other activities in a more orderly way elsewhere. Football was what young men here wanted to play, and not letting them wasn't going to stop behaviour that contravened the organisation and community centre rules. My football sessions were unstructured and it may sound counter intuitive, but I felt I could manage the session better with everyone involved in one game, with me involved, actively refereeing and breaking up little disagreements, making sure the ball got passed to smaller kids at times by doing it myself, and involving them in the game, keeping the game flowing so that the scores were even and everyone had a chance.

Almost all the boys attending here wanted to be involved within the majority activity, which was regularly football, but included other group

games such as dodgeball. They were also easy to engage in other activities including community-based schemes such as repainting planting boxes in the small concrete garden of the centre. But more regularly they wanted to play football or a similar substitute, and for staff to allow one large game where they could physically engage as a group. Some boys were serious about playing and winning, whereas others were less enamoured with the game but fully committed to being included with everyone. So for the juniors it was more about taking part and engagement than the actual activity, be it football or dodgeball. This desire to be included was not in itself different to the seniors, rather the feeling in the room, the openness of bodies, meant that engagements were more open, and more openly contested. This meant, on the whole, it felt easier to build trust with these younger boys.

Standing up to being tested: The relationship between respect and trust

I didn't want to respond with bravado as other youth workers did at times, winning the superficial respect of the more-bravado focused young men but not so much the ear of the others. I didn't want to build a relationship where I operated in this way – (re)producing the more dominant practices masculinity that formed hierarchies. My ideas of trust and trying to work both within these performative rituals remained, but in practice this meant operating in the group and building trust with everyone, inclusively, while navigating the processes of respect. During the group discussions described earlier and more generally in my time on the Southgrove I would hold my body, giving it a fixedness and rootedness so as not to be challenged. Carrying my body in this way without directly adhering to their codes of respect became a method of participating in spaces that were initially unwelcoming, a process of being there, sitting, unruffled, pretending not to be affected. Showing numbness to the games so that they become pointless, you are there, have survived, are amongst them and although I had not been let in yet you cannot be pushed out; here a new settlement must be forged where we negotiate each other.

Thus insights from or engagement with the quieter young men was often as hard or harder to get than when engaging those more aggressive or extrovert; that is those young men who successfully mediated their presence within the peer setting without becoming targets were not going to risk that by freely divulging how they felt to me. This impacted on relationships as engaging more dominant young men meant they got all the attention and dominated resources, thus (re)producing gendered hierarchies. Later, when funding was withdrawn from this generic style of youth work and I worked as a 'gang worker', I was able to pay for my 'client' to do gym sessions but not his friend who arrived with him. Still in school doing his GCSE's and not identified as a 'gang member' he did not warrant support. It meant that the quieter young men could become wary of youth workers who seemed to be more interested in the louder and extrovert characters, and some were actively reproducing the power hierarchies existing amongst young men. Yet as much as my focus was on developing trust I also had a strong feeling that it was important I did not fall beneath the games and tests the boys operated, nor take an authoritarian stance over it. The latter set me out as an authority figure, that many of them had issues with whether teachers, police, YOT workers, social or youth workers, although there is distinct difference in how young men would behave and interact with each role. Youth workers who responded to these tests by removing young men from the centre or bus for that session or reprimanding them there, maintained a relationship with them on this level and were treated as untrustworthy authority figures and set themselves apart from the young people's worlds. Many youth workers saw it as important to set a good example to young people and thus not engage them on an immature level, which is how transgressive behaviours were viewed. They did not spend a long time trying to engage young people unless they were asked for something specific, although in practice they played an essential role within this space by allowing me to take a less authoritarian approach and continue to try and build trust with those attending towards getting to know them. Thus within this adult/child relationship young men viewed staff who enforced the rules of not bringing a bike into the hall, or not playing football with a leather ball inside, as untrustworthy of sharing their spaces and conversations.

Some young men who used their contact with youth workers towards conversations about educational progress, jobs, and university options, but who did not socialise with the majority of the wider peer group, simply did not attend the centre or bus sessions, finding the intense, group dynamic uncomfortable and unnecessary. When Keon's group graduated from this space aged seventeen, some of the younger boys I had seen in early juniors sessions emerged and became the dominant peer group. I asked why they hadn't come for two years, and their varied replies alluded to the fact that Keon's group had been a controlling presence within the space.

But with those who attended regularly, there were also a whole range of relationships in existence: close bonds, supportive links, inquisitive interchanges that could be momentarily spotted, but that were not always on obvious display in the group dynamic, and boys quickly fell silent when I approached a private conversation such was their focus of self-preservation. In short the atmosphere was at times overwhelming, and I would posit in a more emotional and embodied way for young men, but this was also the basis for engaging in their wider peer groups, in activities, developing relationships and feeling like they belonged within the spaces of the youth sessions and to the place they were growing up.

4 Belonging and realness

Urban multicultural and local context

The different phases of migration into the UK has shaped urban space, and the histories and cultural practices of local neighbourhoods, communities in myriad and on-going ways. As a result of the continual migrations global cities such as London experience, many people today identify in multiple ways; your parents may be from different places, and countries, bringing a rich family history and a hybridity of tradition and practice at home and beyond. These histories are carried in migration patterns and are re-made as part of the interaction between urban space and multicultural (Gidley 2013). Many of the young men I worked with claimed dual or tri-national affiliations through parents and also held religious affiliations through both family and personal histories. There were similarly rich histories of families who identified as white British and had long rooted networks within the local areas, for example the Southgrove was historically populated by white working class families. These different histories were played out and related to their local areas and communities bringing a mixing of traditions across generations and also place-based understandings of identity, where ideas of 'race', ethnicity, and religious affiliation were contested, re-imagined and re-made through the practices of everyday relationships.

In this chapter I ask what does it mean to be a young man in this particular historical, social, and political moment? What are the practices that young men draw on to define their masculinity, their sense of value, and their own belonging both to place and within peer groups? More widely, how *are* social hierarchies amongst young men constructed, enacted, maintained, and contested? What are the ways groups are created, re-formed, and contested, and through these the ways that young men

practice belonging? In considering these questions I develop the idea of 'realness' for young men and explore this idea of realness as it relates to belonging and in relation to the idea of hegemonic masculinities.

Belonging on the Southgrove

The Southgrove, situated in the area south of the River Thames that lies opposite Canary Wharf is an estate with a specific history of white, working class identity. This is also the case for other estates that lie close by such as the Burlington. Once known as the larder of London due to its prominence in colonial trade, the wider areas history as a docklands is still reflected in street and pub names, and references to community rooted in notions of shared ethnicity remain through visual markers in the form of St. Georges Cross flags. These patterns of settlement can be understood through the histories of dockside industry and the communities that developed around this, and more recently through the Greater London Council's allocation policies, rooted in ideas of community empowerment that allowed local residents to be involved in the selection of incoming residents (Keith 2005).

But both the real and imagined solidity of a homogenous white community has changed in recent years as patterns of settlement seen in the surrounding boroughs have slowly been replicated. Both these estates, those in the borough where Denhill lies, and others across urban centres in the UK, have seen significant concentrations of migrant minorities settle in the last forty years. In the boroughs where the Southgrove and Burlington stand white males now make up minorities in local state schools. With the gradual demolition and even more gradual rebuilding of the Southgrove, contraction in housing stock and the gentrification of both estates through private development schemes, many older white residents felt like the 'old Southgrove' had disappeared as the cranes turned the concrete blocks into rubble. As Ben Gidley (2013: 364) notes, in these claims to a rose-tinted past a "mythos of community" emerges in the ways some older residents imagine and remember place.

Unable to start filming on a summer youth film project, because Nathan our co-lead had not yet arrived I spoke with Jane outside the local café as we waited. 'What's this, news?' Jane asked me. I replied that it was a summer film project for young people. Looking over the group I was with Jane asked me 'Are you from round here?' I replied that I was from nearby and knew the area, it's local cultural history apparent to me from my teenage years working random Saturdays in a friends parents newsagent nearby, and trawling the concentration of breakers yards off the old Kent road as we looked for parts to 'do up' cheap cars and keep them moving. Jane eyed me up and responded 'Oh, it's changed a lot round here you know', questioning whether I did, and continuing 'Even the café, nice people though', gesturing with her eyes inside where we had both just bought tea from the Vietnamese owners.

The wider area here has a particular history of racism, which is both very real (Hewitt 1986, Back 1996) and also something that has led to a caricaturing of local working class inhabitants as Gary Robson (2000) explores in his study of Millwall fans and the ways they practice and embody their masculinities in relation to class and 'race'. This caricaturing of the working class is something Lisa McKenzie (2015) also challenges in her ethnography of the St Ann's estate in Nottingham, noting that many everyday practices are far from the way they are reported and talked about by 'outsiders'.

Amongst the young men on the Southgrove I would often white boys together in groups and, at times there might be a temptation to give 'race' or ethnicity an explanatory power through the perceived visual significance of skin colour. Expanding the viewpoint there were multiple crossovers between peer groups, friendships, and estates, characterised by complex understandings of culture, ethnicity and belonging. Importantly amongst the young men I worked with I never had to deal with an incidence of what *they* defined as racism. So while the idea, or memory of working class white identity was still strong here, ideas of 'race' or ethnicity were played out in new ways through everyday practices of belonging for everyone living here, and particularly young people.

'Oor-wite Guv, eeeer woss goin on'. Keon shouted at me, flashing a smile as I spoke with another boy, exaggerating his pronunciation of the local South London working class vernacular and swinging his arms to embellish his walk and the caricatured 'local geezer' masculinity he was portraying³³. Keon was at once showing his knowledge and embeddedness within the historically dominant local culture whilst simultaneously mocking it as something he did not identify with. As a young man Keon emphasized his Jamaican heritage, and as we will see shortly being Jamaican draws a particular cultural capital for the claimant in the local context of the Southgrove, in Denhill, and also more widely. Yet in our many interactions the above exchange was repeated in similar ways, where he parodied and rejected historically dominant local white British identities whilst simultaneously making a claim to them through his connection to this locale. In bringing the working class history and strong identity of the area to our relationship in this way, Keon was asking questions of class, ethnicity, and the ways that through localised and gendered identities and practices these can be claimed. This exaggerated performance was both something that I did not embody myself, and simultaneously a distinction of my whiteness and proximity to these identities, as opposed to Keon.

Rafael, who ran the project at that time, and had strong relationships with almost all the young people, told me he had attempted to develop his relationship with Keon through opening up a space around their shared creole cultural heritage, but that Keon had shown little interest. This is not to say he disregarded this part of his heritage but alerts us to the importance of local contexts and place, both spatially and temporally, and the ways these intertwine to create the complex fabrics of contemporary urban multiculturalism as distinctive across generations and age groups. Twenty years older than Keon, Rafael had grown up in a nearby area of South London in the same borough as the Southgrove. Working as a youth and educational support worker and manager across several

³³ See Robson (2000) for a detailed ethnographic study of this.

boroughs he has operated through several re-definitions of what it is to work with ‘vulnerable’³⁴ young people.

But what Paul Gilroy termed ‘political blackness’ writing about the shared political consciousness between Asians and black urban residents in the 1980’s as Rafael grew up, has subsequently seen ‘race’ become ordinary, blending with poverty, deprivation, and class inequality as a complex interplay of power and exclusion. The “rise of identity politics, corporate multi-culture, and an imploded, narcissistic obsession with the minutiae of ethnicity” has fragmented “political blackness” (Gilroy 2002: xiv). In the aftermath of the 2011 UK riots many commentators, not restricted to the discourses of populist and right wing cohorts, see these factors as having developed into a failing of the political possibilities Gilroy envisaged developing within the urban sphere.

Belonging in Denhill

My relationships in Denhill were characterised by different histories of migration, different configurations of place and urban space, and different institutional agendas. The wider borough was characterised by lower levels of inequality and deprivation than that of the Southgrove, and largely composed of middle and upper-middle class housing stock with predominantly white British residents. Concentrations of social housing and housing estates shared the super-diverse characteristics of the Burlington and Southgrove’s multicultural, multiple cultural histories, changing borders, multiple and contingent identities (Gidley 2013) – but covered smaller geographical areas, and this had fewer residents.

³⁴ I use scare quotes around vulnerable here because youth work is often defined (where) as focusing on ‘hard to reach’, ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ young people and it is these changes and the resultant ‘new’ policies that I refer to as regularly ‘re-defined’. Youth workers need a broad relational capacity to deal with the range of personal and social problems some young people face. However the idea of working with individuals in deficit is an inaccurate representation of the majority of young people a youth worker will work with, where to define them as necessarily ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’ is symbolic violence. What is uniform in the majority of contexts in which government or NFP youth services and projects run, are inequalities resulting from historical structures of class, ‘race’ and racism that are sustained through a neo-liberal society, although individual experiences of these, of course vary.

Furthermore they did not share the histories of intrusive and racist policing, nor the community unrest and response to this unwanted and oppressive policing, or at least these remain undocumented (Hall 1978, Keith 2005).

All of these factors played a role in relationships with and between the young men here that were different to the Southgrove in subtle ways. Due to my different status as a youth worker, as an intervention focused – gang – worker and often being introduced to the young men I worked with on a one-to one basis, it felt there was significantly less inter-personal contestation between us over particular spaces and belongings to place. Thus class, as maintaining a distinction between us, initially did not seem to be as much of an issue to the young men. Several of them lived with parent(s) in a terraced house provided by the council, the surroundings were, on the whole, more suburban. Another, additional, reading of this might be that ‘race’ remained a more relevant topic on the Southgrove, those histories still present and identities negotiated in a different relational balance, than it did here in Denhill. On the Southgrove there was a more direct negotiation between minority groups or families and the longer established community identities of white working class Englishness. Two of the young men I worked with in Denhill lived with their mothers who were white British and had fathers who were black.³⁵

So there might be an instrumental interpretation of the reduced contestation of my presence in Denhill as an openness, and perhaps honesty, existing around our identities and our purposes, and thus the effectiveness of targeted youth work. This is a fallacy; in Denhill the certainty of my whiteness in being what the young men saw as essentially a police informant, meant contestation was not necessary. They knew that

³⁵ In the context of this chapter the use of the terms ‘white British’ and ‘black’ are not terms I use through choice. I use the census like term ‘white British’ to distinguish the mothers’ identities from a blanket term of white. I use the term ‘black’ because I was not able to discuss their fathers with these young men. Such a subject was off limits, they both held anger towards their fathers and I had a real sense that to ask about them, as a man myself, would have angered them. Both young men were happy to talk about their mothers to a relative degree, and I would visit them at home in their mother’s presence.

I would not be around for long as they met me voluntarily, and as such I did not contest the spaces they felt belonging to and claimed as territory in comparison to the way that I arrived regularly on the Southgrove. They had no intention of building trust with me.

These are place specific observations that suggest at the ways that emerging forms of multicultural develop in contingent ways and are relational to historical and more contemporary trajectories. The way my whiteness was positioned, as an outsider on the Southgrove through 'race', class and thus gender made for a longer process of building trust, which importantly was made possible by the time I spent there. In this way my whiteness was, at times, overlooked suggesting the importance of building relationships and trust. What is important here, are the ways that a contestation and questioning of difference was possible in the open access youth session on the Southgrove, relationships left undefined enough by the lighter institutional presence of the youth work team. It is an uncertain and incomplete comparison that I draw between the two areas, but it does illuminate that the tensions in everyday urban multicultural are both more productive, and yet simultaneously tentative and constrained, than they appear from the outside.

The Young men in Denhill had a strong sense of territoriality and their identity was defined locally in slightly different ways to the Southgrove. Through an inherited conflict with another local area in the borough they were restricted to travelling in the other directions and also avoiding certain areas, often having to go around a locale to reach another beyond it. Their collective identity was not defined by one estate, but they claimed a particular postcode and more specifically an area within this as theirs through what they understood as a gang identity. What they also claimed was a strong affiliation with the local forms of cultural practice. The local area where they spent most of their time had a majority Muslim population resulting from different waves of migration especially Pakistani migrations in the 1960's and populations from Somalia in the 1980's. In relation to these cultural demographics many young men here identified as Muslim regardless of where their parents were from. To clarify this this affiliation

was shared across young men who claimed Asian, African, and Caribbean backgrounds either in full or in part.

These young men were similarly diverse in their heritages, as on the Southgrove, many with parents from different backgrounds yet similarly there was a focus and emphasis placed on the status of particular forms of masculinity related to being Jamaican. Sitting in the studio waiting for young men to arrive with Dexter I was talking to him about his life. At twenty-five he was older than many of the young men he and I jointly knew. Levi entered the studio quietly with some food and Dexter noticing where it was from asked him loudly, 'Are you Jamaican'? 'Yeah', Levi replied quietly. 'I didn't know', went on Dexter, 'A true blood, you're a true blood like me'. Building trust with these young men was both made easier by Dexter's presence, whilst simultaneously occluded. His age meant he was less perturbed by my presence as a youth worker having spent time in various institutional settings during his younger years, meaning they shared this ease. This also meant they responded more to his presence than mine, bringing a different dynamic to the group and allowing me to go less noticed as a body and observer as we will see in later chapters. Levi stayed quiet. He was still bedding in as part of the group as a close friend of Joel's, but he had received respect from Dexter though what was perceived as an ethnic authenticity.

In a similar way to Southgrove, within peer groups there were localised and gendered practices of belonging but importantly that were not divisible within the idea of the gang; who belongs in the UK, to the local area, to the estate, and even to the current group activity. Young men shared terms of camaraderie taken from Islam and also from Afro-Caribbean and African-American histories, and they similarly questioned one another's credentials to identify in certain ways. This was often humorous and sometimes went too far, requiring physical resilience to stand your ground, but it also operates far beyond simple narratives of illegality, inter-personal violence and nihilism that have been used to discuss young people and reify their cultural practices as gangs, as mindless, and as apolitical. Drawing simultaneously on the large Muslim demographics and related

cultural practices in their local area and familial histories, particularly Jamaican heritage, young men instead showed a questioning of what it means to belong in terms of migrations, cultural difference, class, and notions of gender and a remaking of this within their everyday practices.

Complex histories of migration co-exist with the specificities of local areas in a process where identities and belongings are lived and re-defined. In these ways young men can forge affiliations based on these complex histories that are specifically related to the local areas or postcodes in which they live. More specifically here the super-diverse characteristics of urban spaces, and a related attachment to place can be seen to transcend skin colour as what Les Back (1996) has called 'neighbourhood nationalism'. For some young men such as Asim on the Southgrove, they had understood the importance for their parents of the opportunities available to them in the UK, and they asked me a lot of questions around how they might deal with particular situations at school, questioning the dominant practices of masculinity that often structured and mediated peer interactions. The experience of living and negotiating these histories and differences in a globally connected world provides particular local knowledge's and claims to belong. Keon enacting the 'local tongue' did not translate easily into Rafael's shared notion of cultural heritage. So there are multiple temporalities intersecting these local spaces that go beyond simple ideas of migration, 'race' and multiculturalism.

FOB

Tuesday evening boys session, Organisation B Youth Bus, Southgrove

We are up in the Organisation B Playstation zone, at the back of the top deck of the bus. Its 7.30pm, half hour remains of the session and we are sitting six abreast, shoulder to shoulder, all looking to the flat screen at the end where a game of Fifa football is playing out on the screen. As usual it is competitive, particularly over who's turn is next and whether it *is* winner stays on, but the actual playing of the game becomes a backdrop to the interactions

and energy of us all gathered, watching and waiting to play. Those intent on taking the game seriously are likely to be frustrated by this focus on unsettling one another, so most of the young men play hard to keep their place in the queue to take their turn as Barcelona, Real Madrid or Arsenal, and while playing continue to use most of their attention responding to verbal and physical jibes from those waiting. This makes concentrating and importantly *proving* your skill on the game difficult, resulting in young men quickly clarifying that they do not care about the result when a goal is scored against them, and sometimes throwing the pad down mid-way through the game or demanding a restart. There was rarely consensus, although particularly aggressive or sustained distractions were often deemed by the majority to warrant a replay or at least an extra half to decide the match.

I am sitting with Marlon, Jerome, Harry, Aadan, Iman and Tolga. The boys are all eleven or twelve years old, Aadan and Tolga are a school year younger. Aadan and Iman are brothers, from a Muslim family, that moved here in the late 1980's where they and their sisters were born. They are the younger brothers of Amiir, and only one school year apart. Tolga is half-Turkish with an English mother. Iman and Clement play each other, Iman as his beloved Arsenal. He is concentrating hard, Clement is good, and Iman likes to correlate the success of the players under his control with the real life Arsenal players and their chances in this years premier league.

Tolga is talking to me, but loudly in the close proximity of the others about how he knows older boys at school. 'What you been up to? At school'? I ask. Tolga eyeballs me and puts on his best Jamaican accent. 'Bummbaclaart... bullying people innit'. 'You bully people at school'? 'Yeah fam. By taking their money'. I question him, 'Are you doing that really'? 'Yeah fam, with my boys innit'. 'Who are you friends with'? 'A boy called 'Trev', he lives up there, you know where Iceland is? Yeah, up there'.

Knowing Tolga quite well I am confident he is lying, but I continue to ask him questions, without judgement or much reaction in my voice. 'Are you one of the biggest boys in your year?' 'Yeah'. 'What year are you in?' 'Nine' he responds. 'Year nine? Year nine? Are you?' I'm sure he is not, then... 'If you're in year nine there must be boys much bigger than you? What do you do if they fight you or fight back?' 'I get my boys innit – I got year ten's. Eleven's. Sixth formers. I say 'yeah him' and they give him a punch, bosh, and I pay them'. 'You pay them? How much?' 'Twenty' he smiles. 'Twenty P'? I query. 'Twenty pound!' 'Where do you get twenty pound from?' 'My pocket money innit'. I'm about to ask something else when Tolga overrides me. 'Buuuuumbaclaaaart' he says.

Winston is sitting by the laptops next to us, suddenly he looms in to the back section where we are. Laughing he says, 'What did you say?' 'Bumbaclaaaaaart', Tolga exclaims loudly. Winston rocks his head back and laughs, his voice rising an octave higher than usual, genuinely amused at Tolga's exaggerated and Jamaican accented use of the word. The young men see Winston as authentic, calling him Skepta³⁶ or Jay-Z³⁷ on account of his apparent likeness to them. 'You're a FOB', Iman says curtly. 'Who you callin a FOB?' Tolga replies, and then adds... 'You Somali piiiirate'.

