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## **Dying for Control: Men, Murder and Sub-Lethal Violence**

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### **Abstract**

The central concern of this paper is to unravel the links between men's use of violence and their perceptions and understandings of the functions that violence serves. To these ends, the accounts of twenty violent men, convicted of either killing or violently assaulting other men are examined. The interview data suggest that regardless of the specific nature of violent acts, i.e whether they involve lethal outcomes or not, or whether they are the result of some spontaneous disagreement or are planned, some common goals seem to unite many of the acts. Specifically these goals appear to revolve around the need to control other individuals as well as one's own social identity and are intrinsically linked to the men's wish to project and protect a particular kind of masculine image.

### **Introduction**

What we know about the nature of violent crime is that males predominate as both offenders and victims, at all levels (from the working class man on the street to the powerful world leaders who wage war). It is almost as if violence belongs to men. Women very rarely use violence to the same extent, or arguably, for the same sorts of reasons as their male counterparts. As Collier (1998, p.2) notes:

Sex difference explains more variance in crime across nations and cultures than any other variable.

Despite this knowledge, the maleness of violence, particularly men's violent relationships with each other, has often been taken for granted - an unexplored known so to speak. It was not until the advent of second wave feminist in the 1970s that gender was firmly placed on the criminological agenda. Understandably feminist scholars focused predominantly upon violence by men against women and this focus continued so that much of the work that has emerged since this time has been directed at men's violence towards women. For every account and analysis of male on male violence, a dozen or so more can be found that focus exclusively on men doing violence to women. Feminists' original contribution arguably influenced the direction that criminology and other social sciences took in relation to gender issues. So whilst men's violent relationships with women came to be problematised, the same could not be said of men's violent relationships with each other.

This omission began to be tackled with some vigour in Britain at the beginning of the 1990s, in what Collier (1998) has referred to as the 'masculinity turn'. Since that time a number of important texts have been published, each of which addresses in various ways the issue of what it is about men or the experience of 'being a man' that disposes them to criminality (Jefferson, 1994, 1997; Newburn and Stanko, 1994). As Walklate (1995, p.160) notes:

A gendered understanding requires academics call into question men, their relationship with, and experience of, their violence.

This paper contributes to this recent literature, setting out to consider the functions of male interpersonal violence by asking, what it is men are achieving, or seeking to achieve, in their use of violence?

## Methodology: The Interview Sample and Interviews

The findings discussed in the paper derive from interviews conducted with twenty men in two prisons - one in Wales and one in England. The men had been convicted of a range of violent offences against other men, including, murder, manslaughter, grievous bodily harm, actual bodily harm and various forms of violence associated with robbery. The extent of their involvement in violent crime varied. Some of the men had been violent from a very young age, others had become involved in violence more recently, as adults, and had few previous convictions for violence. Of course, previous convictions for violence may not accurately represent the men's actual involvement in violence as many of their offences may have gone unnoticed, or they may have been charged with offences but subsequently found not guilty at court. The men were aged between 18 and 44; the average age of the men who took part was 29 years. Table 1 below provides a break down of the interview sample in terms of the men's most recent violent convictions, the sentences received, time served and the number of previous convictions for violence.

Most Recent Violent Conviction	Sentence	Time Served	Previous Convictions for Violence
Murder	Life	7 years	None
Murder	Life - Min 16 years	11 years	Ten or more
Murder	Life - Min 10 years	4 1/2 years	2
Murder	Life - Min 14 years	7 1/2 years	2
Manslaughter	5 years, 7 months	9 months	Ten or more
Manslaughter	8 years	2 1/2 years	3
Armed Robbery with Violence	14 years	12 years	Between 5-10
Robbery with Violence and Imprisonment	9 years and False	2 years	Between 5-10
GBH with Robbery	3 years, 9 months	11 months	4
GBH - Section 20	9 months	8 3/4 months	None
GBH - Section 20	4 years	2 years	Between 5-10
GBH - Section 20	5 years	1 year	41
GBH - Section 18	3 years	9 weeks	1
GBH - Section 18	4 years	1 year	Ten or more
GBH - Section 18	Awaiting Trial	4 months remand	- None

GBH - Section 18	6 months	2 months	22
ABH with Robbery	6 years	3 years	Between 5-10
ABH - Section 47	6 months	1 month	4
ABH - Section 47	0	Serving time for 3 other (non-violent) offences	
ABH - Section 47	6 months	Serving time for 3 other (non-violent) offences	None

**Table 1:** Criminal Biography of Offenders in the Sample<sup>[1]</sup>.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with the men using a semi-structured interview schedule. The main aims were to examine the dynamic development of violent events amongst men and as such the men were asked about the most recent act of violence they had perpetrated and asked to describe exactly what occurred and encouraged to discuss events in detail. Additionally the interviews explored the wider social context in which the men's acts of violence had occurred which included probing their views on the potential usefulness of violence - for example - was it ever necessary, beneficial or appropriate? Also a range of social factors relating to the men's lives were explored, such as aspects of their family life and upbringing, and the kind of lifestyles they had led before coming to prison - including where and how they spend their leisure time, and their employment histories. Finally, details of the men's criminal histories were gathered, specifically the extent and nature of their previous offences (including criminal convictions and also their involvement in crimes for which they had neither been apprehended nor charged). In short, the interviews were designed to probe both specific incidents of violence and how they developed but also the men's use of and views of violence more generally. The interviews lasted between thirty and fifty minutes and were tape-recorded and later transcribed and analysed. The method adopted to analyse the transcripts followed that developed in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Considerable, detailed information has emerged from the offender interviews. This paper tackles just one of the important and interesting themes that has emerged - namely the notion of '*control*' and its links to male violence.