A chorus of laughter erupts, its foundation from behind the partition where Winston is sitting. Aadan sits nonplussed looking at the TV, rejecting Tolga's slant at his and his brother's heritage. Iman looks more slighted, the insult directed at him. I look at him to try and break a smile, but he looks down at the floor and shakes his head, with his head bowed he looks up to his right, curling his mouth into a thoughtful but vengeful smile as he thinks of how to respond. Iman is small in build but reads situations amongst his peers well and is quick witted with his responses. Tolga is usually quick to threaten a punch amongst his peers and is bigger than Iman, but is

³⁶ British grime artist

³⁷ American hip hop mogul

a year younger so threatening this means situating himself and his threat as game in Iman's wider age group. His silencing of Iman amongst Iman's peers leaves a moment of silence, the laughter punctuating the flow of energy and banter between the boys.

Suddenly Winston wheels into the back section, standing over us, all seated, his 6'3 adult frame filling the low ceilinged upper deck of the bus. Wanting to keep things light hearted he reaches down a hand Yo Iman, come on bruv. Iman flashes a hand out to signal leave me alone. Looking at him I can see he is trying hard to maintain his affected anger, not smile, and not allow Tolga this victory, but Winston's presence always generates a humorous vibe amongst us. At risk of smiling, and with the game continuing on the big screen and others following it, Iman swiftly looks up, and flashing me a knowing smile he merges back into the flow of the group, without showing that Tolga's insult didn't bother him or that it did.

The use of Fresh Off the Boat (FOB) to describe an individual or group references dominant migratory patterns between particular continents, and designates someone or a group who have arrived from a foreign nation but have yet to assimilate into the host nations culture, language and behaviour. Its use in popular culture globally suggests it has cross-cultural usage and similarity in meaning and use (Loomis 1990). In this way FOB is a direct reference to ethnicity and (lack of) assimilation but it also has particular localised socio-cultural significances and may be used as a positive self-descriptor of a journey or as defamatory depending on context.

As we have seen the local area here has a rich history as a working docks and a migrant destination, and racism has also been a feature of everyday life here in the recent past; histories that resurface but also are re-written in Iman and Tolga's exchange. Iman is criticising Tolga for his overblown self-description - his performance of fictional pride over bullying, violence, and being able to call on a group or gang of older boys – whilst sitting

directly with a group of older boys; a year is seen to count for a lot at times amongst young men. The dynamic of being older or younger means Tolga is wary of responding with a threat or using his greater physical strength towards Iman and a better option is to respond verbally.

Iman situates himself as 'local' in criticising Tolga's performance, both in terms of Tolga 'getting gassed'³⁸ and also lying blatantly, neither being respected. Part of being local for young men here and belonging is the everyday living of cultural difference; but also an understanding of how to navigate this and the complexities in making claim to particular identities or heritages within this local context. Neither young man here would 'claim' Jamaican cultural heritage or practices as their own yet Iman is responding to Winston's presence and drawing on this to marshal the boundaries of authenticity and Tolga's use of Jamaican patois, through his identity as (Somali) black. Winston's authenticity amongst the young men is definitely based on his cultural heritage and age, but also his embodied demeanour, his unwillingness to enforce any rules on the young men, his humour and working class background. They identify with him on multiple levels but he also engenders a positive response in their emotional interactions, and it is these relationships and trust that allow Iman to make the identification with him, and allow the working out of differences amongst the young men.

Secondly then, while Iman feels moved to question Tolga on account of his appropriation of Jamaican patois, importantly here, Iman's use of FOB is as much a questioning of Tolga's local and context specific knowledge through his various claims to dominant masculinities and the codes of this as it is a direct reference to ethnicity or 'race'.

What is also important here are the ways that young men engage with one another and the relational practices that inform these processes of belonging. Humour and 'banter' were important ways of sussing someone out, checking the veracity of their account given that boasting was

³⁸ Gassed was a term the young men used to signify having an inflated view of oneself

commonplace, and being taken in by aggrandised tales signalled a lack of experience and savvy as we have seen. But humour was also a way of negotiating the complexity of multiple belongings, of difference, of creating value, often in uncertain and challenging social and economic circumstances. I look in more detail at the place of humour and ‘banter’ and the processes of young men making claims over belonging in the next chapter.

Tolga’s racialised response was met with laughter partly through his tone and expression as he said *pirate*, presenting us with the idea of a comical character;³⁹ but also because of the perceived softness of Iman’s Somali masculinity amongst the young men. Iman and his brothers were generally good-natured, of slender build, and as such were not positioned as physically imposing or dominant. This fed into a stereotype of Somali men looking more effeminate than some other African men, and thus being ‘softer’. As Alexander (2003) notes regarding the perceived ‘softness’ of Asian masculinities and Asian bodies, young Somali men on the Southgrove were seen as looking sifter and therefore being weaker. However Somali masculinity was a complex and contradictory subject for young men; other young Somali men I worked with in another borough were very dominant in their peer groups and drew on the brutal histories family members had experienced in the ongoing civil war as shaping their masculinities towards carrying resilient and hardened bodies. As well as questioning Iman’s claims to belong through his Somali heritage Tolga is simultaneously affirming his own position through implicit claims to whiteness as a closer to a local identity. Winston laughs at the interactions through his older eyes, but also through his Jamaican heritage that as we will see shortly is seen as a strong masculine identity by many of the young men.

The expected line for youth workers in responding to incidents such as young men calling others a FOB was to make clear that this was not acceptable behaviour within the youth club space. It was deemed as

³⁹ Somali pirates had emerged at this point in English news as a new, or renewed, other to fear following the kidnapping of British sailor.

unacceptable and racist language. But, as we will see in the next chapter, 'banter' and humour are context specific and local practices, and form important parts of working class life.⁴⁰

Robson describes the place of humour as class rooted and context specific practices of masculinity, specifically its relation to 'race' and racism.

"The deliberate affront to polite sensibility represented by this rather dark sense of carnival at Millwall is an important theme which runs parallel in matters of race, to the informal monitoring of and preoccupation with cultural authenticity already noted" (Robson 2000: 122).

Similarly here, and at other times, in other places, young men tried to position others as not belonging (sometimes via 'racial', ethnic or religious identities) through unsuccessful performances of gendered identity. So while there is a playing out of belonging along historical, and also much more contemporary discourses of 'race' and othering, this is more about Iman and Tolga's positioning within this group and shows the ways that ethnicity is intimately tied up with gender as class-based practices that intertwine in processes of belonging.

Some months after this exchange I asked Iman and his brother Aadan where they knew the term FOB from. 'I dunno', Aadan said, 'Everyone does. It means you're stupid'. 'It's someone who is not from here', corrected Iman. I was about to ask from *where* but sensing my continued interest and towards both humouring and foreclosing this, he moved to intercept the passing football while sending an answer back in my direction. 'From South London, round here, wherever', and focusing on passing the ball, confirmed, 'You know what I mean Brian'. Young men often said this to me, 'You know what I mean', or sometimes just a look was enough, as a way of finishing off an explanation. This was less a

⁴⁰ As 'getting by' (McKenzie), as testing others out (Whittington), as intimidating outsiders (Robson), as defining value (Evans)) all as oppositional practices and simultaneously ways of defining cultural authenticity, value and belonging.

question and more a statement that expected I knew and therefore didn't need to be asking any more questions or trying to catch them out.

How I think about these moments now are that the young men I worked with were often asked, for example in school or at youth clubs, about their experiences and the problems that they apparently faced, for example monitoring them over racist behaviour, or the likelihood of prison; real fears perhaps, but also brought with a regularity that they found simplistic and patronizing and many of them didn't frame their own experiences in these ways. I also think that their responses were embodied everyday practices that were necessary in the social spaces they inhabited, and that they had no need to be experts in analysing their own lives in the ways sociology might suggest are important.⁴¹

Iman's response shows us an immediate affiliation to local territory and place, but also takes us out of the emotional boundary of the estate and Hanley's (2007) "Estatism" of mind, beyond practices of 'local knowing' into South London and then further afield to 'wherever'. He suggests that knowing how things are, knowing how to carry yourself, and the expectation that we do not have to make this explicit in talk, as I often attempted to, is how young men survive in their peer groups as an everyday practice. In this way this alerts us to the importance of gendered practices and the way these are embodied in local contexts as urban cultural productions.

This interrelation of class, 'race' and gender warrants closer inspection for several reasons. It is about the ways belongings are re-made within everyday life in continually new and changing contexts but also in relation to unequal societal relations and the experience of this.

As we saw in this exchange and in chapter three, competitiveness existed within and around many social relations between young men. The

⁴¹ Which in no way suggests that this account manages or attempts an expert analysis, more that I came to understand the way I had learnt use social theory to analyse young men's worlds could fall short in capturing what was happening through imposing a framing onto meaning. Therefore a practice of listening and developing a sociological imagination as advocated by Les Back (2007) that attended to difference was necessary.

exchange with Iman and Tolga has begun to consider the place of historical and contemporary discourses of race' and ethnicity and the ways these are re-made as 'new ethnicities' (Back 1996, Harris 2006) but also importantly the way these are re-made within gendered and embodied practices that define belonging. I want to examine more closely the ways ethnicity or 'race' was done, that is to say how global belongings, that is personal, familial and cultural histories were practiced in local contexts.

Realness

Tuesday evening boys session, Southgrove Football Cage

I see Madu walking, then his pace picking up as he starts to near, preparing himself for us, for the group, for entering the cage where a football match is underway. By the time he reaches us he's bounding, bouncing on the balls of his feet, his chest out. He struts into the cage and repeats loudly for us all to hear but without looking at anyone directly. 'Real nigga shit, real nigga shit, real nigga shit'. He is all smiles, fresh shape-up⁴², dressed in light grey from head to toe, his trainers matching his tracksuit. He spuds a few young people coting on the sideline and looks around, body still bouncing. Turning he sees me on the pitch and makes a quick dart over, 'yeeaaaahhhh', he says and spuds me too. 'Whats goin' on'? I say as a greeting and he nips back to the sideline to let the game progress. Soon he is messing around with a ball with Kieran, who, at 15 is two years his senior but almost twice his size. Madu is not small for his age and is physically strong; most of his peers know much better than to tangle with him, but Kieran is particularly big for his age. As they do keep-ups and pass the ball, the simple passing game changes. 'Pass', Madu says, but Kieran is keeping the ball. 'PASS'? He jumps in to get the ball and Kieran's miscontrol leads him to stand on Madu's foot. Aghast he looks down at his box fresh grey Adidas and up at Kieran. 'You fucking dumb guy', Madu says. Kieran takes a step back but screws his face up and looks

⁴² Haircut

back, 'Shut-up', he says, tensing his upper body forward. Madu backs off but gets louder, abusing Kieran. 'What the fuck you doing you dumb wasteman'? Madu's voice is higher, his forehead frozen in a frown. 'Fuckin watch what you're doin. You can't even afford these trainers, you bum-out wasteman'. 'Yeah, I got Hurracahe and those Air Forces', Kieran responds. Madu is a few metres away now and not going towards Kieran, who, normally very physical with other boys because of his size makes no move either. Madu cannot take him on, so his insults, aimed at a perceived lesser sense of style, wealth, and at Kieran's intelligence, are targeted to cause maximum insult - these status signifiers are real and important markers. Madu's position within his year group and this wider peer group, his status as 'authentic' means he is not a wise target for Kieran, not for fear of physical reprisal but in terms of the social fallout Kieran will feel if Madu and him clash. For a while Madu looks thoroughly disgusted, but later is smiling again, although he and Kieran steer clear of one another until the session ends.

In this particular group of boys, a peer group that I have worked with throughout this project from the age of eight with them fourteen at the time of writing Madu is a strong presence. I have only known him for two years since he and his family moved onto the estate, but we built a quick rapport. He was eager, friendly, full of charisma, and his mood would cloud in an instant when he felt things weren't to his liking. His bounding, excited, pumped-up entrance, in fresh trainers, newly cropped hair, chest-out as a bodily performance of 'dominant masculinity' must be seen as a relational display within the specific context. Madu's excitement to reach the group is based on his position in it, that he has friends he is excited to see but also that he sees an opportunity to present himself as a 'top boy'. His deflation at Kieran ruining his performance is based on others seeing this and he switches to anger towards maintaining some respect in the eyes of others. But he would know better to bop in like this if older boys were around, they would quickly put him down as being 'gassed' and he would be exposing himself to potential challenge in a later situation.

Competitiveness is seen here as a relational practice and operated with similarities and differences across age groups and also peer group formations. What is important here is the way that this competitiveness structured the ways of relating, relationships and belonging amongst young men, forming a hierarchy amongst them that in some way was adhered to by everyone through, as noted above, either active or passive roles.

New belongings, Jamaicanisation, authenticity and embodiment

Like Keon, many men on the Southgrove that had any claim to Jamaican heritage emphasised this. This was also true in Denhill as we saw with Levi and Dexter's interaction, and other areas I worked. Following migration trends Jamaican culture has and continues to develop a particular relevance and influence in urban culture and beyond within the UK and especially music. It is important to see this influence as part of a black Atlantic creative expression, developing within urban spaces and across national, ethnic and cultural boundaries (Gilroy 1993). But it also has a particular global position. In this way the belongings young men practiced mirrored yet also superseded the patterns of immigrations that we have seen in the ways that young men enacted and practiced ideas of 'race' and ethnicity (again in competitive ways that formed hierarchies of belonging).

Authenticity in this space was often talked about using languages of ethnicities although less demarcated along simplistic and dominant typologies of 'race' such as Black, white, Asian. Jamaican heritage connoted the most cultural authenticity amongst young men, however members of an established white family, prevalent on the estate since its previous period as a bastion of white working class community held a similarly authentic position, where the young men would not be called FOB. Belonging here was complex and the seemingly strict lines of demarcation were also transient and re-drawn to allow new configurations that worked to the favour of those involved. African heritage was often used as an insult amongst the boys, with particular somatic or

phenotypical features seen as weaker and less authentic in terms of masculine bodies.

Young men with West African heritage were called 'blick' on account of their darker skin-tone, drawing on more ideas from across the globe that darker skin signifies a poorer background, as in India, and relating to histories of slavery. Rather than the view taken by pan-African perspectives, here young men suggested African heritage as a backward step, in terms of local belonging and directly on account of the more recent waves of immigration into the UK. Although this was also very much in transition here and remained as a feature of their contingent hierarchy based on the particular dominance of a white and black (Jamaican) cultural dichotomy. Whether it was political or not, around these narcissisms of minor differences (St. Louis 2005) some idea of 'blackness' existed amongst young men, although as Gilroy notes these are now more globalised ideas or identities that have spread through new technologies, beyond the historical identity of 'rudeboys' in London in the 1980's and 1990's. As Gilroy notes, "The Rastafari have gone and the Rude Boys are back in force. They are ruder than ever and, as the antics of the infamous So Solid Crew attest, some of them are now 'white'" (Gilroy 2002: xiii).

So African heritage could simultaneously be claimed as successfully authentic by someone who was powerfully built, had a good fade⁴³ with a good shaped head, the right trainers, as we saw in the case of Madu who saw himself and was seen as 'real'. Strength or ability to fight was important but could be mythicized through threat based on 'realness' in the peer structure. Put simply, displays of 'authenticity' were governed by the localized cultural markers of dominant masculinity, and carried successfully through embodied performances and narratives. However, while the modes of 'racial' authenticity and the ways these blended and were diffused through embodied repertoires, stylistic, emotional and

⁴³ Hairstyle where typically the top is longer and then blends or fades into the sides and bottom getting shorter and shorter with the lower areas totally shaved to reveal the skin: popular among young men from all backgrounds, although more so among young black men due to the effect that can be achieved with afro hair.

physical, are the particular examples I have focused in in this chapter; importantly as chapters five and seven show, this did not mean that authenticity was only achieved by the most popular, the most physically imposing, or the most 'street aware' young men, as many accounts of young men's peers groups that use an implicit framing of hegemonic masculinity as their underlying structure suggest.

Peer group dynamics were based on not showing weakness and on embodied cultural capital that served to ward off threats but what I came to realise was that for all the emphasis put on style, hair, trainers, that these were as much markers to blend in as markers to make you stand out. And this desire to fit in and not be singled out was borne of young men's desire to belong, emotionally. In other words trainers and stylistic markers protected against showing too much individuality in an emotional sense, they, like the way clothes were sometimes worn, were a barrier, they prevented questions being asked, they allowed young men to get on with it where the real goal of belonging was being accepted by your peers and this was an emotional, personal, psychological need. You didn't want to be accepted because you had *trainers* you wanted to be accepted because *you* had trainers, because these symbols showed that you knew what others knew in the everyday life and practices of the place you lived.

Temporalities and uncertain movements

For Keon, and the young men I work with, understandings of 'race', identities such as blackness or whiteness, and their wider everyday lives are forged through the particular histories and localised experiences of migrations and the on-going effects of the post-industrial decline in inner-cities. But also through the spread of new technologies and the resulting changing experiences of territoriality that see the global linked to the local. These super-diverse spaces and multiple temporalities exist within the context of the UK's current austerity politics and increasingly limited opportunities for young people in urban contexts.

Discussing ideas of how to practice youth work and engage young people with me at a later date Rafael explained that he saw the period where 'experiential styles' of youth work being successful had passed. 'Everything moves too fast now, I don't know what music they're listening to... even Zeke doesn't'.⁴⁴ I used to keep up, but with phones, YouTube, you can't. The method that works now is a relational method to try to understand where they are coming from'.

Alongside migrations, movement remained a continual feature in young men's lives: Young men were moved from areas by local councils when they were deemed at risk through Police information or changed schools, or moved as a condition of a conviction, bail or release. If these are disparate examples to bring together what they show is the sense of movement that was prominent in young men's lives I worked with and the speed at which they took on new surroundings and worked to fit in and belong. This is perhaps a more human feature in the present age with migration patterns so prevalent. This can help us begin to understand how local area can be so important to young men. The speed of change within local support services did not surprise, or even phase, those more versed in institutional relationships.

I took a group of boys to see the Bob Marley documentary and Mo would not stop talking, barely paying attention to the film. He frustrated the audience sat near us and could not seem to sit still. At the next session I ran he was gone – 'he's been shipped' said Jamal. Mo had been doing badly at school at had been reported by his teachers, although this was as serious as his misbehaviours had been. Young men whose families had migrated from Africa were at risk of being sent back home to live with extended family if they became involved in delinquency or crime, or started to fall into trouble at school. So lives were defined by historical but also more contemporary, and everyday movements, with migration rarely a finished process for many. Migrations, young men moving to live with grandmothers when their mother felt they couldn't control them, peers

⁴⁴ Zeke ran the Organisation B mobile (van-based) music studio and generally knew what the young men were listening to and what was popular.

doing jail time, and returning, redevelopments and relocations, the transience of local youth services; all these played some part in the uncertain temporalities young men I worked with faced.

The negotiation of the complex tapestry of urban life requires a sensitive reading to draw out the experiences and understandings that develop and are often portrayed as negative, disaffected, violent and undesirable. Identity for young men was experienced through a coming together of myriad histories and movements but importantly in a particular space and at a particular moment. It is these local contexts that frame young men's experience and where we must look to understand the connections within super-diverse urban multiculturalism through which young urban lives are lived.

Outsiders, Territoriality and Proximity

There is a temporality to young peoples' experience, brought about by global circuits of movement, migratory, urban, but also informational via new technologies that creates globally inflected belongings in local spaces and territories. One of the key questions that has stayed with me throughout this research has been what it means to belong for young men, on the Southgrove, and in the different areas I have worked. At times there have seemed similarities across the areas, and I have searched for an overarching framework that can explain the ways young men find their place within peer groups and how these can be situated alongside and within wider social structures.

Lisa McKenzie shows the perspectives of both men and women from St Ann's regarding their perception by 'outsiders' from other parts of Nottingham. "The Women describe this as 'being looked down on' while the men accept the reality of living in the 'endz' and how they 'work around it'" (McKenzie 2015: 51). For some young men being from ends⁴⁵ was important, and this proximal identity that signalled belonging here, was

⁴⁵ Used to refer to where you are from, for example the particular local area or neighborhood, but the scale may vary with individual usage.

primarily about a classed, 'raced', and through these a gendered identity, that Rafael or I could not accomplish. So amongst many of the young men there was a questioning of whiteness, which I define here as a class based identity in a position of authority employed through the state, and in this way Keon saw both Rafael and I as outsiders. Identity and associated ideas of belonging, respect and trust, were measured and granted through a shared identity with someone, and an acceptance, or trust, that you know, or recognise one another, based on the proof of experience, and recognised through a doing of that identity.

In this way proximity, thought of as a trust in place and person, as presence, present, is not opposed to but in in tension with temporalities, sometimes working with sometime against them. Proximity can be thought of as a response to the movements, and changes in young men's lives, the uncertainty, the comings and goings. By being there regularly I was able to create a different temporality and build some trust with young men, albeit as an outsider that was less unwelcome than reliable.

5 It's just banter

Challenging each other

Where Chapter three was a reading across (group) bodies and an initial exploration of young men's embodied and emotional subjectivity, this chapter explores [this] in more detail. Following on from chapter four's ideas of belonging and the ways that these were mediated through class-situated, gendered practices this chapter looks in more detail at the way young men engage with one another and the relational practices that make up processes of belongings. More specifically the chapter describes the processes of banter young men engaged in and the tensions that arose in maintaining ones composure when self-worth was challenged in such a competitive environment. This chapter then offers a reinterpretation and development of the well-known idea of banter (Back 1996, Nayak and Kehily 1997, Robson 2000, McKenzie 2015).

Drawing on the wider group process introduced in chapter three of finding ones place and being excluded from peer group spaces, and also drawing on the competitiveness over belonging, introduced in chapter four, in this chapter I analyse how these feelings or practices of belonging were further contested around/ over the importance and 'authenticity' of each other's experience. Belief in another's claim was often directly related to the hierarchies described in the last chapter, and this brings in the importance of an idea of truth for young men (in relation to the ideas of myths from the last chapter. This develops the idea of what authenticity is for young men.

The process of banter was not just an aggressive exchange, but a way of determining the veracity or likelihood of someone's account; itself a signifier of experience, and comparative to age, or more specifically

being/having grown up. Young men would say, 'Big man ting', or simply, 'BMT', to conclude what they were saying, to make clear [its] veracity and importance. Banter was sometimes humorous but can also be seen as engendering a particular type of relations both with others and with yourself that is able to 'not care'. Young men often said to me "I don't care" (repeated) which like many things I discuss throughout this thesis could often be explained away by saying boys will be boys; but young men did care, often wanted a situation to be resolved but did not always know how this could be done. Young men learnt and developed bodily routines to seem unaffected, whether using a more offensive 'fronting' strategy or a more defensive disinterest or ignorance towards maintaining a hardened body.

Masculinities, class, and the place of humour

Tuesday evening boys session, Organisation B Youth Bus, Southgrove

The sun's out, it is late May, boys gather outside the cage on the tarmac between the bus and the grass. Younger boys are on bikes, Aaron and Luke, older, just sixteen on new mopeds. Aaron is on a different one from last week and tells me he's selling motorbikes now. A few boys have arrived early waiting for the team to open the bus doors. Lamar walks on the other side of the road, heavy footed, his head bowed listening to music, his hand articulating the tone and punctuation of the lyrics.

Wanting to escape the bus' static air Winston and I are chatting outside. Employed specifically as the bus driver, in practice Winston is one of the best youth workers here in terms of building relationships with the young people; because he doesn't see himself as a youth worker, which is someone exterior to the young people on the estate, someone who comes in to 'help', and doesn't need to negotiate either a different class background or an authority position in his relationship with young people.

Lamar signals that he'll be back soon to Luke, and seeing him Winston calls after him, "YO... T... YYOOOO TEEE". Lamar hears, turns and comes over. 'You comin bus'? 'Na, getting food', Lamar replies. 'YO', Winston says laughing, "You sortin me an B out'. Lamar looks at me uncertainly. Is he buying me food? Winston is a big character to the young men, they like him, he's not like other staff. He will banter with them and they can be themselves, but he will call enough if things get out of hand, usually when things are out of hand; his role as bus driver is not to enforce rules he reminds other staff. Lamar is particularly receptive to his bond with Winston, and this also gives him more kudos amongst his peers so he doesn't want to say no, but his face says he isn't planning on buying the food either. Winston responds by laughing again, realising the uncertainty he has created. 'Don't worry G, bring your food back here', making clear he just wants Lamar to come back and hang out rather than buy food for he and I.

Upstairs on the bus Winston and I sit and talk to Jerome until Iman arrives. He is shortly followed by a number of young men who, aged eight, were the youngest juniors when I started working here, and now aged twelve I know well. They pile into the Playstation zone and sit on top of one another, knocking me, barging and standing on each others feet until a settlement is achieved and Aadan who has ended up next to me turns and in mock surprise at my presence, loudly says, 'Hi Brian'. Humour was always present in young men's everyday relationships to the extent that its different forms, articulations and embodiments form the basis of this chapter.

As they debate who will play first and the following order, the length of games, whether there will be extra time, Winston talks to Iman.' Don't talk to me', Iman says. 'Ehhhhhh yyyyo Iman, why you goin' on like that', Winston questions, smiling and leaning back into the slim cushioned benches lining the sides of the bus so they can accommodate him. Iman looks at the screen. 'He's in a bad mood', Aadan clarifies. 'Your parents not feeding you'? Winston jests.

“Shuu-ttup. You big lipped Jay Z”, says Iman with a scowl. Winston laughs, ‘Yo Iman, how come there’s no curtains in your house’? Winston asks, laughing his way through the last few words. Laughing more he continues, ‘It’s cos I keep seeing your mum wearing them’.

The whole group are still full of energy and now all laugh at Winston’s joke, ‘Oooooooooooooooooohhhhhh’, some of them say signalling the sharpness of it. Iman returns Winston a scowling and mischievous smile. ‘Ok you ugly big lipped granddad, I’ll let you have that. You can have that one’, and the game begins. In fact I am the only one not really laughing, wondering how I will be viewed by the other youth workers in this context if I engage in what is seen as a prelude to trouble.⁴⁶

There are similarities here with the exchange between Iman and Tolga in the last chapter beyond Iman’s involvement but the context of previous relationships between those involved is important and different. Iman and Winston, alongside myself have built a good relationship and banter every week. Winston knows Iman can be sharp and there is a mutual respect around the terms of their banter. Further Winston offers no direct challenge in terms of peer group position, instead elevates young men’s popularity through their association with him. Winston was never uneasy in youth club sessions with the young men, he exuded a happy, friendly, and experienced character to them, and he embodied this in his casual and relaxed demeanour. But in quieter moments when we would talk he would confide in me the difficulties of his week or life, that he was skint, or that he might move out of London for good to live with his partner and children, despite his attachment to living there. My point here is Winston was not just a happy go lucky charmer, but built relationships with young men in a direct and trusting way that he refused to compromise through becoming an ‘official youth worker’.

⁴⁶ I had no intention of making a comment to Winston about ‘inappropriate language’ although if this had been between two young men in the proximity of another youth worker there would likely have been an intervention by them.

In her ethnography of working class life on the St Ann's estate in Nottingham, Lisa McKenzie explains that:

“giving good banter’, and being able to tell a good story, is both an art form on council estates and also necessary as part of ‘belonging’ to the estate” (McKenzie 2015: 57).

For the men and women McKenzie knows in St Ann's humour is a way of ‘getting by’, an ability to laugh at circumstances that might seem unfunny, if not downright grim to what she terms ‘outsiders’ or those that do not live on the estate.

It took me a long time to position what was happening when young men challenged one another and how to frame it. Different youth workers had different ways of approaching this as we have seen, what it comes down to is trust: if Sean and Joel were fighting I knew they wouldn't disrespect one another, similarly Keon and Lamar, but in wider peer situations it meant physical conflict was likely and would have to be stopped by staff.

Many times throughout my research I was struck by the way young men engaged one another in wider peer group contexts; and many times I asked young men, whom I had gotten to know well, why they had just offered such a direct challenge to another young man. Similarly observing two young men challenging one another I would ask those watching with me what it was about. Young men reassured me, ‘its just banter’, aware of the session rules around fighting and simultaneously peer rules around snitching, ‘They're just joking’. So there seemed an acceptance and levelling off regarding the omnipresence of potentially conflictual interactions by most young men. Sometimes young men would engage another critically or aggressively simply towards getting a third person's attention.

Something I had not expected to feel so strongly was class dislocation during my research and this helped me to build an awareness of the pitfalls I faced in writing about young men. As I have shown in the

literature review there are deep assumptions that exist around not only 'race', but also class and gender as natural categories and are maintained through ways of seeing and relating that are simultaneously classed, 'raced' and importantly here gendered.

Throughout my research, in considering the further pitfalls of writing myself in and considering my own subjectivity as a conduit or way of thinking through experience I have talked with many people, friends, and colleagues who were not directly involved in work with young people or necessarily in anything closely related about young people, 'gangs' and differences in society. Explaining your research when you are uncertain yourself is often joked about as the researchers (or perhaps more accurately the PhD researchers) biggest fear. Perhaps as a result of my uncertainty I tired from people's reactions to the claim that you are doing a PhD, and in social situations often said I was a youth worker doing 'gang work' or was a 'gang worker' – a perfect example of the discussion around 'gang talkers' from the previous chapter. "Cool" was a response I heard several times, followed by questions about so what makes and why do young people commit violence? These conversations showed me the non-malicious but also deeply seated simplifications that young people and identities of 'race', class and gender are understood through.

I had often read moments of interaction between individuals or within group contexts using a priori assumptions and had followed moments where I was not involved and could observe but had decontextualized them in terms of young men's interpersonal relationships and the ways these are relational within group contexts. When I paid more attention to the interactions I was involved in I came to realise that I had been coming to terms with young men's humour throughout my research and often participated in it, less with the instigative approach of Winston and more often through gesture, smile, and bodily disposition especially in the context of activities like football. There were times when I got carried away in group contexts and would stop noticing, or notice less, that someone might have been left feeling hurt and vulnerable after an interaction. Some of the young men I worked with had been bantering with me from the

beginning (others spent a long time testing me out as we have seen) but the place of humour as part of getting on and as Lisa McKenzie describes “getting by” became clearer.

Banter was humorous, allowing a space for young men to make light of the complex processes of belonging and fitting in, which are so important for young people – discovering who they are, experimenting, trying things out. In this way banter is a way of learning and practicing to not take oneself too seriously, and can be seen in both British working class and African-American cultures (e.g. the game ‘the dozens’, see Wald 2014). This was particularly prevalent amongst young men aged eight to sixteen. Around the time they turned seventeen they would still be game for having a laugh, but on the whole began to take themselves, and how others saw them and thus engaged with them, in a more serious way. Men (by which I mean in their early to mid twenties) who I worked with during the period of this thesis as part of one of the youth work teams I was employed on did not banter in this same way amongst one another. They would joke with one another in group contexts but they were not interested in unsettling each other or contesting who they were in the same way.

Between the ages of eight to sixteen, and particularly towards the latter end of this period, young men are going through a lot of emotional and physical changes. On the Southgrove, the Burlington and in Denhill the groups of young men I worked with were living on the same estates or local areas, but some had been there for a year, some were born there. Others had grown up there, returned to live with family in Africa and were now back, two years older with new experiences. The ways that gender identities were played out through these different histories were complex and rich.

Getting it right, knowing, and proving experience

This section looks at how young men presented what they knew with ‘certainty’. It considers the links between masculinities, knowledge and

language use. This is in-line with an early ethnographic observation I made around the place of language and being trusted.

Young men felt inclined to 'get things right', they wanted to know the right answers to avoid being seen as naïve. This had two different outcomes in everyday interaction and particularly where I engaged them with more direct questions. As Alexander (2000) observed of another researcher who visited the youth club to question young men about their experiences of racism; young men began with tales that 'fitted the narrative' and quickly moved into fictional, and to them humorous, accounts of abductions and illegal arrests. The researcher would have left none the wiser had Alexander not informed her through her more locally situated reading of the young men's answers. This was the first outcome I found; young men embellished and began to create accounts that they found desirable or amusing. The second outcome I found was also present in research by Carol Gilligan (1993) working with young girls, where their interpretation of what an incoming researcher wants as an answer is what was offered. Gilligan positions this less as 'banter' and in a more relational way, and I also found this talking to young men about issues of community, violence, education and social life. They would ask me what my research was about and then offer the best explanation they could in the terms that I had framed the questions. I was leading the discussion, and they were trying to help me find what I was looking for.

In this section I analyse how these feelings or practices of belonging were further contested around the 'authenticity' of each other's experience. The importance of experience for young men is crucial at a time when they are transitioning and dealing with things for the first time, some grow up very fast, no-one wanted to be labelled a FOB or a 'neek'. Young men questioned each other over the authenticity of their stories and thus the validity of their knowing.

EGYV studio session, Denhill youth centre

'He's just a chino wearing, Ellis going liar'. Joel was talking about another boy Malachi, who had been at the studio last week with Sean and the other boys in Joel's absence. Malachi attended Ellis, a good local secondary school that also provided sixth form education, and was known for higher than average grades and a stricter code of discipline than other local schools. We had been recording in the studio the week before in Joel's absence and he had obviously listened to the track they had recorded. 'Man's not doin any of the stuff he's saying he's doin', said Joel, "He's lying'.

What I want to consider here is something that has been a recurrent theme and focus for me throughout this research, namely the importance of experience for young men resulting from the way that a particular type of dominant masculinity is always needing to be proven, and thus always in process. If this is the case as I observed and young men feel they need to get it right or not show weaknesses then what does it mean for young men to get it wrong? Where, or what are the spaces they can do this. Hopefully it has become increasingly clear to you as the reader that finding, understanding, and also trying to develop and sustain these sorts of spaces and relations where suitable and possible has been a focus of this thesis. What experiences are valued and what are not?

For some young men who identified with a more street or 'road' culture (Gunter 2010) proving (so that they were believed rather than actually demonstrating) that they would use violence, that they had the experience to draw on was regularly important. The UK rapper K Koke (2013) released a song called 'Lay down your weapons' where he talks of "die hard kids [who] wanna play with toys". Young men I worked with were listening to this and we discussed it. A lot of his early music prior to this, and on which he founded his name, centres on road life or doing road, the making of money illegally and a proclivity to violence (Gunter 2010). "I was caught in the hype as a Kid" Koke (2013) tells us, an idea that young men

of around fourteen regularly repeated to me suggesting they felt they were more in control of themselves at this age, than when they were younger.

This example raises questions around the place of experience within young men's worlds and more widely within masculine relationships. A successful musician who has based his musical and public identity on claiming to be willing to engage in violence then suggesting an end to street based violence can help us to start asking via Koke's own life experiences what is the place in young men's lives at which they identify with violence (which I consider more in the next chapter). More specifically we can question the place of experience in young men's psycho-social framings and the way they develop knowledge of their social spaces. From Koke's lyrics there appears to be a need to have experienced to then be able to offer advice.

Not being 'fake', being a 'real nigga' for Madu and others was important, and it was important to appear certain, to have a coherent identity.

Growing up, as a process was not always valued by young men, and is not by society and by cultures of masculinity, but is seen more as an end, 'Grow up', to be done with as quickly as possible, so the uncertainty is framed as a negative. This must be considered in the particular contexts of people's lives where there is perhaps not time, responsibilities, and parents with jobs and not much time. For some young people this time of uncertain exploration was impossible requiring only certainty as they struggled with family problems and carried the weight. For young men sometimes it seemed as if there was no need for exploration because everything they wanted to know, or simply want, is available, at least to view. Experience for young men was immediate, though Twitter, Instagram and Facebook; their responses often characterised by soundbites, that didn't listen and valued the immediacy, and also the proof of experience. In the gym one day Joel kept looking at a photo of two older boys from another area who were positioned as rivals to his peer group. He knew of them rather than knowing them directly. 'They are wham', he said referring to their heavily built upper bodies. Joel was at once revealing some insecurity about his physique, as he ripped his shirt off,

saying, 'I need to get big', while tensing his body in the mirror to try and achieve it in the moment. He became twitchy, excited yet agitated at the same time, 'I'm bored, lets go', and he left.

Within cultures of certain speaking and certain knowledge, cultures of proof and immediacy, there is a relationship between language and feeling. Within histories of masculinity from working class to academia, different articulations of certainty are the watchword. Young men used to say 'real talk' and 'big man ting' to assure the listener(s) of the credibility, seriousness and importantly, sincerity of what they were saying in contrast to 'banter' and 'playin'. At a certain age the time for this is gone, so we might think the relationship between language and feeling is also associated with age. We should 'grow up' and 'learn not to take things personally'.

Truth and experience

Young men develop a competitive masculinity, a competitive relationship with their peers around appearance, knowledge, games, but more widely around experience. They question one another on whether experiences recounted are valid. Experience is at a premium for teenagers, because they know what is available, yet it is not necessarily available to them. So there is a huge value for those that have 'got there' first. Knowledge, knowing something is because you can prove it, you were there, as is evidenced by the recording of experiences on smart-phones, including acts of transgression and violence towards other young people. Experience gives status within the wider peer group context, and thus respect, which is about authenticity as a young man, but also belonging, belonging to the group moment and belonging more widely within the expectations of accepted versions of masculinity.

There is then a particular value on truth, on obtaining or measuring truth for young men. What is at stake here is status, gaining over another and/or protecting oneself. So the value of truth is that it shows a depth of experience. Young men know the game of bravado well and they know

that people will lie about experience. But experience is relational here; at stake is your own experience in relation to theirs. You must use your own experience to measure if theirs is real, are *they* telling the truth? Scepticism, an open questioning, or a sometimes safer strategy of silence is necessary to defend your own integrity or risk looking stupid. What, who, should I believe and how much of this is banter? Young men are growing up here, and as we all do a closing down is necessary, scepticism around truth claims because someone's always trying to pull the wool over our eyes. It's hard to trust in this context when there is joking around and seriousness all mixed together.

In their music sessions, writing and recording lyrics young men were serious, they were focused on putting what they felt was a real version of themselves out there, one that would be taken seriously (this is something I return to in chapter seven). Joel and Keon's lyrics were both about the way they had experienced various forms of exclusion and personal hardship, relating their personal lives to wider societal themes, and framing these within stylised tropes of UK rap and grime. To summarise some key themes: Family and friends being imprisoned, the lack of opportunities available for young working class, black men, the threat of violence that they faced in everyday urban life and also the aspirational dreams of 'makin a stack', bringing the team through and ultimately getting themselves and their mum out of the ends. Conspicuous by their absence were fathers in music and in discussions with young men more widely. I can count the number of times young men brought up their fathers in the years I worked with them on one hand. But there were times when they did speak about them. In this way music can be one form of catharsis, the feelings that young men have are acted out here as a testing ground (Dickens and Lonie 2013).

It can be play and it can go too far, but the testing one another is not just putting each other down, not always an attempt to win, which is a framing often surmised from the conceptual misuse of Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinities. Instead it is a space of flux, uncertainty, where

they are trying to make sense of who they are at a stage of life where things feel very important.

In a lot of grime and UK rap lyrics there is this constant focus on 'realness' as living or having lived the things that you talk about. Thus belief in another's claim was often directly related to the hierarchies described in the last chapter, and this brings in the importance of truth for young men. The process of banter was not just an aggressive exchange, but also a way of determining truth, which itself was signifier of experience. Within peer groups on the Southgrove, the questioning of one another's knowledge over particular experiences and the veracity or authenticity of their stories was relentless, and required young men to develop a thick skin or simply to disengage which was often the tactic used, but also often put pressure on them to embellish their own experience, which they might later be called on to prove.

Learning not to feel?

Having detailed the humorous sides of banter, and also its function for young men as a way of sharing and learning about experiences amongst their peers through questioning and contesting people's accounts I turn here to the ways young men presented hardened emotional responses when banter became more personal.

Tuesday evening boys session, Organisation B Youth Bus, Southgrove

Asim arrives and looks at me. 'You're lanky', he says. I don't respond but think about it. It's a challenge, but more an opportunity to practice. I am a safe target, and no one else takes notice. Boys learn to communicate like this, challenging each other. Asim is polite and we get on well, he rarely initiates trouble but will stand up for himself if he has to, so he is practicing on me. Kam is off doing a charge around the bus. He's upstairs letting off energy with a swaggered walk, bouncing around people and putting out jolts to see who will react. I find him alone momentarily, 'Kam be a good

example to the youngsters, I know you can be sensible like that'. 'Ok', he says and disappears down the stairs. Kai comes in and sits down to challenge Tolga on Fifa. Casim brings it in, 'haven't spoken to your girlfriend for a while', he says to me. 'She deleted your number', I say. Kai says 'I saw your mum last night', I respond with something but between maintaining my professionalism and slow wittedness there's no bite to my response. "That. Was. Dead"! Kai mock exclaims, 'You got parred', Casim flatly says to me. I raise my eyebrows and hide behind my authority as a worker. The Fifa game finishes. 'Face me Brian', Jerome says. I play the game and can never remember the buttons. 'I'm gonna slam you', says Jerome. 'I'm gonna totally mash you up'. 'You're a disgrace', Tolga says to Jerome who is only beating me 1-0. 'Watch this... see that skill, brup brup brup, aaahhh, licked him, see that'. 'Yeah but you aint getting no goals', Tolga says, 'You skillin thin air'. 'Shut-up you dead Turkish wasteman. I'm skillin'. 'You aint getting no points'. 'Do I care'? Jerome retorts.

Boys banter like this, they joust; to not be able to do it shows weakness, a lack of resistance, an inability to stand up for yourself, both as knowledge and checking emotion by not getting upset. If you lose your cool then you have to raise the stakes and use physical violence. Banter worked to determine hierarchies within wider peer groups as well as within more immediate cliques to reaffirm loyalties and reliance, and often went too far on account of the relational hierarchies of groups and young men's pride, feelings, and sense of self-worth having been stretched too thin.

Its just banter was young men's way of telling youth workers not to worry about what might appear to be a breaking of the rules but was in fact just normal everyday interaction. Many young men saw it as strange that I would question this boys will be boys challenge, while for others it appeared unwise to discuss it with me and expose themselves within a context where they had their own self-respect and well-being to preserve. Young men had little time for 'research' on the Southgrove and in the Denhill area, and similarly on the Burlington estate young men told me I

was running a 'focus-group'; Jamal explained, 'Asking questions and always wanting to talk about things'.

The general consensus amongst the young men I worked with was that the testing of one another over somatic, ethnic, physical, stylistic, and mental idiosyncrasies and/or abilities, and the judgement over whether it had gone too far, would ultimately be mediated with threats and at times physical confrontations (over not wanting to lose face within a group context). With personal status at stake young men learnt and developed bodily routines to seem unaffected, whether using a more offensive 'fronting' strategy or a more defensive disinterest or ignorance towards maintaining a hardened body. I analyse this process as fronting and hiding and as a 'learning not to feel', through the ways young men worked hard (bodies) to shrug off uncertainty and insults towards 'getting on' in their peer groups.

Some found this more important than others and these processes of fronting and hiding your feelings varied at different stages of peer group life. Similarly 'not feeling' is also about learning to 'not care': To say I don't care and learning to shut things out. 'Do I care'? Saying this is part of a masculinity young men exhibited that gets on with it, and learns to not care about impacts to the self as much as impacts to others (Bissell and Peacock 2015). Learning not to feel is thus a way young men learn to relate, emotionally, in particular ways, looking beyond simple models of masculinities, repression, and silence at these processes in more detail as feeling within group contexts.

6 Threat, young masculinities and violence

Young men and levels of violence

This chapter deals with the place of violence within young men's lives. More specifically it deals with violence in relation to the way it was embodied, as fear and as threat, and in relation to gendered subjectivities. In this way it talks about different levels of inter-personal violence largely within peer (or rival peer) group contexts as a way of considering the relationship of violence to gender relations of power and emotional life.

Throughout my time doing research for this project violence was present in young men's lives. Violent events were talked about, and the regularly uncertain information surrounding these operated as a space where masculinities were played out. Young men I worked with were involved to varying degrees in violence beyond the youth club spaces we shared, and inter-personal violence was also present as threat, makeweight, blurring the boundaries between play and conflicts, and at times breaking out between young men within these spaces.

In some way this is a blurring of the possible boundaries we might draw around types of violence. But my aim here is to consider the varied and overlapping presence of violence in young men's lives, how they negotiated this in terms of their masculinities and gendered practices, and more specifically the emotional and bodily tensions they experienced in doing this.

Violence was slippery; it surfaced in inter-personal and group relations at a micro-level where the makeweight of a punch or a more sustained physical confrontation was offered up, but also in young men's lives more widely – from unknown areas, gangs, and within urban spaces they

inhabited. Much of what went on was posturing and threatening as practices of belonging that remade hierarchies of dominant masculinities, but was also used to undo them by boys who felt they needed to stand their ground against aggressors.

However more serious instances of violence did exist in many of their lives beyond the confines of the youth projects, clubs and spaces that I generally engaged with them in, if not directly then indirectly. To distinguish these from more micro-level inter-personal violence I term these violent events within this chapter. During the course of this research two boys I had worked with and who both feature here were murdered. One was stabbed in a confrontation with a group near the estate he lived on. The other was stabbed in broad daylight, after being identified and targeted. Another boy who I worked with was jailed for murder after participating in the shooting of another local teenager.

Although I do consider the relationship between mental health and violence directly in this thesis, mental health amongst men (and in relation to masculinities) bears a relationship to physical violence that is important to acknowledge (Gilligan 1996). By directly I mean with reference to the literature on mental health and the ways the bounded individual features as a unit of analysis. A critical engagement with this would consider the ways that psychologising perspectives have regularly looked to explain violence in rational terms and paid less attention to the social and related emotional aspects. Thus there is a risk in a focus on mental health, currently fashionable in public and political spheres, leading to diagnosing and pathologising individuals from very different circumstances and with different needs and problems.

The young man in the latter case was diagnosed with behavioural disorders and had conflictual relationships in education and family life for many years.⁴⁷ But he had also lived in a family environment where his

⁴⁷ How to approach these issues is something that this thesis considers in a broader sense in terms of emotional life and relational practice in youth work and with young men but developing this into more specific strategies and practices

father had been violent and had physically assaulted his mother, resulting in the young man stabbing him in the leg, a story his younger brother recounted to me. This begins a consideration in this chapter that the experience of violence is rarely confined to one event and is carried in the body as trauma (Das 2006). This then forms the focus of the argument in this chapter, to consider the way that violence is experienced by young men and practiced as doing gender, and thus how it shapes masculinities and emotional lives.

All of these events happened at different times and each in a different place, but the trauma from these events reverberated and was felt by many young people in the extended peer groups. This is to acknowledge the ways that such events are not solely about gender and also affect families, friends and people connected to those young men, whilst also retaining a focus on young masculinities and the relationship more widely between masculinity and violence. These events did happen between young men, but may have had much more complex contributing factors beyond inter-personal male-to-male relations and the practicing of masculinity. However as noted earlier in the thesis the youth projects I worked in were sometimes mixed, but invariably they were 'boys only' projects. Young men had requested this in some youth projects, and young men were the only ones on police target lists in others. In this way the interaction I observed in these spaces are used to develop my argument around the relationship between young men, masculinities and violence.

These events are not simply included here to sensationalise the narratives of the thesis or those around young men. The sudden nature of these events shows the ways that risk (of personal injury) coexists amidst the prevalence of threat, and also alongside a more romanticised ⁴⁸

around mental health and masculinities is an important area for practice and research.

⁴⁸ Placing the association to violence is hard and is something this chapter aims to do. I use the term romanticised here over other possibilities, for example glamourized or fictional, to enunciate an idea of an imagined relationship with violence, where one rises above it as embodied by the popular figure of the lone hero who overcomes almost impossible odds. This masculine imaginary is

relationship to violence within the everyday and in young men's wider psycho-social imaginaries. This is not to make a false correlation between serious physical violence on the one hand and simple bravado on the other, however it is to consider the relationship between the threat of violence and the enacting of gendered subjectivities, and how this sometimes results in tragic consequences. Similarly while these events do not define violence as a regular feature in young men's lives the relationship between young men and violence is recognised statistically worldwide (Barker 2005). Although actual outbreaks of violence beyond facing up to one another were on the whole rare and these fatal events were clearly the most serious cases, they were also not the only incidents of serious violence that were committed against or by young men I worked with.

In considering them as events this is not to say that they cannot be situated within wider emotional and personal histories and also wider social and cultural histories and structures. Serious violence is often described as cold-hearted, mindless returning us to the history of disembodiment and association of the male with the rational within western traditions. While I do not associate violence with 'the emotional' what I am interested in here is the emotional worlds of young men in relation to violence. I argue that violence is often a particular closing down of the self and look to show the ways this operates through locally situated practices of gender. From a consideration of these subjective processes we can also consider the ways that violence is embodied and is carried as emotional histories and how this relates to masculinities.

The chapter shows that violence in young men's lives caused them visible stress and pushed them to emotional states that they did not want to go to. The threat of violence can be seen creating gendered subjectivities that

defined by ideals of masculinity and one being able to 'oppose violence successfully', but takes place without having to consider the everyday and real presence of threat. I use *romanticised* because *glamorized* suggests a less fraught relationship, while the use of *fictional* might position subjectivity in a way that had little emotional connection. *Idealised* would also be effective in its more instrumental designation, but again removes the importance of the tension young men felt around engaging in violence.

are shaped in relation to the particular local context and wider institutional factors. The chapter concludes by asking about the way particular young men are framed as violent and how we might re-think approaches to work with violence in relation to young masculinities.

The pressure to act tough

The figure of problem 'youth' that I outlined in chapter one is a racialised, classed and gendered object. It is also one that is regularly associated with violence and as being violent. Government programmes like the Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme I worked on make this apparent problem and correlation clear. Similarly there are multiple reports that continue to be published that attempt to frame the exact problem and how it can be tackled (here are some examples: The Street Weapons Commission Report 2008, Squires et al.2009, House of Commons 2009, World Health Organisation 2010, Ministry of Justice 2011, Centre for Social Justice 2012). What is also apparent around this formulation are the behaviours attributed to 'youth', such as violence, are much wider phenomena; further examples that show this discursive regime are truancy as differentiated from absenteeism from work, or the linking of youth with football hooliganism when those charged with offences are almost always adults (Jefferies & Smith 1999). Violence might be a man's game, but not one that is limited by age, class or ethnicity.

So what is the relationship between young men, masculinities and violence within urban spaces? What I want to consider here are the ways that young men talked about, and engaged with one another around the subject of violence, the meanings it held and the way threats were present(ed), and the ways this was normalised and embodied within everyday interactions. In the last chapter we saw that humour and testing one another were practices of belonging, but that the competitive relationships often characterising young men's peer groups meant tempers often flared and emotions ran high. In juniors sessions some young men lost their cool over football matches and practiced standing up to one another until I separated them, and with me forming a bodily

division and the target out of reach they really went for it, straining to get past me. These moments showed young men act out particular gendered performances at a young age. Chu (2014) shows us that gender socialization teaches boys more aggressive ways of being and happens at the early age of four, towards considering the practices she observed as an emotional closing down.

Public Bus⁴⁹ / Tuesday evening boys session, Football cage, Southgrove

Returning from a football tournament I have taken them to I am sitting next to Aadan. The public bus is busy, so he is stuck next to me and we are talking about boys fighting. 'Do you fight at school?' I ask him. 'Every day', he responds blandly. 'Really?' I ask surprised. 'Of course', he says in response surprise. 'People are always starting on you so you have to. There's only one boy that doesn't fight and he gets picked on. We bully him'.

A week later when I arrive at the Southgrove a game of football is underway in the cage, the calls for pass accented by Aadan and Iman trading insults. Now thirteen and fourteen, I have known Aadan and his brother Iman for five years as part of the peer group that regularly attended the community centre and now the bus. Iman is much calmer these days where he used to argue with other boys a lot. Both boys are small for their age and having a big mouth can quickly get you into a confrontation. But Iman still cuts a staunch figure, reflected in his upright posture and dismissive hand gestures.

I always say hello and he nods back. "Why are you arguing?" 'He's annoying, Brian. Everyday I live with him, you don't know what its like', Iman tells me. They continue to trade insults and when the game ends Aadan sits annoyed on the side-line, having lost. Iman walks over and side-foots him in the face. I see it, it is little more than a tap, definitely a violation but not painful. Iman is trying to

⁴⁹ Travelling back from a football tournament I had taken some boys to.

goad him and to openly disrespect him in front of everyone else. Aadan's reaction is symptomatic of how violation must be managed within the group through the ways that young men try to present hardened bodies, and the pressure this exerts on them. He looks down, staring at the floor with widened eyes and repeats to himself 'Kick me in the face yeah. Kick me in the face yeah', shaking his head. Looking up aghast towards Iman who has moved away he shouts, 'Kick me in the face yeah, you fuckin asshole'. Young men called this moment 'switching', when you lose your temper and become serious, beyond banter and suggestive of violence.

Across the concrete pitch, Matthew, a much bigger boy but the same age as Aadan, is laughing. The group know Aadan has taken the bait and is wound up, it is a game they know well and although it never felt good to be in that situation, it felt good to not be in it. Aadan could not look more serious: he is enraged. His voice gets louder. 'Fuck you, you fat shit', he shouts at Matthew. 'You fuckin' fat shit, go an' eat some more'. Screaming in his anger he is overcome with the tension that has been building in him in front of the whole group and the tears come. He shrieks through them, abusing Matthew again. I am facing Aadan but when I turn around I see Matthew storming towards him, twice his size. I move Aadan away and another worker intercepts Matthew who makes half hearted attempts to continue his progress while maintaining his screwface.⁵⁰ We break it up, but Aadan has switched, albeit posing no threat to anyone else. Swearing, he bobs his head around me, volleying more abuse. Matthew is also committed in front of the group now and he strains to continue his march.

We move them in different directions and I speak with Aadan but cannot calm him down, he refuses to hear, repeating himself again and again, so I let a friend shepherd him out of the cage for a few minutes. As the confrontation with Mathew and Aadan slowly cools

⁵⁰ Meaning adopting a displeased look on your face, so literally tightening up your facial features in displeasure.

down, I returned and stood on the side-line with Dhven. Friends with Aadan he attends regularly and always joins in football games and more competitive games of Fifa on the Playstation. While he is very competitive in these games, he treats others with respect and is always polite. 'Why are there always fights over football' I question, posing it as an observation with my tone of voice. Dhven, usually happy to talk, looks at me slightly uncertainly with a look that says, 'Why are you trying to blow my cover'? With a quick and quiet, 'Dunno', he looks straight ahead.

Soon Madu arrives, bopping in as he does and this time repeating, 'You know me. You know me.' He catches by the lamppost on the cage fencing and as Aadan continues to fire verbal insults at Iman during the re-started game, he laughs loudly. 'You're gaaaassed',⁵¹ he says of Aadan for everyone to hear, mocking his attempt at toughness.

Madu saw Aadan as weak for several reasons. He was scrawny and not able to back himself up against Matthew who was much bigger, so he was all talk – gassed. He did not cut the figure of a 'bad-boy' or 'G'. Madu on the other hand could position himself as a bad-boy within his group, he was strong and could fight. To Madu, Aadan is not authentic as a body, but the embodied reaction by both he and Matthew clearly are authentic in the affects they felt and what they felt compelled to do. What became clear to me and I have shown across the previous chapters was that maintaining respect for yourself in the presence of your peers was important for young men so as to maintain future safety. As Victor said to me, 'It's not about the fight with you or him, it's about who sees and who is there, who will want to fight me next'. Standing up for yourself in the moment was about setting out *who* you were, for everyone to see. In this

⁵¹ Someone was 'gassed' or 'gassed up' when they were hyped up directly by others or through being in a group situation and as a result had an inflated view of themselves in the situation.

way Keon, as prominent within a dominant⁵² peer group on the estate in this period, never found himself in physical altercations as far as I knew and had observed. Challenges were made, but as we will see he could manage them through symbolic gestures, towards the maintenance of his mythical position as strong, as associated with his social position and the related bodily traits of accepted masculinity. But in maintaining this position, he was particularly adept at navigating and managing the emotional economy that mediated inter-personal interaction and confrontation so that his mythical strength and status maintained his position as someone you wouldn't want to fight.

Tuesday evening boys session, Organisation B Youth Bus, Southgrove

Sitting upstairs on the bus one day, five years after his uncertainty in finding a space to be in the community centre,⁵³ Lamar exclaimed, 'I'm the strongest here', then qualified himself, suddenly aware of how many of us were present. 'There's only two stronger'. 'Who's that'? Winston asked, intrigued. 'Hasaan, and Keon', Lamar replied, earnestly for all to hear, (re)creating the order, giving some respect but by doing this placing himself firmly within it, associated with these two. This is Lamar's order, the way he sees things or wants things to be. By keeping Keon at the top of his projected order Lamar gets himself close to the top, but also cements his position as a close friend of Keon. "Why'd you say that"? Winston pushes it, 'They're not stronger than you'. 'They're faster'. Lamar qualifies. 'One thing I know is that Keon got a good bang doe 'cos I felt it more than a couple a times', Winston says, helping to qualify Lamar's position for him.

Keon, invisible to those in the conversation behind the thin partition separating sections of the bus' top deck, now enters. He has heard all of this. It seemed likely Lamar knew he could as well. He comes

⁵² Dominant here means that within the young people who attended this youth provision Keon's group were older and had some status, partly through myth and threat, amongst the other young people.

⁵³ See Chapter three.

running in, arm raised and clenched fist in the air and makes out to land a wild haymaker punch on Winston. Stopping a few inches short of his face he sits down and smiles.

Personally Keon was worried about his small size as he confided to Winston and I one day in a private context, telling us he wouldn't go training at the gym until he was older as he didn't want to stunt his growth. But he knew that for now, with stronger boys around him, all he really had to do was cock an arm once in a while and within this context he would remain unchallenged in physical battles. When I asked him in an interview about his life beyond the estate and whether the idea of postcodes and the associated territoriality meant anything to him he replied, 'Not really, you know someone who knows someone and your crews meet up, then you can go to a party and generally its cool'. Playing it cool may have been one of his strengths, but it was also his emotional intelligence that allowed him to navigate conflict, the risks of altercations and the various gendered games and hierarchies that existed.

These ritualized performances by young men can, on one hand be seen in a similar way to the practice of banter as testing one another. Physical conflict between young men was negotiated through a spectrum of relational factors; whom you were arguing with, were you connected by a mutual friend, who else was watching. It became clear to me that quite often the parameters were not likely to end in physical confrontation, or at least young men would rather they didn't. But even if we see them as symbolic shows of an already acknowledged hierarchy they required very emotive and embodied engagement. The emotional fallout of bringing across that you were serious in the face of goading and the possibility of fighting with many people watching, was regularly unsettling for young men to the point that they could not get themselves back together and would leave the context, often shouting back as they did, unable to contain the violation they felt. The fear of violence was much greater than the desire to engage in it, yet this would not be acknowledged openly, even if it were sometimes obvious. In this way these moments were about more than respect, they showed that young men did not enjoy this ritual and that acting tough had embodied affects, yet most of them felt it was necessary.

Navigating ethical and moral choices

Across the youth projects I worked in, young men tried to show, or had to deal with the effects of the prominence of a tough masculinity that was willing to defend itself. Following this, and as a result of many conversations, interviews, and workshops with young men, and an understanding through my personal experience of navigating growing up in South London, I had an awareness of the relevance of considering violence – specifically peer to peer violence – for young men.

So while at times the uncertainty and risk of violent interactions was mediated through the codes of morality within localised or close knit peer groups or contexts, these were localised examples of wider contexts that young men had to navigate that were more unknown spaces. In this way it was not always morals that were the basis for ethical action. Wider ethical ideals might be easier to maintain in local spaces. The awareness of threat that young men carried towards facing the possibility of violence meant one had to consider their actions in that immediate context.

Within Aadan's peer groups he had an awareness of trust and who he was dealing with. Aadan knew that he was situated in a hierarchical idea of physicality as Madu's reaction showed, but also that he was amongst friends and peers, in a space he belonged in, and in this way he could situate himself within a more widely established ethical code. There is the consideration that Aadan chose to position himself within the peer groups he did, avoiding the threat and risk of more serious violence but this could also be seen as an ethical and moral position. Whereas Keon associated in peer groups where risk was more prominent, he navigated this to seemingly stay unexposed with ultimately similar results to Aadan. Keon's older brothers were in prison for what he explained as, 'Serious shit'. His father was not around and he never spoke of him but spoke about his mother with affection. He felt responsible for how he going to turn out with respect to her efforts towards him and their shared history, telling me he didn't want to end up in prison like them. Again this may have ultimately been an ethical choice.

Building trust with young men to a certain level where they felt able to behave and transgress the rules around you, but would also stop doing this if you asked did not always take a long time. However developing this trust to the point that we would both consider the relationship we held as a series of recent and remembered encounters took longer. For young men to reflect on who I was and what I might do meant they had to know me reasonably well, but it also meant they had to trust me enough to consider a situation relationally, and their actions within the context of others.

Nico, a youth work colleague, is talking with two young men, Tunde and Jerome. I sit down in the empty Playstation zone with them and join in. We have a discussion around what it means to be a man. 'It means protecting girls', Jerome said. 'Not hitting girls', advanced Tunde. Jerome continued to explain that being a man meant not getting picked on. 'Not being moist, not getting shit, otherwise you'll get picked on by olders'. Nico asks how old they are, knowing them less well than I do. 'Twelve', Jerome released his words slowly saying, 'I'm... thirteen... in.... six... days'. Staring out the window he turned and said to me, seriously and deadpan. 'I need to fuck some twelve year old up in the next six days'. When I asked why he said because it would be bullying unless they were the same age.

There is a particular idea here that being a man means you cannot just take infractions or perceived violations to the public presentation of self, and the practice becomes to pass it on to someone else. We can think about this by reflecting back on the group dynamics in chapter three and the ways people were excluded from friendship groups and also chapter five in the way banter circulated around groups.

But there were particular ethics around who you could fight with, here Jerome suggesting that he could not fight anyone younger as it would reflect badly on him. It is important to note this was framed through an institutional lens, which due to continued disruptiveness at school and multiple meetings of professionals involved with him which I attended, had

come to regulate and define his (oppositional) perspective on who he was in the world. He had been placed in a PRU that was attended by older boys due to his disruptiveness at the previous institution for his own age group. In this way he developed a particular perspective as the youngest pupil at his institution. The older boys there gave him liberty as a younger. He was off limits as a target and should be looked after, but in this way I know from talking with him that Jerome found a new space in which he felt he was acknowledged in a way he had been looking for, and thus found value in the behaviours that had got him there.

When I first met Jerome aged eight he had cut a distant at times forlorn figure; he would drag his feet and often showed physical signs of having been fighting. He had several close friends who I also developed good relationships with and they were often worried about him, but shook their heads as if there was little you could do. Through the ages of nine to twelve he was tested for various attention and behavioural disorders, which all returned negative diagnoses. We built a relationship quickly, he always came to say hello to me and as a youth worker I reciprocated. He seemed to value that I would specifically notice him and he would often accompany or follow me to the local supermarket. Towards the end of this research the idea of a mentor was considered as an option to help with Jerome's increasingly difficult behaviour. He was twelve and I had known him for almost five years and having refused the idea initially, he reluctantly accepted when I was suggested. In our first meeting we discussed why we were meeting. I asked what was positive about the idea of us meeting. Jerome told me I had never shouted at him. 'Never made me feel like shit', he concluded. I consider this relationship more in the final empirical chapter.

Continuing the conversation Nico questioned Jerome on his need to fight reminding him it would still be bullying regardless of age, 'They don't have to be younger'. Jerome replied, 'No, if you're thirteen and they're twelve, you're an older'. Nico asked Jerome again, 'Is that being a man'? 'Nooooo, but you can do it, you can just do it in the same age group and that's it', he replied. 'Do you think Brian

would do that'? Nico asked. "Yeah Brian wouldn't just let them bully him, what, you think Brian's gonna let them do that? Innit Brian'? He said looking at me. I was a little lost for words here, but replied 'As you know me, the way I've been for five years and how I am and behave, what do you think I would do'?

Reflecting then on my own experience I considered the relationships I had tried to build, the consideration of how I came across, and the place of violence within the young men's lives across the places I had worked in. I wondered how I had come across as a youth worker and as a possible role model, and how perhaps we had built relationships across differences but also through the shared experiences we did have around masculinities and growing up. Perhaps I had shown a lot less of myself than I thought in my own attempts to build trust and belong.

The conversation ended with Tunde explaining that I was questioning the need to fight because I was older. 'You're an adult, we are youngsters. It doesn't happen to you'. The difference the young men articulated was that these types of relations happened a lot to them as part of being young and it would stop once they reached eighteen, but for now it was going to be part of their life. 'Everyone's a younger fam. I'm a younger, he's a younger, Brian's a younger. If you're a younger then you're a send out', Jerome said. 'You're a send out', he repeated, lingering on the words, and getting a feeling for saying it like he meant it. 'Otherwise you're a wasteman, you're weak, you have to or you get bullied, you get picked on, you have to fight or they keep coming at you. I used to get picked on, now I don't'.

'So you can't not fight'? I questioned. Turning to Tunde, Jerome looked for confirmation, 'You would fight'. 'No. Yeah', Tunde paused, 'I mean I would yeah'. Tunde was uncertain which the right choice was to make, knowing that he was navigating different ethical codes in terms of what he thought was right and what would be the right thing for him to do, for him to say here. But he WAS quite definite about his final choice, saying the words slowly, as

young men would when they were trying to come to terms with new and difficult feelings, and here what seemed to feel almost like a responsibility.

This ethnographic excerpt also serves to draw a divide between the different associations young men made with different levels of violence, reflecting back on Tunde and Jerome, Aadan (who was part of their wider peer group) and Keon. Violence operated on the bodies of young men through threat and through the ways they tried to repel fear and show that they were not weak. But the relationship to violence was also embodied in much deeper ways through emotional histories. Keon at once navigated its presence but never showed a willingness to use violence; he wanted to separate himself from doing the wrong thing in the context of his familial situation and responsibility to his mother.

A few months before his thirteenth birthday and the scene I have recounted here, I met Jerome for a one-to-one meeting. He told me excitedly that his father was buying him a mini motorbike and showed me pictures on his phone. He had spoken about him a few times before and about how he visited him outside London. Jerome's mother told me later that his father was embarrassed about his son's misbehaviour in school and now never turned up to meetings to discuss his progress. Two weeks later we met again and I asked him, 'How was your birthday, did you get the bike'? I immediately regretted it, his unspoken reaction was instant in the way his body suddenly lost its fluidity and he stopped still. We walked and he stared straight ahead, and just said quietly, 'He said I couldn't have it'.

Whatever the reason this may have been the wisest choice; I felt a mini motorbike would have quite likely resulted in trouble or an accident in Jerome's hands, he always looked to prove himself amongst his peers and found it hard to set himself limits. Yet other young men had them on the estate and here Jerome viewed his relationship with his father through this. He was closed that afternoon, not talking, and it reminded me of one of the first times I met him aged eight, playing football he was violently

knocked off the ball by an older boy and lay face down, remaining on the floor. I walked over and he lay there tensing his body and shaking his head angrily. I offered to help him up and he suddenly bounced up himself. 'I'm fine', he said and quickly moved off. Jerome's association with being tough and violence always existed in relation to other men, and as an emotional response to masculinity. He always wanted to engage with older people, and be older himself, but the relationships he did have with older men were largely based on institutionally defined 'interventions' or were, as he termed with, 'Wastemen who don't do shit'. His ethical perspective changed based on the moral choices he was making in order to find his way.

Within youth work provisions to support young men like Jerome and Tunde and their negotiation of ethical choices there were sessions, video workshops, and discussions around (not) becoming involved in violent events. On the bus I sat with a group of young men aged between nine and twelve and watched "Choose a Different Ending", an interactive story-video where the first choice is whether to carry a knife after hearing a friend has been stabbed. "Yes" or "No", both result in further choices regarding certain contexts, including holding a knife, going to a party or a friends house, joining a fight. Each choice can change the narrative and engages with a range of peer pressures young men face in peer settings.⁵⁴ Asim suggests to the other young people present, "Take the knife", at the first available choice, smiling as he does. He is acting up to the crowd. Tre who is controlling the cursor chooses the opposite and we continue. A young man runs out of an alley in the video and asks the viewer to carry his knife for him. Asim says again, 'Take it, taaaaake it'. Again Tre does not, but shortly a choice to become involved with a group of friends in a large fight has to be made. On the behest of Asim, Tre makes the choice to fight.

Everyone here knows the purpose of the interactive video and what he should choose. But most of them want to, to see what happens. For some young men the pressures around experiencing as a way of knowing

⁵⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/user/adifferentending>

become more important than ideas of ethics and morality. As they discuss why they should or should not fight and Asim continues to say, 'We shoulda taken the knife', I wonder⁵⁵ how much of this is an exploratory transgressing of boundaries, and how much can we understand from the specific context of the video-story? What might the difference or similarities be between the choice of taking the knife here, and defending oneself from verbal, mental, emotional attack towards thinking about the process and emotional engagement with violence?

What is worth engaging with and thinking through here rather than the idea of the 'choice' of violence, is what the space of encountering violence is for boys at particular ages. The identification with violence is often considered in terms of 'choice'. Much is made of choices in youth work policy and practice, and similarly 'character policies' work along this line. I want to make clear that the ways choices are considered in youth work practice are often significantly different, compared with the ways they are framed in policy and expected as practice. Youth work practitioners more often understand the particularities of place and situational and relational aspects of specific contexts. Policy more often seems to develop from individualising narratives as we see in austerity and neoliberal discourses. Regarding this, I have shown how these discourses work to group these individualised characteristics as a 'racialised body' of an undeserving underclass within which gangs are a feature. This thesis has worked to critique this object of the gang and the way it is formulated in line with wider discourses around youth, 'race' and class and of course gender. But beyond discourse there is also a way of considering the gang, and urban fears as part of the urban imaginary. Thus I consider the gang as an example that is in part brought to life and sustained through of wider structures of feeling (beyond discursive mechanisms), through a distancing, through a lack of trust. It can be thought of as one specific example of how public emotions exist (Seidler 2007b) in this case through the fear of the other, the fear of urban life (within this imaginary the 'unwanted' is a necessary component to situate and contemplate the joys

⁵⁵ A lot was here in this moment and from experience I knew that to question Asim about why he might take it would invoke his moral judgement via the power relationship between us.

of urban life, to be grateful for what one has, and rightfully deserves). In this way we can consider emotional life in a wider sense, operating across bodies, but also as both constituting and held in individual bodies.

For young men, like Jerome this may result in them feeling alone and with little support. In this setting having to defend yourself might be important, and there are sets of morals where carrying a knife might actually help one perform certain moral duties for those around you, whilst still remaining in itself immoral for the carrier. Jerome had mentioned to me that carrying a knife⁵⁶ was something that made him feel better, 'I'm not a confident person without my shank'. How much of this is performance as with Asim asking us to take the knife is hard to say, yet beyond the languages of discourse and performance there is here a questioning of what to do, and an engagement with both sides of possibility. In this way the violence young men feel proximal to, and feel affected by, can make tackling this violence through engaging with it acceptable to them as a moral strategy in helping to protect themselves, their friends and their own feelings of self-worth.

Performing and embodying threat

There is research that considers the pressures to act tough on young men in urban environments characterised by poverty and the ways this can affect their subjective outlook through speech (Parkes et al. 2013). But this ends at the level of how discourse is related to speech. As we saw in the methods and throughout the thesis there are levels of experience that are particularly relevant in this context around masculinities, emotions, trust and here violence and threat, that need to be considered beyond the performances of bravado and proving knowledge that I have shown young men engaged in.

⁵⁶ Although in this moment I questioned him more on this and he went on to deny it. This was something I discussed with the manager of the service and my concern over his identification with as he put it "being a badman" meant he received extra support.

I want to consider this in terms of young men's emotional life and how this might be held in young men's bodies, how we might consider associations with violence alongside both emotional histories and particular masculinities. Keon felt he had a history through which he could identify with aspects of road life and identity, but less so directly with violence. Whereas other young men I worked with found an association with violence through the way their experiences had shaped their bodies. There is also a notion around gangs that they operate as spaces of belonging, as a family, with a set of peer group rules that are perhaps similar to Aadan's group, but that include violence to others as potentially necessary or indeed as central to their identity. This suggests a different type of relationality within these groups.

Amongst the group I work with in Denhill, Joel is a dominant figure. His peer group situate themselves within a larger group of young men, and self-identify as affiliated to a gang. A relatively large part of their gang identity, both self and externally imposed, is based on conflict with another group. There is an older history of violence and a murder between the two groups that pre-dates both the time I worked with them and those of Joel's peers personal experiences. When I worked with Joel he was polite, and much more open than many young men I had worked with. He was popular and the way he came across it was easy to see why he was well liked. In a similar way to Keon he was adept at managing himself in a group, confident, likeable and seeming older than his fifteen years. Talking to me as a 'worker' he was aware that I had responsibilities to report any clear information regarding criminal activities, and my role was not to question him directly on instead to engage him in positive activities that would act as a deterrent. As such we spoke a lot about what could be considered normal things, everyday life, family, but he was also articulate about his feelings and hopes and fears in relation to the situations he faced and the way that violence was present in his life. He had recently been expelled for carrying a knife and been placed at home by education services instead of attending a PRU due to the possibility of conflict with other pupils attending there.

EGYV music studio session, Denhill youth centre

Joel arrives at the music studio with another young man we met previously. They discuss last weeks session. Jordan recites some the lyrics he has written, 'Don't talk about the life that you don't live, and don't talk about the food⁵⁷ that you don't give'. He says it slowly, trying to fill out the sound of his voice and put real meaning, put himself into it. He is trying hard to be the right person to say it. 'I think you've got ADHD, man can't stay quiet', Sean says to Jordan 'I'm calm,⁵⁸ I'm calm', Jordan replies. Making money from illegal drug sales and similarly being able and importantly ready to use violence to defend any incursion is a recurring theme across road, trap, UK rap and Drill and some grime music. Many of the young men I worked with in studio sessions would come with bars around these topics and I was required to question them on the suitability of these.⁵⁹

They're practising their bars⁶⁰ and Joel raps suggesting how a rival will get attacked. 'OOOHHH', they say. I bring up the lyrics thing, 'Remember what we talked about last week, this isn't a gang thing, this session'. 'That's going in, I don't care, that's what I got this week', Joel says and starts getting abusive. He abuses me, somewhat jokingly but testing the water. Sean checks him, 'You're movin' weird fam', after he abuses me, appearing visibly surprised at Joel's behaviour to me, I assume given the things I have tried to do for them in the last few months (look for jobs, provide access to sessions) and the relationship we have had.

In these moments I did not feel physically threatened and chose to take a more passive response to young men's behaviour as Whittington (2006) does. I felt there was often a tension here in terms of the requirements of

⁵⁷ Drugs.

⁵⁸ Relaxed.

⁵⁹ I was required on the EGYV programme to question gang related lyrics and make it clear this could not be recorded in these sessions.

⁶⁰ Lyrics.

targeted work⁶¹, and achieving a target, where Whittington's work is in a more directly therapeutic setting. However I also felt that young men talking about how they felt was an important part of challenging their behaviour so I often acted unfazed by his behaviour, and would continue talking towards keeping the spaces of communication open.

'You don't really sound good', I tell Joel. 'Don't care', he says. Sean looks at him perplexed. Tayo, the other youth worker, had previously left the studio and Joel suddenly focused on him, 'Fuck that guy', he says, 'Where is he?' 'He was ready', I say, 'You weren't'. 'He's a prick', Joel says, 'He's shit'. 'He's here so you can record, you need to be more respectful', I respond. Joel drowns me out with a loud baby voice, "Nah, nah, naaaah", to show that he can exercise not listening. It's a projection of how he is feeling, breaking boundaries. Recently excluded from school, the everyday structure gone, he's at home and starting to lose the boundaries he adhered to previously.

The atmosphere in such group contexts and particularly in closed spaces was often affective. As the professional presence responsible for behaviour I may have felt a tension more than others, however the interactions between peers often operated to generate a hype between two or several young men. Jordan felt more comfortable in my presence having attended for the first time the previous week and he also seemed hyped up to be with the current group as opposed to the group who had attended with him previously (chapter three). He talked loudly about doing weights, his emerging chest, and his newfound muscle. Outside the studio, he and Joel had talked about sparring each other as a way of enacting a physical test between them. "Why don't you hug him"? I had said to Jordan regarding Joel in a response that was designed to question their propensity to verbally challenge each other when it seemed to me that they were interacting as friends, only through a

⁶¹ Targeted work is as much about targeting a young person as providing an intervention and achieving a target.

language of masculine bravado. Sensing a fading interest in himself, Jordan returned to repeating his lyrics over and over. The other boys looked up, “I told you ADHD fam”! Sean repeated, which was a continually popular diagnosis offered for young men at this age who were struggling in school or showed signs of transgressive behaviours.

Joel and Jordan continue their banter, with Joel saying Jordan is hyped, Jordan responds with an insult to Joel, who turns and opens his chest and arms suggesting they make it physical. Jordan is on his feet now, chest to chest with Joel, continuing their verbal sparring match. They are not challenging each other, but are, in a way practising, learning and configuring a relationship and set of relations. It ends with a sudden burst of short laughter from Jordan and an embrace of Joel before Jordan sits down. Ironically the very action I had suggested. But this interaction serves to hype Joel up further, reminding me that when he first came up the stairs and saw me waiting outside the studio he had responded, “Ah fuck this, Tayo the prick, he’s long, I’m goin’ to play ping pong”. Today’s behaviour isn’t just a result of the immediate affective feelings in the room, but of Joel’s wider emotional states at the time.

Joel is up first, he records his first bars and can’t get through it without starting to laugh and losing his flow. He has lost all caring really compared with how he was when I met him six months ago. He records it in several short takes, does his ad libs and stabs,⁶² adding in, ‘Faggot’, a few gunshot sounds and a few other violently asserted punctuations. We listen back to it; it’s all about violence and gangs.

The whole situation feels like it has run away from me, spiralled, with all of us locked into this intense feeling in the room. Tayo never says anything and just looks more and more uncomfortable and

⁶² Stabs reinforce certain lyrics whereas ad-libs act as a response to the lyrics. They are recorded after the lyrics and act as aural punctuation.

annoyed. I question Joel about his lyrics as we are listening back to it and he reacts angrily, telling me, 'Blah, blah, blah'. Dexter has previously entered the room quietly. His usual loud controlling presence is often calming on the younger ones, who don't want to act stupid or get caught out. Tayo has had enough, 'This is boring. It's the same every week, your lyrics aren't new'. When Tayo says this, Joel flips at him and starts shouting. 'You don't say shit when I see you on road, when I see you down there, here, nothing'.

I decide to physically remove him from the room, using my body to walk him backwards without putting my hands on him. Dexter looks on surprised, but unfazed. Joel was holding all this in today, and prior to today, judging on how he arrived with this becoming the context for him to release it, spurred on by the feeling he has in being amongst his peers.

There was a tension here between Tayo and his attitude to these young men and my take on it. I wanted to let the gang narratives thing play out a little, to work on an idea of emotions. Tayo had no time for this and wasn't keen to engage with people who were causing trouble if not in, then proximally, to his everyday life. But there is a reading of Joel being told, "No", by Tayo and me, where the pressures he does feel are revealed and in the way that Lee (2009) shows that for young men being cut off "in the cipher" when rapping is comparable and related to feeling cut off and overlooked in other parts of everyday life.

Outside he paces and looks at me, 'I won't run. They know I won't run. It will happen, I'm on road and two cabs pull up and it's all like – Yeah what's goin on J, and I'm like oh you got me, duh, duh, duh⁶³ – and then that's me. I try and leave it then I get some little yute at school saying – yeah, he's here, I'm calling them up on you – and he's calling them'. I respond, 'So what? He's winding you up'. 'How do I know he says? It happens like... boom, you're dead'.

⁶³ Bullet sounds.

I try to imagine this, him finishing the day here or at school, leaving, thinking he might get jumped. The streets become a gauntlet and walking home a danger. Here we can see the way that the threat of violence operated in young men's emotional lives where some considered life and death as options, in contrast to the previous context where the limits were more established, at the level of inter-personal or group physical conflict.

Jerome continues, 'I have to be ready. I walk where there are lots of cars parked'. I consider what he is saying, essentially preparing his body as both lookout but also blending it with larger objects to use them as shields. He stops here, perhaps seeing my concern and also realising that he has opened himself up and tended to downplay the gang talk with me at other times. 'Look what it is right now, we got beef. It's beef, we're beefing, and when the beefing dies down, then we'll be ok. This is all over nothing maybe, maybe it is, but now they've done this, and he's said this, and nah, nah, nah, all a dem's onto me, and I can't let that go. So it just keeps going like you don't know why but they won't shut up sayin my name. Still after I been good. What you told me to do – be good – I done what you said, stay low, but they sayin my name, and they think I'm gonna take that'?

Joel was worried about his immediate safety, but his fears also extended to the options he had in his life. He talked to me about his opportunities and felt frustrated as we will see in the next chapter, but he was unwilling or unable to separate himself from the close ties he had with his friends and wider peers that were currently focused on performing a road identity (Gunter 2010). Within this peer group he was respected and he clearly enjoyed that, however the pressures it was placing on him personally and within his family life were starting to show and he was starting to embody his performances (Butler 1993).

Embodied histories

One of the arguments I have tried to make in this chapter is that when we consider violence in the context of young men and peer-to-peer violence, it is important to think beyond the event and the immediate characteristics that might be used to define what happened. This is not a legal argument, but does make a point regarding the way violence is situated and discussed, important in everyday life and more specifically violence prevention strategies. Towards this I am arguing that violence has prevalence in many young men's lives and is, for some, intimately tied to notions of masculinity. This can vary with cultural context, but the navigation of violence for young men is a feature of many global contexts (Barker 2005). One of the features of research on urban contexts is the super-diversity of urban populations bringing global belongings and histories into local spaces. This next section considers the relevance of this in terms of the context of young men, violence and urban life and pressures.

At an early stage of my research I attended a summer camp for young men from different the different areas in London that Organisation B ended. I went with young men from the Southgrove, and on the minibus there got talking to a young man, Ahmad, from another. During the first two days of the camp we built a good relationship in a similar way that I had with Jerome. We talked about school and life a little, and found ourselves on the same team at football, working as a duo to try to win a hotly contested but very humorous match.

One evening an altercation occurred between a young man from the estate I worked on and this young man I had met. It was over nothing serious, and there were no specific or previous rivalries between them. It could be framed that it was more over belonging. Ryan was from the Southgrove, from a well known family on the estate and popular. He was always there with good banter when I worked there. The boys had been messing about on the way back from an activity and when the minibus had parked, and they exited the confined space of the minibus it boiled over.

Ahmad confronted Ryan, they tussled a little, and Ahmad pinned Ryan down and hurt him. I was called in to help with the situation after the event; Ahmad had refused to speak unless I was there. I was surprised, and at this point had not focused my research on trust or considered our relationship much with a lot of other young people there. We spoke about the event, and agreed on an apology, which upon its sincere delivery, Ryan begrudgingly accepted. Ahmad sat with me afterwards and began to talk to me. He was twelve and his parents were from Sierra Leone, where he had he had spent some time. We were cut short as a group discussion began around experiences of violence. One young man openly spoke to the group about his experience of running into a group of young men he didn't know, being robbed and stabbed. Ahmad spoke to me quietly afterwards that he had experienced similar things a lot growing up, fighting with knives and the ways that, in these moments as a young man, he had often thought he was about to die. A few months later I began working on the estate he lived on. 'Where have you been?' he asked smiling, and it was a touching moment that everyone who works with young people will have experienced.

Unfortunately this particular story has a tragic ending; I worked on that project for a year, and two years after I stopped working those sessions, opened a free newspaper in London to see his face. He had been stabbed to death in an argument with some other boys near to where he lived. It was a horrible moment as I remembered his energy and the forthrightness of his personality that gave you a feeling of trust. I knew from working with him he was also used to standing his ground and perhaps had strong views about what he would accept from others in terms of personal transgression and standing his ground. This has helped me to think about the ways that young men navigate violence, and to different degrees embody it, but also the ways that different cultural backgrounds and emotional experiences are carried within bodies.

The consideration of violence amongst young men must be one that considers the violence young men face, and the ways these manifest in local contexts, where socio-economic characteristics increase the risks of

inter-personal violence, and give rise to particular gendered practices that are at once locally situated whilst globally inflected; a study of working class young men in London is suddenly global, incorporating histories of sometimes unwanted, migrations, displacement, and war. Hedges (2002) provides an interesting discussion around the way war gives meaning to masculinities and the seductive nature of it across society. This means a focus on the wider relationships between masculinities and violence within and across cultural contexts. If we are to work with young men around the way violence comes to be associated with particular masculinities then paying attention to these complex cultural interconnections are crucial alongside a focus on young men and their emotional lives.

Group bodies, riots, emotions and violence

The 2011 riots can be seen to punctuate this research. They occurred during it and became the moment increasingly surveillance based, punitively focused interventionist youth services were rolled out that focused on undesirables ('gangs'). But rather than the populist explanations that I considered in the introduction that gained centre stage via media reporting, more nuanced discussion around the 2011 riots focused on social context and the relevance of histories to these contexts. How do we consider the riots then and what is their relevance to a discussion on young masculinities and violence?

The geographical locations the riots took place in – largely working class areas some where rioting had occurred in previous times including Brixton and Tottenham can help us to think of the ways that histories of previous riots linger and the injustices that were felt then are carried, within communities and within individual lives. But in 2011 the contexts were many, with disturbances occurring in several places with no previous histories of rioting.

Thus in individual places the riots saw a body of people, across ages, across identities, almost certainly less across classes, come together in mass, as one, as a crowd (Canetti 1981: 16) but also I would also argue in

the sense of a structure of feeling (Williams 1977: 128). Historically rooted through particular contexts, this was also a wider expression of contemporary feeling: at once political whilst perhaps simultaneously nihilist, the appropriation of what we might consider essential goods denied to some through poverty, whilst simultaneously the theft of property through opportunism fuelled by narcissistic cultures of greed. It was perhaps all of these things together as a contemporary manifestation of all that is carried and experienced, an outpouring of uncertainty and latent resentment. I want to be clear that I do not associate the riots directly with young men, instead I position them as occurring within the urban contexts young men in this research lived in and as a manifestation and expression of feeling resulting from histories of domination, inequality and repression.

What I am arguing then is that within particular areas (including those in this research) that are defined by class inequalities and often in London by super-diversity, there is a coming together of multiple histories often in difficult everyday circumstances. If we acknowledge that histories are embodied across generations and through immediate family ties (Real 1997) but also through more contemporary familial and kinship affiliations⁶⁴ and consider the riots through this, we can also consider the relevance of these embodied histories within individual lives. Returning to chapter four we saw how young men created identities based on their own heritages but also those of friends and the local areas they lived in, and these enabled both belonging but also an oppositional stance to various forces of oppression.

Amongst many young men there was a feeling that the attitude at the top of society is about taking what you can get. Without always knowing the detailed circumstances, they considered the global financial crisis and the resulting charade of austerity politics and cuts to services including health-

⁶⁴ Consider the prevalence of terms of respect and association between young people today – Blood, Fam, Cuz. Many young men I worked with called others ‘my cousin’ when they were not actually related in terms of the predominant western understanding of family. But importantly familial ties were often complex extending beyond the middle class nuclear family. Further belongings meant that notions of kinship were more detailed than this thesis has been able to properly acknowledge as chapter four notes.

care provisions, youth services and particularly EMA, as unfair.⁶⁵ But also the phone-hacking scandal and scandals over MP's expenses, the raising of university fees and protests over several wars that Britain has involved itself in. These were all issues that were raised in different contexts by young people I worked with that they were aware of. Young men regularly discussed conspiracy theories and ideas of the way the 'Illuminati' controlled hip-hop and other global businesses and politics. As we will see in the next chapter young men took on these ideas of what it takes to survive and be successful in different ways, but not all young people suggested they felt directly disenfranchised, and many young men had a range of aspirational identities and hopes for the future.

But many young people were fully aware of the challenges they faced in terms of securing a future in an unequal society. Many young people form part of a global labour force that Standing (2009) calls "the precariat". This is defined by a precarious existence working in temporary jobs often doing periods of short-time labour. In this way there is little sense of developing a career because young people do not have secure social or economic identities in occupational terms. "The precariat knows there is no shadow of the future, as there is no future in what they are doing. To be 'out tomorrow' would come as no surprise, and to leave might not be bad..." (Standing 2009: 12).

Before the riots occurred a young man was interviewed by the Guardian around cuts to youth projects and EMA; speaking thoughtfully and about the feeling in the area he lived in he was unsure how many young people felt: "there'll be riots" was his fear around the lack of opportunities on offer (Guardian 2011b).

Returning back to the introduction I considered how the riots were framed and that 're-framings' had extended them in time beyond simple events (Millington 2016). The *Riots Reframed* documentary (Voiceover Productions 2013) was made by Fahim Alam, in part after he was arrested

⁶⁵ See also Guardian (2010) for the ways young people felt widely let down over the withdrawal of support for their educations.

during the riots and charged with public order offences while on the way to visit his Grandmother. Studying at the London School of Economics and Political Science at the time he decided to use the documentary as a direct way of taking people's stories into the public realm arranging screenings across cities in the UK, at universities, youth clubs and community centres. This history and its telling of the riots extends them in time, but also shows a carrying of Alam's and others histories, from before and after the riots. Through this we can also think about the embodiment of uncertainty over belongings, around class, 'race', and more global identifications and dislocations in young men's lives, in relation to the moments of the riots but also more widely.

As I also mentioned at the outset the riots impacted on many young men I worked with. Some had new phones, some had their oyster cards confiscated and without transport of their own or any means of earning money found their movements seriously confined, which was mirrored in their mental and emotional states; And many of the young men I knew did not take part. But the criminalisation of the bodies of 'youth' through stop and search and joint enterprise laws affects young men more indiscriminately and does not bring an end to the violences that affect young people and marginalised groups.⁶⁶ This is a localised manifestation sometimes accompanied by physical violence of the wider symbolic violences I suggest the riots are a symptom of and protest against. This has become a cyclical process in Britain; one that at best perpetuates the histories of distrust I have spoken about throughout this thesis, and at worst maintains a relationship of violence as a constant in young lives. In this way the riots symbolise a body, of dissent, of revolt, and of latent anger that might be useful to consider in the context of inequality and further in the context of individual bodies and emotional lives. They signal that violence is present within society, but that this must be considered

⁶⁶ See the links in the references section to Guardian 2012b where a young black man is racially abused in 2012 by a police officer in the back of a police van, and secondly the link from TMG 2015, and the acceptance by the then Home Secretary Teresa May that Police stop and search procedures were still having seriously negative effects in their outcomes with specific reference to black and minority youth.

across ages, ethnicities, sexualities, and identities and across class, not solely through the bodies of “revolting subjects” (Tyler 2013).

Re-thinking young masculinities and types of violence

This chapter has considered different levels of violence within young men’s lives and offered an analysis based in empirical and relational research of the ways violence is intertwined with emotional life and young masculinities. It began with a focus on the pressures to act tough in urban contexts and the ways young men developed embodied repertoires to avoid looking weak. Following this the next section considered the ways young men navigated ethical and moral choices in relation to their own sense of safety and belonging in response to the threat of violence. The next two sections considered how engaging with violence became an embodied state and the stress this caused, both in a more immediate context and with regard to the idea of embodied histories and considering violence within the context of super-diverse spaces of belonging. The final section considers violence in a wider cultural context via the 2011 riots as a moment of eruption that is temporally and spatially aligned with the contexts in this research. Here I put forward how the riots might be considered as more than an event, and more akin to a structure of feeling related to the socio-political moment in Britain.

The chapter therefore takes a broad perspective on violence from a theoretical perspective, but a specific perspective in terms of tracing these themes directly from the moments and contexts of my research. What I want to do here is make some conclusions around violence, young men in inner cities and more specifically the relationship between masculinities and violence. The reason for this is that the connections are complex, varied and it is better not to simplify them, but as noted before they run through both the contexts and individual lives.

Placing violence, defining it, has been a problem throughout this research. Wieviorka (2009) explains the need to approach [violence] in an objective sense, including its empirical objectivity and its factuality in terms of the

numbers of people killed, yet also its subjectivity “how it is experienced, lived, observed, represented, desired or undergone by individuals, groups and societies” (ibid: 2). Classical sociology and associated ways of thinking tend towards the former, looking for a reason and internalization in the protagonist of violence. But as behaviours are never sociologically pure forms it is important to also focus on the meanings and orientations that violence might be expressing (ibid: 90).

While all of the violent events⁶⁷ that I have reported here were between young men, as perpetrator and victim, this tends to lead us to a reductionist view of violence. How many other violent events occurred that I do not know about, and who was involved and why? Looking for causal explanations seems both necessary in preventing further occurrences, yet simultaneously flawed in that any generally applicable model or strategy must rely on some form of reductionism, that tends to mirror too closely the historical power relations and structural inequalities that operate through class, ‘race’ and gender and age differences. Throughout this thesis I have maintained that I could have written a different narrative that confirmed the presence of knives in young men’s possession on large, sometimes dilapidated estates and that violence was a continual threat in young men’s lives. That is a narrative we all know well, and one towards which many reactionary and punitive measures have been operationalized to deal with. Yet these seem to have had little effect on statistics. Is there a problem of serious youth violence as multiple reports and research outputs would suggest although rarely seem to clarify?

In light of these theoretical and empirical observations I was concerned that violence was so readily attributed to particular spaces of the city and also particular bodies which made me wary of using these, and the young men I knew that moved through them, as a way of trying to explain and thus situate violence. Yet on the other hand violence, on different levels, seemed to be present in many young men’s lives and, importantly was intricately tied up in the ways they articulated gendered subjectivities

⁶⁷ As made clear at the start of the chapter I do not term the riots here as events, but see them as having a wider existence in time and space.

through particular notions of 'race', ethnicity and class⁶⁸ in relation to the particular local context and wider institutional factors making [violence] an relevant and important consideration in this research.

In attending to this what I have been more interested to trace are the ways that violence enters young men's lives in myriad ways, that cannot explain the moments of tragedy I have previously mentioned or other violent events, but within the wider context of uncertainty and structural domination that I have identified may begin to consider the 'double perspective' Wieviorka argues is necessary within this contemporary moment of late modernity, and offer some explanation towards the ways masculinities and violence intertwine. But my primary focus has been on the more subjective element of violence, to offer an emotional and relational reading of violence within young men's lives across a range of South London locations. What their experiences showed me in many conversations is that there is another story to almost every formulation in this research and more widely if you listen, across time, and in different spaces, without needing to travel far.

For example young men on the Burlington talked about getting chased by young men from the Southgrove which was a different narrative than that of Rafael who talked about his cousin growing up on the Southgrove and never wanting to go near the Burlington because he would always get chased. Keon's stories about friendship and his pathways to school crossed boroughs and he had little issue with the 'postcode wars' that have become an recurring way of explaining young men's worlds in London. Yet other young men that he knew and hung around with talked about needing to adhere closely to postcodes through the ways they had positioned themselves against other young men; more importantly this could be a result of histories of conflict between the previous generation that they had inherited, taken on and been criminalised through, but also a discursive regime that they had bought into and enacted.

⁶⁸ And also sexuality which is something I have not dealt with in this thesis

As I noted around the ways young men talked about violence there was an element of bravado and also of wanting to be helpful to me as someone asking questions towards getting it right. Work by Alexander found this similarly around young men's experiences of racism and the ways they reported it to an incoming researcher (Alexander 2000). Different truths are based on both context and relations within that context, and not least dependent on emotional states. The ways young men navigated, embodied and mythologized the threat and presence of violence showed that an important way of approaching and considering violence and masculinities was through emotional life and embodied narratives; attending to the subjective spaces Wieviorka identifies is thus what this chapter has done.

Lastly this returns us to the idea of violence, masculinities and subjectivities in a wider societal and cultural context. The everyday was not simply oppressive for young men, because they navigated it through local practices and psycho-geographies that maintained their safety whilst drawing on, and sometimes mythologizing, the pasts that haunted the ever-changing urban landscape of London (Keith 2007). They also navigated symbolic violence through contemporary structures and discourses that intervened in their lives and maintained oppressive inequalities. For these young men violence was closely related to their subjectivities, rooted in class, 'race', but particularly their experience of being young men and their gender identity. They expected it. Young people in Britain are among the unhappiest in Europe, and over a decade of social policies directed towards disadvantaged young people and an increasingly difficult social context have failed to properly deal with, or I would argue understand this. The "embrace of neo-liberal managerialist solutions to this has meant that the social context in which social relations are played out has decayed even further... [and in this context] ... trust declines and the potential for violence and aggression intensifies" (Cooper 2009: 89).

7 Holding your own: Resilience, responsibility and transformative masculinities

Neoliberal subjects

Throughout the period of this research youth services have been increasingly privatised and become more focused on interventions. As I have noted earlier, this rolling back of the welfare state and the move to a 'business ethos' within public services is not new. Since the mid-1970's public services in Britain have changed from being based on ideas of altruism to a focus governed by 'managerialism' and market-like thinking that considers the individual as an individualistic consumer (Harris 2003). Following this trajectory, the 2011 riots were not seen as a societal problem but a problem of individuals and communities. The racialised languages used to describe previous riots was invoked in references to culture, chavs, and 'race', and used to position undesirable subjects outside of the acceptable sections of society, defined by having the wrong – read immoral – character traits.

Following the skewed narrative and explanation around 'gangs' as the fundamental driver and orchestrator of the riots, there was an implementation of youth work based teams that focused on gang activity across areas in UK. Services, already having been cut significantly were outsourced to third sector providers operating as 'social businesses' under the management of local authority provision and cut further to refocus funding towards the goal of targeting gangs and ending youth violence (HM Government 2011).

Within this wider ideological shift, the focus on 'gangs' can be viewed alongside changes in other public services for young people, notably

education policy, where there has been an increasingly common trend, present since at least the Coalition Government's period of office, to identify character skills and traits as the basis for various individual successes and achievements (APPG 2014, Cameron 2016). Throughout education and training for employment sectors, character has been linked to the making of successful, morally aware, employable and socially mobile citizens. But as I have argued around the framing of 'youth' earlier, these particular ideas are closely linked to historical (Bosanquet 1896) and more contemporary (Challen et al. 2014), in other words omni-present, moralizing discourses that stigmatize particular groups as the underclass. Contemporary approaches to character and resilience are increasingly allied with behavioral psychology and neurosciences, towards developing 'realistic thinking' and 'adaptive coping' (ibid) alongside 'resilience'. Within the literature 'resilience' is a contested concept⁶⁹ that Rutter (2015) argues depends on a broad range of psychosocial processes.

The argument that follows in this chapter responds to these prevailing contemporary ideas about young people by considering their aspirations, ideas of success and resilience. In considering these ideas in young men's lives I also respond to questions raised throughout the thesis and in the wider literature around young men and masculinities; specifically, is there a 'crisis' in masculinity through the economic and cultural displacement of (young) men resulting from global restructuring of labour and gender relations?

Through belongings situated in super-diverse spaces, characterised by class structures and within the wider context of decreased educational availability and insecure labour, framed by Standing's (2009) as the 'precariat', what did the young men I worked with consider as their future pathways and options? Within a social context governed by neoliberal ideology and a corresponding focus on creating subjects of value, do

⁶⁹ There is much literature across disciplines that deals with this. The most relevant to my overall argument discusses the way resilience can be measured within social research methodology, approaches it within a mental health framework, and is critical of more psychologising perspectives, seeing resilience as the result of broader psychosocial processes, for example Achourioti et al. (2014), Fugard & Potts (2016) and Rutter (2015)

young men feel valued? What does resilience mean in particular cultural contexts and how are young men resilient? More specifically in what I have detailed as often challenging circumstances what are young men's hopes for the future and how do they navigate the opportunities available? These questions can all be seen to develop a focus on young men's emotional lives in relation to educational achievement, employment and earning money, and also sometimes survival and through these how young masculinities and ideas of 'being a man' are lived out.

One immediate answer to these questions is that many young men had not yet made up their minds: most were still at school. But the more nuanced answer is that they thought about themselves as men regularly, they imagined themselves as older in their everyday practices and in the ways they carried their bodies. This chapter explores the way being a man was part of young men's everyday life to consider more closely that relationship between young men, masculinities and being a man. Therefore this chapter considers young men's perceptions of the future in more detail specifically in relation to ideas of achieving, 'making it', and responsibility.

This chapter also considers young men's futures in the ways they were directly impacted upon through youth work and interventionary practices. The subject of futures was therefore often in direct tension with the immediate institutions that young people were connected to, engaged, and at times in conflict with, but thus became an area around which to engage with young men, and consider how trust operated in young people's lives in wider contexts than their peer groups; specifically in relation to school, employment, and family but also in terms of their wider social status and the way they saw themselves as positioned beyond the more localised contexts I knew them in. Towards considering these questions, the following chapter is split into four sections.

The first considers the ways young men looked to develop themselves, through school and the importance of doing well to young men often at the time they enter secondary school and in the years following this. The

second section looks aspirational identities they had for their futures and the importance of earning money amidst various uncertainties. I suggest that the ideas of 'working-class jobs' (Willis 1997) or 'not working' (as is a common theme for designating a new 'underclass' in Britain) are not applicable to young men in their teenage years. Following this the third section considers young men's attempts to develop themselves via 'alternative spaces of achievement'. This focuses on music as both a site of cultural production and achievement through youth work provision, yet also a space that is framed and delegitimised as culture. There is a relationship between who gets to consume and who gets to make and what is considered legitimate culture.

Drawing on these previous sections, the fourth section considers the ways young men embody resilience in relation to the ways they are required to become neo-liberal subjects through interventionary youth work provisions. While striving to 'make something of themselves and talk about their emotional lives young men were often ultimately deemed as culturally unsuitable in their outputs and criminalised.

I conclude by considering the ways young men embodied responsibility (that must be read as particular to individual lives and circumstances rather than as bounded by class, ethnic identities, culture, or as contained by this research.

The importance of school

Research on young men, and masculinities in educational contexts is not hard to find⁷⁰. Similarly research on ethnicity, particularly white working class boys and black boys tends to dominate the UK based literature. There appears to be some relevance to these as particular foci of research and broad distinctions across ethnic and cultural identities were observable amongst the young men I worked with. But to draw any further

⁷⁰ See Archer and Yamshita (2003) on theorizing the complexity of race class and gender towards understanding inner city masculinities in relation to education. See Frosh et al. (2002) and Woods (2009) on masculinity in primary schools. Mac an Ghail (1994), Jackson (2006) on research on masculinity in secondary schools. Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2012) for an overview of research on masculinity within education contexts.

distinctions around ethnicity and educational achievement is not my focus. What I do want to focus on is the way young men felt about education in specific relation to gender identity, but also in relation to ideas of being a man.

During this research Keon was excluded from school and was moved to a PRU in the borough. I, and other youth workers were concerned for him as it is not always easy to find your way back into mainstream education. This was before I had built a relationship with him and we communicated through a more official youth worker-youth relationship were he was resistant to share much with me, positioning me as an (non)authority figure. Keon did not remain in the PRU for long, finishing the term there and being returned to mainstream. He felt supported by teachers there who enabled him to focus and return to his previous school and I discussed this with Rafael who worked more closely with him and in many of the borough schools, including Keon's. Rafael told me Keon had got his head down, worked hard, and been respectful to teachers not wanting to get stuck in the PRU. He was aware that if he spent too long there he might slowly be impacting on his future opportunities. When the new term began and I heard this story I approached Keon, asking him, 'You back in school'? He smiled at me and nodded, taking his time and making eye contact. He was pleased, and finished school with ideas of going to college. Amongst all the young men I worked with failing at school was not seen as something to be proud of.⁷¹ Jerome found this out amongst his wider peer group, with several older boys one day on the bus.

Tuesday evening boys session, Organisation B Youth Bus, Southgrove

As we play Fifa, Jerome walked in rapping. "I'm the waviest I'm the waviest".⁷² 'How's school', I ask, as I always would with Jerome because he was regularly being moved due to disruptive behaviour.

⁷¹ For a study of ethnic minority achievement in a British educational context that does not focus on the usual tales of underachievement see Archer and Francis (2007)

⁷² To be wavy is to denote a positive connotation with oneself, with a similar meaning to 'having style' or 'being popular'.

He was at the same school, a PRU for pre-secondary young men, but had been accepted to a mainstream secondary school in September. He says this to me with pride and while he does not say he cares, what he has told me previously is that he does not like being at the PRU; to be at a mainstream secondary means something to him.

Kam picks up on the conversation and questions Jerome on where he goes to school. Jerome tells him, with sheepish pride that it is the same centre⁷³ that a young man who had made the news through being stabbed to death had been at. “How old are you”? Kam asks, stopping and looking straight at Jerome in response to his answer. “You’re eleven and you go centre”? Kam shows that he is not impressed, and Jerome, younger, shrugs it off to avoid having to answer anything else. Jerome risks being embarrassed but uses indifference to feign not caring.

Not achieving and being seen as a ‘wasteman’ was not respected by Kam or any of the young men. Dropping out of school or being at a PRU can bring status providing you have enough cultural capital within that alternative sphere; in that the alternative sphere brings you kudos and dropping out is seen as a necessary failure, perhaps even one that you have not brought upon yourself but has instead been imposed on you. But in wider peer groups success was important. Keon commands a greater respect in the peer groups a few years above Jerome’s but he was not proud of having been excluded.

Young men I worked with never criticised one another for doing well at school. People were criticised for being a ‘neek’⁷⁴, yet this more closely signified a lack of locally relevant cultural capital, what I have described as authenticity in chapter four, and develops in new ways in this chapter, rather being related to achieving good school grades. In fact young men

⁷³ Centre amongst young men meant a Pupil Referral Unit, or non-mainstream educational facility.

⁷⁴ A cross between a nerd and a geek.

regularly talked proudly, and boasted about achieving academic success. Unlike boasts of football prowess, goals scored and teams represented, or discussions of girls and sexual experiences that were regularly contested and dismissed, assertions of academic success were harder to question. Of course they young men queried one another, with all of them attending a range of different schools across boroughs, but there was regularly a fellow student who could back up the claim that you were a level four in maths while aged thirteen.⁷⁵

It is important to consider that similarly to the importance of knowing about particular issues, such as local knowledges in belonging (chapter five), or knowledge of and explanations for violent events (chapter seven), no one wanted to be seen as not knowing and as young men said 'dumb'. Likely based in the fact that much of their time was spent in school, one of the commonest phrases to suggest to someone that what they were saying or doing was wrong was, 'Are you dumb'? Or, 'You're a dumb guy'. In this way being seen as smart and achieving at school was important to everyone whether you were or not, in a similar way that other areas of life were competitively negotiated between young men. In some way not wanting to be seen as a failure at school could therefore simply be positioned as part of a hierarchy of masculinity where young men did not want to show weakness. However in both more public interactions and in personal conversations I had with young men they regularly articulated pride at doing well at school, and were often ashamed or felt inadequate when they felt they had failed, or been excluded.

There is little doubt that Jerome was a handful at school, but as I knew him he was a young man who was crying out for attention even at the age of eight. He was one of the easiest young men I have worked with to build a relationship with, not through any magic method of empathy I developed, but because I had the time to show him. In the same way when I broke what he saw as our trust through trying to curtail his behaviour more and more in a role I was asked to do as his mentor, he cut our relationship off

⁷⁵ In England level six is the national average for the end of year nine which young men would complete aged fourteen, so to be a level six at thirteen was considered doing well.

in a violent and immediate manner. He refused to talk to me after that. From this personal experience I know how difficult he was to engage with, but this was much less true at eight than twelve. Further he learnt and needed to show that he did not care, and as a result education became one of the first spheres in which this was recognised. In this way education became a vicious cycle for him, learning to be disruptive amongst other students and in turn becoming unable to build the relationships with teachers and adults in the correct way. He purposefully enacted particular behaviours and practices indicative of more locally and globally recognised forms of dominant masculinity.

But in the time I knew him Jerome showed me that he did care deeply, often through already troubled behaviours. He chased a boy down who had broken something in the youth club and run away from the centre, caught him, took his phone and ran back so the boy had to return. Charmaine, the lead worker and I were unsure whom to discipline. When asked to fill a form out evaluating the service he joked around and refused. But when I asked him he agreed; it was only when I saw him desperately struggling to write his name that I realised why he hadn't wanted to. He was desperately embarrassed and quietly said, 'don't make me'.

Jerome is one of a few outliers amongst the young men I worked with, but that meant I worked with him more closely than others. What I hope his example illuminates is that disadvantaged young men do not necessarily benefit from the wider privileges of masculine domination and patriarchal society. He was caught in a web where his loneliness and lack of role models meant that he developed destructive behaviours that failed him further. But it was only after years of failing that he stopped caring. Young men are not in 'crisis', but following the closer definition of Connells's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity as the operation and maintenance of patriarchy, they are caught in wider structures of gender relations of power where they do not adhere to the types of masculine subject who can benefit from these power relations.

The three young men I have also used in the above examples all claimed Jamaican heritage through one or both their parents. But of them, Kam was popular, worked hard, and respected teachers, his parents and also himself. He did not want to be seen as a wasteman. There appears to remain a focus on masculinities on young men in educational contexts that reifies particular, restrictive constructs and codes of gender often referring to masculinity in the singular, reifying ideas of hegemonic masculinity and similarly drawing on static groupings of 'race' or ethnicity. The names of academic monographs are indicative of this view: consider two of the ethnographies on young men cited here *Growing up Bad* by Gunter (2010) and *Toxic Schools* by Paulle (2013). There is a pressure to publish using catchy titles but there must be an imperative on the political representation of subjective worlds in their complexity. As with my focus on belonging in super-diverse contexts in chapter four, more attention needs to be paid to specific place based formations of class, 'race' and ethnicities, sexuality and other axes of difference, and how these inform gendered practices.

What I have shown here is that while there are issues with young men's educational engagement for some young men, this is not related to broad ideas of 'class' or 'race'. Further these are not related directly to masculinities, as most young men I worked with treated education seriously, often juggling separate identities and vocational or directional paths outside school.

Returning to chapter four, which considered processes of local belonging that were based on competitive practices of embodied masculinity and globally routed, I considered an idea of 'realness' amongst young men. We can consider young men's engagement with education alongside this, towards developing the ideas of authenticity for young men away from representations that follow the hegemonic norm. Across youth work projects, young men attending were respected for doing well at school, and used this as a form of authenticity to challenge other more dominant ways of representing masculinity. This is not to deny the rejection of education by some young men within particular peer group formations, but across peer groups and in relation to ideas of masculinity beyond these I found the opposite. There were hierarchies amongst young men

maintained by competitive behaviours, but there was no one hierarchy of masculinity. There was no 'gangster-nerd status continuum' or overarching 'code of the street'. Young men were not 'growing up bad' and most of them were not 'dying to belong' in 'gangland'. The code amongst young men was generally to do as well as they could with what they had and that earned you respect. In this way we can consider young men's aspirations in a wider frame, although this is not to deny the realities of structural inequalities and the way power relations act to disadvantage some young people.

Aspirations and all about the P's⁷⁶

The global re-structuring of gender relations since Willis' (1997) study has suggested a crisis in masculinity through a lack of available 'pathways' for working class men exacerbated by an increase in 'soft economies' via service sector jobs and the 'feminization' of labour (Nayak and Kehily 2013). To consider these changes alongside the aspirations young men had it is useful to return to Willis (1977) and the example of young working class men and their pathway to 'working class jobs'. In response to the changes identified above, I observed that aspirations for the immediate future were not class based in this traditional way; none of the young men that I worked with spoke about their futures in terms of looking for, or desiring 'working class' jobs as other research conducted in other areas of Britain has also shown (McDowell 2002). Young men had dreams of being successful and spoke of this as part of the masculinities they wanted to enact. In their early teenage years one shared feature was their aspiration to do well as 'men' and this was reflected in the types of jobs or ways of earning money they aspired to. Music, football, some making money through illegal activities, law and business in the case of Aaron, Yusuf and Marlon; these were particular types of jobs they wanted to do, based around the ways they saw themselves as young men and the roles they wanted to fulfil.

⁷⁶ Shortened form of slang term 'paper', meaning monetary notes of higher value

I was often questioned on why I was working as a youth worker. 'Why you here'? It was known on the Southgrove that I was writing something about my time there, in discussions young men regularly said they did not remember until I reminded them, 'Oh yeah, yeah', they would reply, but I was generally seen as a youth worker. When switching between organisations I worked in a voluntary capacity for a period before a new funding cycle began that I could be paid from. 'Why you still turning up for free', Tray mocked long after this period; this questioned the value of us as youth workers and our belonging in the space of the estate, but more specifically my own sense of self-value and worth. Why was I wasting my time turning up here for nothing? Who would do that? Youth work has been sustained by a voluntary principle, but Tray raised a valid point for youth work professionals, who have to support themselves and others. Youth work is increasingly low paid and the young men knew that, but some did consider it, and also take it on, as a way of gaining work experience at a young age, in an environment they felt comfortable in.

In this way there are elements of Willis' study that continue to be useful. There were particular gendered emphases that were shared across cultural boundaries, that might be seen as more localised understandings, unique to particular contexts, but also useful for considering young men in different, wider contexts. The idea of growing from boyhood into a man, and a (traditionally) defined work identity is a feature of Willis study. This was also true for the young men I worked with. Being self-sufficient, having your own money, and not relying on others was important for many of them and was part of the way they looked to define themselves as young men on their way to becoming men.

While gendered these can also be seen as more contemporary identities that are located in class rather than class based, and are also routed in more transnational and global cultural representations and attachments. Making P's was one of the ambitions shared by most young men I worked with. Whether it was youthful bravado and boasting, and simply reciting

the lyrics of their latest, favourite track about being, 'On my grind',⁷⁷ and, 'makin a stack', more serious discussions with Marlon and Aaron about the cost of university in 2010, and then again in 2014 over the changed context of huge rises in fees, or considerations of what options were available to them having left school at sixteen; the ability and need to earn, or just get money was a concern. As Marlon and I discussed university fees as they had just been raised significantly for the first time in recent history, we were working out the economic viability of completing a course then paying it back in comparison to working. On paper it didn't seem to make much sense over three years of potential work experience and actually earning a wage during that time. Of course beyond the sometime presentation of ideal masculinity and the need to earn many were also worried about their position and opportunities as we will see and this caused them stress as they moved into teenage years and began to wonder how they would support themselves and it was often at this point young men turned to more masculinised ideals of what path to take.

Willis' study shows the transitions to industry related jobs that were a traditional and available path of employment, identity, and a source of economic income for working class people at the time. In the context of Standing's (2009) 'precariat', while young men's aspirations were harder to define distinctly by class positions, there remained an emphasis on doing what one needed to do to firstly survive, and secondly to do as well as possible, often with a particular focus on the most lucrative pathway. This research then is an example of sets of relations situated within more contemporary circuitries of culture and that shows differences, but also some enduring gendered and class based similarities with the young men in Willis' (1977) study.

But within this more generalised idea of being a man were particular types of masculinities and aspirational futures woven through migrations, family histories and particular embodiments of ideas of ethnicities and 'race'. That is to say young men's aspirations were difficult to delineate through broad ethnically and culturally situated identities. Rather there were more

⁷⁷ Locally, but also more globally used term for earning money.

specific examples of gendered and ethnically or culturally located objectives, hopes and expectations. I do not have the space within this research to attend to the complexity of these individual histories and the way they were taken up and related to aspirations and ideas of employment and earning. So I will make two short points about this that draw on the way wider cultural heritages did come into play in the way young men took responsibility at a young age for their futures in local contexts.

Many young men with parents who had migrated from countries in Eastern Africa such as Aadan and Iman's from Somalia, or Western Africa, as Marlon's parents had from Ghana, talked of university and training to become a lawyer or finding their way in business. I did not have these conversations with many young men though, due to the age they were at, being more focused on their everyday life, and with particular young men also due to issues of trust. For a lot of them this was an uncertain subject, they were navigating themselves in similar ways to me, finding their way, unsure, and not clear on the future or often the present.

Some white working class men I worked with on the Southgrove such as Ryan took holiday jobs doing removals through family connections, happy to be working as soon as they could. But this was more due to familial pressure and guidance than desiring particular identities through traditional class based labour. Ryan rolled his eyes when he told me what he was doing having not seen him for over a year. 'But its alright', he said, 'Getting paid'. He was able to say that he was doing something which was better than not.

What was most obvious about young men's relationship to their economic future was that it was very much in their present, and that many of them diversified and engaged in several spheres of activity alongside, or instead of education. Dreams of success, that were often inspired by ideas of fame and celebrity and the seeming proximity of these lifestyles through new technologies, were enacted through locally based lifestyles and practices; making use of youth club and school facilities and setting up

businesses and services to fulfil their own and other young people's needs. Many young men played for one or more football clubs, travelling to matches, going to tournaments to be scouted, and attending training sessions at the local professional club. As we will see those engaged in music spent time and money writing lyrics, setting up recording locations and shooting videos in the local area. Other young men engaged in video production and editing around the popularity of music and uploading videos to YouTube for publicity. At fourteen, Robbie was learning the ropes as a mechanic, in a local garage, fixing motorbikes and developing an interest in rally driving leagues in the greater London area. And other young men were engaged in activities that earned them money and also put them at risk of police attention.

My experiences of the way young men considered and enacted their earning potential can be seen as examples of their aspiration, and also of the awareness of what opportunities are available, that they are limited, and that flexibility is a requirement of contemporary labour structures (France 2007). For many young men associating with 'youth' styles, practices, subcultures or scenes, that are variously defined as 'urban', or more specifically for young people in the urban contemporary, road culture, all of which have, at some point been subjected to a focus on 'gangs' and the criminalisation of styles and bodies; these lifestyles or ways of living in the contemporary urban environment, are instead about belonging (chapter four), survival (chapter six) but also about economic possibility. This leads us to an important point around young men, culture and masculinities. Where much of the analysis around young people and cultural practices might be more correctly situated is alongside a consideration of economic opportunity, aspiration and survival.

Alternative spaces of achievement

Music was a source of expression and creativity for young people I worked with and provided a space through which young men could develop their cultural capital and gain the respect of their peers and both also offered the dream of a way to 'blow' and avoid the prospect of working in a job

they didn't want to or for some ending up on the wrong side of the law. Operating as an alternative space of learning a large amount of thinking and creativity went into writing lyrics, presentation of self, and the setting up and recording of videos. The full scale of writing, recording, producing a video in itself could compromise more than the amount of work required for an A-level project. Often with no financial or mentoring support young men would rely on informal networks of sound engineers, cameramen and video artists, and dancers, all peers or friends, using their own or borrowed equipment to make tracks to be posted on YouTube which they hoped would 'blow', meaning get watched by a large audience and gain notoriety and fame.

We ran music sessions in most of the youth projects I worked in and it was through these I often built good relationships with young men. Contrary to the popular representations of genre's such as hip-hop and grime being violent and aggressive forms of music, young men's engagement in writing and recording tracks and developing their lyrical style through these forms often brought up issues around identity and emotional life, that were not easily to articulate in other spaces. In light of this, as I showed in chapter three these were often guarded spaces, as if young men felt they were showing themselves in ways where they would normally reveal less. But through the regularity of youth projects on the Southgrove, through different organisations, these became spaces that allowed an exploration of identities and relationships across cultural differences, that I would suggest formed important relationships and spaces of transformation for young men.

When Tye began recording at the youth club we only knew one another through Keon. At first, as in other youth work projects, they would watch me as they began to record, unsure of how I would react, knowing that there might be comment on their lyrics. But not under any specific pressure to make interventions I made comments about the lyrics but let the space remain as one of sharing these narratives and we continued. Over three years I attended around fifteen studio sessions with a peer group that changed but retained its core members. I also engaged with

these young men in other spaces when they were listening back to tracks on their phones and amending lyrics. Slowly this became less of a hidden space and one that they felt more comfortable practicing their lyrical and bodily performances in.

Friday evening seniors session, Organisation A, Community centre

At least two staff members were required in the tiny studio room in the community centre, and slowly I became a regular in this tiny space that we crammed into to record. Apart from the lack of space that made getting in to the room almost impossible Keon and others inside would put a sheet over the little window and lock the door, partly so they could record in peace but also because a particular privacy remained around what was being recorded and the performance this entailed. I knock on the locked door and Lamar opened it and I pushed in, but there was no space but with four young people in there already. But this is not a simple negotiation of presence, as they will not record if they are unhappy. 'There's no room in here', says Tye. 'I have to be here', I say. 'It's ok. He's cool', says Keon.

In the studio room, I sit perched on a small filing cabinet. Des, the other youth worker, sits in front of me side-ways on, less than three feet away, peering through his glasses at the Macbook screen. His only focus is on the music. He has around an hour to record lyrics, stabs, ad-libs and master the track, transfer it to the boys phones so they can publicise it and then pack the equipment up. It is important to the young people that this gets done but the work to ensure this is on Des. Keon sits behind Des, facing me. He looks down at the floor, occasionally glancing up at me, surveying my face. Aaron and Lamar sit to my left and Eli in between them and Keon. 'Your shoes are dead', Eli says to me. 'Do you think I mind'? I respond to him. 'Yeah, why would he mind"', says Keon. Tye is up first, he stands at the mic and readies himself. His voice is young not deep and he pushes it hard to sound forceful and aggressive.

'Man getting jumpy, pull out the pumpy'. He stops with this line, 'Lemme go again', he says. Second time around he stops shorter than the last. 'What happened'? I ask. 'Yeah why you floppin, can't even do it', says Keon looking at the floor. 'It's you', Tye says to me 'I can't do it with him here'.

Tye found it hard to perform his lyrics in front of me even though he knew them well – saying them required getting into an embodied state where he could put force and meaning into the violent descriptions he had acted out. His inability to finish his bars showed the tensions in young men as they try to harden themselves and present in a certain manner but still feel insecurities and uncertainty about how they are portraying themselves. Keon spent most of the time sitting looking at the floor then got up to record his bars. His first recording lacked force or commitment and I was focused on thinking about the lyrics and what they meant for each of them when I knew that largely what they were rapping about was at the very least exaggerated and at points nothing they had experienced or done. The youth club was busy and I was called out to attend to another situation leaving them to record in peace. When the session ended I listened to the track with Des, they had got it finished in my absence, and we discussed the lyrics.

Several months later, Tye and Keon are downstairs on the Organisation B bus. Keon sits while Tye stands attentively facing him. I sit in close proximity, and while we still navigate our spaces with them guarding theirs, but proximity means a certain amount of acceptance. They are practicing and learning a few bars saved on their phones, still shy in front of me they smirk about my watching them. They rap about their toughness, and there are still some lines about their ability to strike out when called upon or tested, but also about the importance, and their ability, of holding their own economically. They also discuss relationships and making good for their families. There is a real attempt at force in the lyrics Tye spits today and he watches me as he does it. He's pushing them out into the air, pushing, forcing the air out of his chest. Keon takes the

force and forcefully adds a stab⁷⁸ to Tye's, 'Till I bus'... 'BUS'. Tye seems pleased with his performance and is hyped up tonight. He says to me, 'you're my nigga', fist bumps me and puts his headphones back on.

A year later I attended a different studio space specifically to meet the young men as they worked with another youth worker, Zeke, who worked specifically with music as a method of engagement. After an absence in the studio there were the familiar looks of uncertainty over recording to an audience, but they quickly got into it. The lyrics now were quite different, they were more subjective and relational to both other people and contexts of their lives, considering the increased securitisation of the estate, the continual attentions of police and particularly the place of trust in everyday life, amongst friends, with authority figures, and how it is retained and valued amongst a core group of (male) friends that they can rely on. Afterwards, as we had arranged I interviewed Tye. I asked about his music and if it had changed. 'I cut all that stabbing ting. Talkin bout you're gonna do this and do that. That's not really what people are doing, it's just lying'. I asked more about his more recent lyrics. 'We are jus talkin' about life, our life. There are bare⁷⁹....', Tye stopped, cutting short and looked at me. Considering his lyrics, he seemed to be acting them out again and deciding not to say any more to me. Whether it was just the musical space or Tye changing as he grew older I cannot fully say. But in writing, recording, and making his recordings publicly available he seemed to have reflected on the tension between the persona he was putting across and who he felt comfortable being accountable as.

A few months later Tye released another track that I saw on YouTube. It was different again, with a more catchy, faster dance-style beat, two friends as backing dancers, coordinated monochrome styling, and upbeat lyrics about wealth and the good

⁷⁸ In *music*, a *stab* is a single staccato chord that adds dramatic impact to a composition, so when rapping is a word chosen to echo the sentiment of that line of lyrics or the final word of that line and repeated directly after the final word.

⁷⁹ Slang for 'a lot of'.

life. Drawing on different, but similarly prevalent tropes of global hip-hop, Tye had attempted to make a track that would attract more public attention and possibly start to make more of a name for himself beyond his local area. But it did not stay public for long. Tye brushed it off as nothing when I asked about it, saying he was unsure and might redo the video, but it seemed clear to me that he was unhappy with the way he came across in the video and was uncomfortable navigating this more 'commercial' identity, and the reaction to it amongst his peers.

This was the tension for many young men; remaining authentic to who you were, and not selling out. This question of retaining value, culturally and to oneself was a tension that young men continually navigated. While all three tracks described here all fall into well-rehearsed discursive and stylised tropes of US and UK hip-hop and grime amongst other genres, they also operated as spaces for young men to act out different identities and explore their own masculinities.

Resilient bodies

What I want to consider here, in conversation with the discourses and policies around character and resilience that have been implemented as practical services, and that can be seen as wider ideological and cultural positions on becoming a successful citizen (read subject), are young men's subjective experiences and the way they view their opportunities and possibilities for the future.

In 2012 I was working as a youth worker across several projects, and was working with young men in studio settings in three of these. Keon was one of them, and money directed to existing youth projects from this borough's EGYV funding, was used to continue to run the music van where Zeke worked with him, as part of this new programme⁸⁰. In this way nothing changed in the practice and importantly the relationships of the youth

⁸⁰ Of the boroughs that received EGYV funding, they used it differently based on what services were already operating and available.

projects there. One of the other projects was a newly set up team, brought together as a direct response to the riots focusing on gangs and required to work with/ on young people the police were targeting, all of whom were young men. There had been no previous gang focused services here, unlike other boroughs. A long-serving youth services manager explained that this was due to the lower levels of deprivation proportionally within and in comparison to other London boroughs and therefore a lesser Political requirement or appetite to focus on the local areas in the borough with lower access to social provisions. In other words the denial of social deprivation was backed up by the boroughs overall welfare statistics. This was a change for me in terms of my professional experience. I was recruited on the basis that I had gang experience, having run the gang focused workshop on the Burlington over the previous months, where we talked about gangs but no gang members attended.⁸¹

The focus of this work was to engage young people who had been identified by Trident, recently redirected from focusing on Black on Black gun crime to, post the 2011-riots, a focus on gangs (or 'black' youth), and offer them the option of working with us to potentially alleviate police attention. It still required some persuasion. The pressure of this relationship was managed by my colleagues and I, being asked for information by the police, and always maintaining this was unacceptable and not providing it, while trying to retain or build trust with young people.

This was targeted youth work; one-to-one meetings, focused activities, engaging where you could, when you could. With resources newly available young men were asked what they would like to do, which was music, football, gym sessions with educational and employment guidance

⁸¹ Again, this is not to deny the reality that there were young men in this area engaged in anti-social behavior or crime, but to make the point that particular areas, including this one, had become designated areas of gang activity through a almost perverse amalgamation of academic and journalistic research that observed from afar, political discourse rooted in outdated ideas of the populace, and young people's YouTube productions. Well over ten thousand pounds was allocated to this project because funding has to be used and the fear of gangs was so strong. As a youth worker I felt frustrated that I had so many resources, such a short time, and so few young people in this site, when less than a mile away services had been cut.

a required part of the relationship. I will analyse this service focus and delivery succinctly. It effectively engaged young men on an immediate basis but was totally ineffective for any longer-term period, what I found to be three to six months at most. Through the amount of work required to travel, meet, and engage young people, often daily, across a large section of South London, while only being paid for direct contact hours, it was unsustainable. For young men, at least in my case, there was a new youth worker who they had never met, who had around four hours to meet them per week. They often honoured this arrangement but similarly missed meetings meaning the lack of structure we had became impossible for both of us to sustain. In this context it seemed to me trust came much more quickly than previous generic and longer running youth work provision with. After much reflection I put this down to two simple antithetical processes that ultimately meant relationships themselves were unsustainable. I had developed a much more confident youth work practice, and believed in what I was doing in the practical context of building relationships which came across, and secondly the young men I worked with knew I was part of a system, and how to play it, and that its timeframe would always be limited.

EGYV studio session, Denhill youth centre

Within the EGYV programme studio sessions were a key way of engaging young men. But they were run on the proviso that lyrics recorded were not gang-related and ideally had a positive outlook. This was a requirement of the funding and made clear to me by my line manager. Joel attended the studio session with another friend who was on the target list and two others, organically blurring the cut and dry nature of the targeting. They all had pre-written lyrics on their phones, and a hook or chorus they had created, that worked together to make up a track. They also had a beat downloaded that they synced onto the studio computer. Before they recorded Joel recited the hook. Its dead he said, agreeing it had to be redone they quickly convened and rewrote the chorus.

The lyrics focused on social deprivation, black-market economies and drugs, the choice to focus or not focus on education, becoming involved in crime, with the main line of the chorus they agreed on being, 'They don't want to see me living right'. By the next week the track had been mastered at another studio, uploaded to Youtube with a video accompanying it, and new lyrics were brought to record a new track. But I was requested by my team leader to advise them all that this content could not be recorded. The visibility on Youtube was actually where Trident got a lot of its intelligence on who was involved in local gangs from.

While the music was definitely under the genre known as trap or road music, with references to illegality and violence towards others, my opinion was that it was also an airing of the issues I had been asked to confront with these young men. I also felt the young men were very committed to using the studio and, mostly, had treated the whole set-up with respect. Further as we saw with Keon and Jerome these engagements were building a dialogue amongst the young men and also with me. Questions of identity, responsibility and the way that morality adjusted with these, and emotional responses to many contexts of their lives were coming to the fore. After my repeating the rules around using the studio Joel was dismayed. 'This is my life. This is how I'm living. You want me to be here. I am, and I cant even talk about what's happening outside'.

If the way many of the young men I worked with carried their bodies and tried to manage their emotional responses is a reflection of how they feel in relation to their personal contexts and circumstances, and the wider social pressures present in their lives, then the idea of resilience might be one way of describing their general aptitude to life. My work on the EGYV team led me to discover the policy-based use of this term as away of presenting what 'ideal citizen-subjects' should be. Whether the linkages between wider social forces and everyday lives were felt by all young men, which they undoubtedly were not in any obvious uniform or generalizable subjective sense, the ways young men approached their everyday life

through school, employment, unemployment, interests and alternative strategies for simply getting by, showed not just resilience but creativity and often a strong sense of entrepreneurship. This opens up the question about what forms of resilience are legitimate and which aren't. Referring back to the APPG's Character and Resilience manifesto, much is made of developing emotional and social, 'soft skills'. Yet while I can discuss these issues here in an academic context, the young men I worked with struggled to find a space to talk about issues that they faced more directly and when they opened up I was asked to tell them to talk about something else.

Returning back to the young men I worked with and their attempts to explore themselves and their place in the world through music it is important to consider how we view masculinities as identities. These can be personal and maybe more public spaces of change and transformation, but this requires engagement in this process and speaking about difficult subjects across difference. Yet there is a tension that both youth workers and young men felt through music as a provision in youth work spaces. Music is increasingly used by many youth work and third sector services as an authentic way of engaging young men. It is what young people want, it is what we have, and in this way it remains a relationship based on expensive equipment and power. In a similar way to gangs, music has become a buzzword for youth services, a way of engaging 'hard to reach' and 'risky' young people.⁸² Where it is successful is through the caring and deeply relational work of youth workers who are as much engaged with the young people they work with than the music. Arguably working with young people keeps them engaged with music, as Rafael explained to me 'I don't know what they're listening to, even Zeke doesn't'. But providing

⁸² Some examples of organisations using music as a way of engaging young people are MAC UK (<http://www.mac-uk.org/>) working to bring clinical psychology perspectives into young people's everyday spaces and very much focused on offending behavior and problematic young men. Organisation B, who I have worked with and approach youth work in a way in-line with my ideas of a relational practice and can be situated within wider ideas of relational youth work approaches, but similarly have focused their public image on dealing with gang problems and postcode wars. Rap Academy (<http://www.rap.uk.com/>). Many other national and local providers also use music as a form of engagement with more or less focused approaches to youth work.

these spaces can operate as a way of ironically marginalising young people's voices and particular cultural expressions such as grime by associating them with discourses around 'youth', anti-social behaviour and violence and denying the cultural authority they deserve.

In his book on grime music, Wheatley shows an insight into the lives of men and women involved in the surrounding scene or culture. But his photographs and films on the subject suggest more, that grime is not just music or a performance, it is also everyday life. Explaining further Wheatley also suggests that while grime was, and continues to be a reflection of the social milieu, and cannot be attributed to youth crime or gang activity that does exist, he also did not see grime as calming people down (Middlesex 2014). Presenting at the *Re-Telling the Riots* conference⁸³, Fahim Alam described grime as, 'like a catharsis when he were growing up', and went on to explain in a similar way that I have, how grime can be seen as a digital infrastructure that comments on events and is in this way political, but also feeds back in to the community involved to create a learning process around creativity and work (see White 2017). Yet in a wider sense these are not valued educational, or cultural spaces. The term 'urban music' is regularly used to describe a huge array of music including hip hop R&B, grime, dubstep, UK garage, drum and bass, reggae, dancehall, an overwhelming mix. Urban music is a way of packaging and marketing culture, at once heralded for its authenticity when offered as a commodity, and simultaneously pathologised in everyday life.

On this point I want to make a connection between young men's emotional life, opportunity and how young men embodied resilience. As I have continually shown throughout the thesis the ways that young men hold their bodies is an important form of communication and protection for them. For many young men I have found the presentation of the body, as belonging in, or to a space, is an opportunity to maintain their autonomy, a guarding of their personal space. Young men I worked with carry closed

⁸³ Conference flyer available here:
<https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/history/BristolSubcultures.pdf>

bodies as part of an emotional repertoire to deal with the uncertainty of new experiences in their everyday lives. These bodies ask the question why should I change and open up to you? Rutter's (2012: 336) work on resilience from a psychiatric perspective considers is as a, 'reduced vulnerability to environmental risk experiences, the overcoming of a stress or adversity, or a relatively good outcome despite risk experiences'. Here he describes a 'steeling' effect in animals as a stress response that either increases vulnerabilities or strengthens against them. Less research has been done with humans in varying contexts, but that which has shows that successes of mediating environmental stressors are often based on outcomes leading to self-efficacy, such as relationships between people.

In the later stages of my research, perhaps as I became more confident in my work as a youth worker, but largely as a result of longer relationships where trust had developed I came to read these bodies as not just closed but almost by maintaining a separation to their bodies at times, and a front, young men retained a space where they were still able to feel open. In this way they were not simply emotionally closed down, but are closed down in particular moments and contexts as embodied, gendered responses to stress and uncertainty. From my work as a youth worker, I would argue that resilience is etched on many young working class men's bodies in inner cities as they navigate these complex belongings, uncertainty and limited opportunities. But resilience and strategies of survival are often directly related to the opportunities young people feel they have and the life choices they feel are realistic and available for them. In their commitment to musical endeavour, which for some was more fleeting, but for several young men I knew lasted years, I can say that they showed resilience, application, they showed creativity designed to create economic value; these being the character traits recommended in government policy. The 'hustle' and 'grind' of self-made and promoted music is at once a response to economic marginalisation whilst simultaneously entrepreneurial.

Yet while these young men exhibited these traits, the experience of their everyday lives, and the way they embody resilience, is often very different

to the expectations of these policy agendas and wider ideas of what type of masculinities are deemed as desirable, and we could not retain a dialogue within these studio sessions over their output and their subjectivity. As Davies (2008) argues youth work in the UK does not lack definition, in fact it has a strong tradition of providing informal education, but this is not the definition the government want to hear, instead restricting youth work to 'activities', a pastime, and something that does not have real value. Ultimately in the terms of 'developing character', set out in a speech by the former prime minister David Cameron (2015), of 'personal responsibility' and 'persistence to achieving success, while they are already neo-liberal in their resilience and uncertainty, as subjects they are destined to fail, as was I. A year after EGYV started it was restructured and I had no further contact with these young men.

Responsibility and being a man

I cannot say that I worked with any young person who did not care deeply about their future, but some young men took on responsibilities in the ways they were best positioned to fulfil it. Greater respect was given to young men who made something of themselves, and at younger ages through more traditional pathways such as school. Being a man was not related to hierarchies or status around street credibility, nor to the allure, and very prevalent narrative of success through fame, towards which football and music appeared as the most prominent, or perhaps only available pathways. But more closely to achievement rooted in their everyday lives; school, grades, football teams they played in, and future aspirations of becoming a sound engineer or lawyer particularly for young men until the end of year eleven, aged fifteen or sixteen and when they were presented with a choice to leave full time education.

It was at these ages that ideas of celebrity culture creating a void, where young men could not imagine finding their way into employment, seemed more likely, however the more relevant explanation based on their behaviours was that many of them felt strictly limited by the way class, 'race' and their navigation of gender limited the places they felt

comfortable and could succeed. But the idea that they were searching for working class jobs and were lost due to the unavailability of these due to global changes in labour was also not true. The structural realities of short-term and precarious labour meant that finding their way into employment was often harder for them than they imagined, and the youthful engagements with celebrity culture and popular branded lifestyles would morph towards ideas of getting rich, making money where and when they could, and thus the possibility of engaging in increasingly informal and illegal economic activities such as making money and living on road.

While alternative spheres of output such as music offered young men a chance to develop themselves, without enough views on YouTube to generate interest and advertising revenue, and open up related streams through mix-tapes or branded clothing, these were unlikely sources for earning money and by sixteen or seventeen were often abandoned.

The options and choices young men saw for themselves drew on particular ideas of gender roles and gendered practices, but young men also showed a relational side to their masculinities where being stoic independent men sat in tension with the way they sought to maintain their family togetherness and responsibility to family members at different ages. Many young men expressed a sense of care and responsibility for their families, especially mothers, and younger siblings. This existed beyond the playground defence of, 'Don't cuss my mum', and was shown to me in more intimate home contexts in the ways young men of fifteen and younger respected their mothers. However there was often a change at this age point, earlier for some, and also later, or not at all for others.

As Niobe Way (2011) recognises through her research with boys and young men, in adolescence [they] often rediscover their desire to have emotional closeness, but as they move towards their later teen years often around leaving school (which can mean a variation in age) they are learning to 'be a man', emotionally stoic and independent. Not necessarily in how they treated their mothers, but in how they articulated who they were and the way they treated relationships. This sense of care was extended through peer groups in the ways young men looked after smaller

and younger children who were not direct family, in the ways smaller boys were protected in football games, arguments mediated based on age and unfair use of physical size disallowed, and in the ways younger children were often walked home from youth club activities after dark.

So Jerome talked about being a man, but he sought emotional closeness. Eventually he came to be 'a man' in a particular way, rejecting the few relationships he had maintained. How can this help us think about the relationship young masculinities have to wider ideals of masculinity such as wealth and self-sufficiency, power in society and in intimate relationships? The emphasis for success within society is to make money where you can. Scandals involving publicly accountable figures, from politicians claiming large expenses to the Police killing of Mark Duggan and the following silence, and continual accusations of undeserving ethnic minorities, erode trust and create particular templates suggesting do what serves you best, and do not care about others. For young men there is already a strong gendered template across cultural differences to fit into.

8 Conclusion: The granting of respect and the limits of trust: 'Just another worker'

Some time after I had been working on the Southgrove I wondered when I would leave and stop working there. I had been part of the youth work provision there for five years, moving across organisations and had built good relationships over a long period. My engagement with this research undoubtedly made it harder and harder to consider leaving. With a focus on trust, and on building relationships it seemed important to follow through on a practice I have argued the relevance of in social research and everyday life. However this is not a thesis based in improbable possibilities and never-ending time; it was conducted through youth work as a practice and also as employment. Yet it was made possible by an ethnographic engagement significantly longer than any funding award, or almost all university department completion schedules, would allow. Youth workers and young people move on, and moving on is also an important part of this account. Leaving became an active choice; I felt unable to finish this thesis while still working as a youth worker on these projects. I had become engaged with my role as a youth worker, yet had always balanced it with the idea that the work was towards the research output. Reflecting on this, the thesis is about the work I did with young men and it is important that what was learned from these engagements is used towards a consideration of what might happen next.

What struck me on some of my increasingly sporadic visits to the Southgrove in the final months of youth work there, was that nothing had changed, the session was running as normal, and it was the same place I had come to know. The difference was that almost none of the young men featured in this thesis were there. They were around but a newer, younger peer group were growing up and attending the youth project. Most that

feature here, and that I got to know well during my work across the four youth projects were then approaching the end of their teenage years. What this reminded me of was importance of the temporal and spatial nature of young lives and the speed at which they change. There are short periods in young lives when a lot is happening, during which young people can be engaged, and support can be given. It was when I left the Southgrove and spent time considering the issues that had come up in the research and the young people I had met that I realised I had more material than I was ever going to be able to do justice to. The separation from doing youth work became a necessary one for me to make sense of what had really emerged from the different places I had worked.

Therefore, what might happen next, and thinking about this future is borne of the reality that many of the relationships I built were not longstanding or mutual engagements, and most were shorter-term. My work as a youth worker arguably had no impact. This is certainly the way that the majority of youth workers viewed their jobs, in my experience, resulting directly from what is expected of them in relation to what being a youth worker offers them. They were not angry, far from it, but it was rarely viewed as a site of transformation and positive outcomes. This is undoubtedly related to youth work policy and services as focusing on a deficit and on policing particular subjects, but maybe also the uncertainty and changing temporalities of urban life. In these ways it is important to consider how the relationships I built and what I observed in young men's relationships might be part of futures already being lived, or not.

Towards considering what this research has shown, I will firstly draw conclusion from the individual chapters so as to draw out the themes the thesis has brought up around young masculinities. Secondly this conclusion will consider all the relationships through the specific contexts of the thesis to draw some conclusions about what worked and what did not, and what this thesis has shown about the place and the importance of trust.

Chapter three showed the uncertainties of trust, related to a search for respect amongst young men. It showed how young men carried their bodies in youth club spaces that were characterised by peer groups. In this way it showed the ways that peer relationships were structured, not in ways that I claim influenced individual behaviour, but in an affective way. Young men attended the youth club voluntarily however they waited outside before it opened, hung around after sessions had finished. They attended regularly which ultimately enabled the development and completion of this project. In this way it was a space of engagement they enjoyed and valued, they wanted to build relationships.

But there were also continual navigations of popular and contested spaces, and young men were excluded from particular peer groups and activities. These observations are easy to characterise under certain ideas of boys will be boys and ideas around children being mean and processes of growing up. But chapter three showed that these engagements are not experienced as just 'growing up' and are not suitably described under a universalising rubric of 'boys'. Young men did not necessarily enjoy all these peer relationships and neither did all of them adhere to practices that marginalised others. Rather what is important is that by attending to embodied narratives and the ways different bodies were held in space I was able to both develop a practice as a youth worker that built trust on individual bases, and also consider the emotional lives of young men as present, and as part of their subjectivity and experience.

The importance of respect in my early interactions, and the emphasis on enforcing this resolutely between young men showed that issues of trust were deeply felt in terms of gender, and also 'race', class, and across ages. The differences between juniors and seniors and the ways young men were more trusting at earlier ages offers an important point through which to think about young masculinities, difference and the ways identities develop.

Chapter four helped to consider the ways young men's identities and were negotiated in local contexts and the ways that differences were remade within the spaces of their peer groups. It focused on what it meant to belong for young men in contemporary London's urban spaces. What this

showed was that the processes of belonging though and as multiple identifications become ever more complex as wider global movements continue to influence the urban fabric. Young men brought these global belongings and embodied histories to local spaces, which is specifically important in terms of emotional life and ideas of respect and trust rather than to suggest transient and flexible ideas of hybridity. What was happening between young men was a coming to know themselves and their peers, through different histories and multiple temporal and spatial trajectories. These experiences were both embodied as certainty and uncertainty in the way young men practiced 'realness' which drew on embodied practices and created hierarchical belongings but also prepared their bodies and emotional selves for uncertainty and movement, in peer groups and more widely. Hierarchies were made based on these histories and presents and resulted in particular local enactments that meant trust and respect were subtly mediated through an intertwining of class, 'race' and gender. It showed how both populist and romanticist accounts of culture and difference fail to account for the ways difference matters, but also the ways that across difference ways of coming together are always in evidence.

Chapter five considered the place of banter in young men's peer relationships and the ways that they engaged with one another. The more micro focus on these ways of engaging helped to show the emotional responses that come to be normalised in everyday life as part of gendered practices of belonging. But these were also ways of dealing with uncertainty, and drawing on my relational approach I considered the differences between my sometime readings of young men's humour and the ways other youth workers such as Winston. This further disputed simplistic and singular ideas predominant in thinking about young masculinities. I showed the ways that different levels of experience, and thus different stories can be drawn out through particular methods including time but also particularly an attentiveness and listening to the questions we ask of others and who we are within the context and relationship. Through this method chapter five considered the importance of experience for young men, particularly in their early teenage years; a

time when they are having a lot of experiences for the first time and that they feel more like young men than boys, so wanting to prove that they can get it right. The young men I worked with felt this important and they often visibly practiced the repression of how they felt, an embodying of uncertainty and developing a certain relationship to themselves that can be hard to re approach in other moments.

Chapter six considered the way we can think about young masculinities and their relationship with violence. This was not about simply positioning violence as the preserve of men, or indeed young men in inner cities. Rather it was a recognition of the prevalence of different forms of violence in young lives, some more than others, although all young men I worked with had a ready awareness of the potential threat and risk they faced as young men. This chapter advanced the argument that research and practice around violence was often imposed onto particular youth work projects and bodies, and that violence as a subject, slippery, overwhelming and fundamentally unsettling was one that many people either retreat from of face with certainty. In this way the chapter looked to undercut dominant narratives around violence that talk about choices and situate violence as a rational action (while acknowledging that tackling violence requires direct strategies in some cases/ events). I have been concerned to trace how young men perceive the threat of violence, how they learn to face it or not, and through this this emotional and embodied responses they develop and learn. The chapter considers the way that the threat and negotiation of violence, itself related to the importance of presenting tough masculinities, is mediated in particular peer groups through processes of trust and is normalised and validated in others by the same search for this. The chapter makes an argument about violence being widely associated with masculinities and the structuring of global society, and considers the way this is held across cultures, as feelings, and within bodies, focusing in on this in local and micro contexts, and in relation to young men's everyday life.

Chapter seven considered young men's lives in relation to institutional structures including education, ideas of employment and aspiration, and

what it meant to achieve as a young man. This showed the ways that many young men I worked with did not want to think of themselves as boys, but as already men. While they acknowledge they were not in some ways, their inner worlds were often based on the desire to be older, towards a time when things might feel more settled for them. But I suggested this was largely a result of the pressures they faced of growing up in uncertain and precarious times in terms of support and education funding, opportunities, and widening inequality. The chapter looked at how ideas around disaffected youth or deficits, and lack of engagement go some way to explaining young men's feelings but fail to acknowledge the focus on 'doing well' many of them have. This was related to school, and also earning money toward which young men engaged in alternative spaces of possibility including music and more illegal activities. The chapter showed how recent explanations that the disaffected need to develop resilience are completely erroneous in the cases of the young men I worked with. They were regularly thoroughly neo-liberal subjects, motivated, creative and resilient often in detrimental ways to how they engaged with the world around them.

Having returned to the arguments and themes made by the individual chapters I want to make some final points about the place of trust, young masculinities and emotional life. This thesis has argued for a reconsideration of young men and masculinities in relation to urban cultures. In response to the ways that young men's identities are overdetermined in the urban imaginary I have asked the question how can we re-think our understandings of young men, masculinities and urban cultures? How is gender practiced by young men and what masculinities are available to them? The focus then is on the tensions between young men's experiences and the masculinities they practice. This developed the main focus of the thesis as the relationship of trust to masculinities and the way distrust was seen to characterise young men's relationships. Towards thinking this through I developed a relational methodology that focused on the ways that trust could be built with young men, allowing me to develop an ethnographic account of the ways they maintain relationships and the ways trust and respect figure in these.

The way masculinities have historically and continue to be framed in Britain is the result of particular cultural histories, where more globalised and fractured belongings within contemporary urban space complicate the cultural construction of these further. Issues existed working with young men, around silences, around ways of engaging, around revealing personal details and about emotional life that were important to attend to and consider as cultural practices. Young men behaved, talked, and carried their bodies in ways that suggested it was not positive to have an emotional history. In some ways they were dealing with local stresses and gendered peer hierarchies but this is also due to the need to live their own lives and take responsibility, dealing with the problems and stresses they face a young men. They were trying to move forward.

This thesis has offered an account beyond the language often employed to describe young men, masculinities and urban cultures. It presents a more nuanced account of young men's inter-personal relationships and cultural practices, that allows a focus on more occluded emotional sides of everyday life. The focus on trust has brought out a depth to their emotional lives that could just as easily have been framed as masculine anti-social behaviour through a different methodological approach. The gang and gangs were sometimes invoked, always as a changing object, alongside many other ways of grouping or categorising social experience. But after working across the four youth work projects over sustained periods, and with some of the young men for years, the importance became clear of how young people self-identify in different spaces in different ways. Young men's identities changed as they grew older and moved through different stages of life, they showed different sides to their characters and nuance to their identities as I came to know them more, and thus an analysis of young peoples' lives couched in externally imposed peer group formations will always be temporally fleeting, spatially limited and sociologically flawed.

Young men often carried untrusting bodies in the spaces I engaged with them though, and in this way distrust around who they are in society and

how they are seen is embodied. But this is never final, and is always a response to the relations they are situated within and part of.

Overall the research has been a consideration of masculinity both within the research process, and within the places I worked in. In this way I was concerned to develop a relational practice that could build trust and find commonalities towards ideas of transformative masculinities (Seidler 2006). However when I say this I am not imposing an idea that change is necessary in young men's lives, or that they need to transform. The importance of youth work carried out in this way is that it provides a space for young people to explore, in wider peer environments when the work is not targeted, at a time when a lot is happening in young people's lives. In this way I argue both for a greater consideration to the importance of trust in public services, and simultaneously for the strength of a relational method that can consider the ways difference operates in and through myriad spaces and for the relevance of the body, as an emotional, lived site of identity and a carrier of embodied histories that can form important ways of relating to oneself and others if time and space allow.

Young men returned to the youth work projects I worked at, week after week. Within middle class communities youth activities are often organised through private schools, after-school and holiday clubs. Peer groups came and went, others grew, changed, regrouped and grew into different versions of what came before. Young people that I met as a youth worker were always busy living their lives, full of energy and if not hope, then certainly verve and character. Trust was built on the basis of the space provided, and they valued it.

But trust was also lost through the ways youth clubs closed, youth workers left, and through the inevitable move and thrust of individual lives, moving on and growing up. For Joel I was 'just another worker'. He was more aware about the limits of our relationship than I was and he was proved correct. But the experiences of youth workers I worked with, with many more years of experience than me, showed that relationships do end, but memories remain, and they found themselves working with older men who

they had previously known and also younger generations who knew of them. In this way trust that was built managed to sustain across time and space and is a consideration for how we view ours, and others futures.

The key contributions the thesis makes are towards these understandings of masculinities and urban cultures, and specifically the way belongings are practiced in the relation to ideas of urban multicultural and super-diverse spaces. Young men in urban contexts cannot be framed simply through ideas of dominant or hegemonic masculinity. They enact multiple masculinities that are carried as emotional bodies and must be read through a close engagement with the particularities of place as defined by the super-diverse characteristics of contemporary urban space and cultures. Further, while issues I have drawn out throughout the thesis around young men are situated in particular places but I would argue have a wider relevance in terms of young masculinities, and extend much further into questions about the contemporary nature of society. My focus on trust is one that has relevance for both a range of reasons around young men's health, well-being and personal development, and thus more widely than the context of youth work. But they also bring up questions of what is valued in society, how lives are navigated and how people feel. This research thus contributes to literatures on urban cultures, urban space and belonging, masculinities, youth work and ethnographic research methods.

Reflections and future directions

I want lastly to offer a few critical points on this research towards future research directions. I have also focused more closely throughout the thesis on several young men and feel that in relation to my overall argument around reconsidering urban masculinities and the place of trust, this was a necessary direction to take. But there are also questions that can be asked about this particular focus. To generalise, all these young men were, at least for periods when I knew them, out of mainstream education and attracting the attention of support services beyond youth work and the police. This then situates them within the wider gaze on

urban youth in deficit that I have identified and critiqued in academic research, youth work and wider public discourse.

A personal explanation to this is necessary, that is likely very apparent to the reader already. The framing and process of the ethnographic research process is often accompanied by a personal journey. In this way [this learning about masculinities] was a journey I had to undertake towards undoing some of my own preconceptions about masculinity, that were held in much more embedded and complex ways than a detached and distancing method of observation can shed light over.

My own subjectivity withstanding, I stand by my claims of my ethnographic representations of the youth club spaces I conducted this research in as characterised by these dominant gendered peer group practices that affected and were affective in the experience and doing of masculinities. The focus here has been on considering the peer group dynamics between young men and youth workers and across differences of age, 'race' and ethnicity, cultural difference, class and gendered modes of being. In this way a focus on these young men and the ways particular masculinities were dominant in the youth club spaces and in inter-personal relationships, gives a detailed insight into the ways that young men in urban spaces practice their masculinities in male peer groups and the emotional tensions that they experience. Furthermore the research focus was developed through the requirements and practices of doing youth work, engendering a partial perspective, and orienting me towards particular behaviours and relationships with the young men that attended, engaged or were targeted.

However it is important to note that the very focus on forms of dominant masculinity and young men who performed and embodied these practices has left a remaining space to further explore the nuances in (young) men's experiences and the way masculinities are affirmed. This would mean undertaking a detailed engagement with the complexity of relations across and beyond these immediate peer groups and developing an account that focused more on young men who actively or implicitly undermined the

more dominant practices and how masculinities are affirmed in other spaces.

Thus drawing on this wider perspective opens a space for further research, and developing research methodologies and related methods which both consider the emotional tensions in experiencing masculinities and focus on spaces where masculinities are practiced in different ways. These research spaces include a consideration of the role of women in young men's lives and how this adds to and develops the account I have presented, towards developing an analysis of gendered ontologies that takes fuller account of the way gender is relational. Relatedly I have barely touched on the ways new technologies influence young peoples experiences and have changed the ways gender is experienced and is relevant to young peoples relational practices.

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