## Contextualising the Research

In order to place the research findings in context it is necessary to provide a brief review of some key pieces of literature, in particular those concerned with power, control and masculinity/ies. On the first issue, the concept of control has been a feature of considerable research into violent interpersonal crimes, particularly where the offender is a male and the victim female. For example, many researchers who have studied domestic violence, or instances where males kill a female partner, have observed that men often act violently in order to control the activities of wives or cohabitants (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Barnard et al., 1982; Wallace, 1986; and Polk, 1994). In these accounts, violence against women is explained by reference to the sexual inequality of females and patriarchal systems of control and domination. Some radical feminists, such as Campbell (1981), Bean (1992) Caputi and Russell (1992) and Russell (1992) claim that the killing of women by men is inextricably bound up with misogyny, itself a product of patriarchy. In fact, many of these writers actually define femicide (taken here to mean the killing of women by men) as the misogynist killing of women by men (Radford, 1992), thereby altering the theoretical framework within which to

explain this phenomenon. For these authors it is assumed that violence directed at women by men is, at least in part, because they are female (Campbell and Runyan, 1998).

It is not uncommon for researchers who study male violence (lethal or otherwise) against females to compare male behaviour to that of females in order to enquire into the all-important role of gender and its links with violence. For example, Dobash (1990, p. 13) presents examples of the circumstances under which only men kill:

Men commonly hunt down and kill separated and divorced spouses who have left them; women hardly ever behave similarly.

Whilst interesting and obviously revealing, perhaps we need to ask whether men also hunt down other men who they feel have wronged them in some way; in this way we may reveal more about the role of gender in violence than simply observing what men and women do differently. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that some men seek to control women, it is also the case that some men strive to control other men. In short, some of the reasons that have been identified in the dominant feminist literature in this area, for male violence against females, are not necessarily exclusive to occasions when men harm women. Power, coercion and control may also prove vital in explaining violence amongst men.

In addition to the body of work by feminist academics or pro-feminist researchers (see for example Hearn, 1998), there is an extensive body of criminological/sociological research devoted to social control which does not specifically focus upon men's violence to women. As Hudson (1997, p.451) notes, "social control is an important concept within sociology, arguably one of the most important".

Hudson (1997, p. 453 - 454) further notes the predominant direction that this research has taken:

Positivist criminology has always been preoccupied by the idea of social control - or often, with the lack of social control ..... Until the 1960s, criminology's interest in control started and finished with the lack of control-leads-to-crime, causal sequence, and it was only with the emergence of 'labelling theory' that this simple formula was turned on its head.

Equally significant, the vast majority of criminological research concerned with control has focused almost exclusively upon juvenile delinquency (see Reiss, 1951, Toby, 1957; Nye, 1958; Matza, 1964 and Hirschi, 1969). Moreover many of the empirical studies that have been conducted to test these theories have focused upon relatively minor offences committed by essentially non-delinquent youths (Vold et al, 1998).

Both perspectives have important implications for the manner in which control has been conceptualised in relation to crime. Whilst labelling theory challenged the predominant focus upon 'lack-of-control-leads-to-crime', there remains little in the way of research devoted to control and adult violence. Labelling theorists such as Becker (1964), Matza (1964) and Lemert (1967) tended to focus on deviance and delinquency - not violent crime. Some modern control based theories include adult violence in their overall analysis of crime and its relationship to control. For example Gottfredson and Hirschi's 1990 'general theory of crime' and Tittle's 1995 'control-balance theory'. Both, however, are problematic in their claim to explain *all* forms of criminality and, crucially, pay little or no attention to gender. Consequently the gendered nature of control in relation to serious adult offending is yet to be researched in detail.

In summary, the existing literature in terms of male violence and the notion of control either conceive of men as possessing controlling tendencies (over females) where often links are made between power and control or, alternatively, the focus tends to be upon young men's inadequate socialisation leading to a lack of social/self control and hence, delinquency. Whilst both models are important they present an over-simplified characterisation of male control and its relationship to violence. In particular, they do not consider the relationship between the perceived benefits or goals of violence and the wider links to control and gender or, more accurately, particular forms of masculinity. It is at this point that the recent literature on masculinity/ies provides a valuable contribution.

Of particular note is the work of Connell (1987) who introduced the notion of a range of competing masculinities. In fact Tolson (1977) had charted similar grounds when he argued that masculinity was not a unidimensional or universal phenomenon which could be understood as the opposite of femininity. Connell introduced the key distinction between 'hegemonic' and 'subordinated' masculinities. The former is viewed as the socially dominant (though not necessarily in volume), the latter as discredited or oppressed forms of masculinity (homosexual masculinity is the commonly provided example of this). Hegemony was a term borrowed from Gramsci (1971) referring to the ways in which one class or group in society

come to dominate that society by consent. In short, masculinities are viewed as structured in dominance, with hegemonic masculinity being presented as the dominant ideal - against which a series of alternative, subordinate masculinities compete. Connell's work will not be elaborated upon further here suffice it to say that the notion of power was central to his analysis.

Building on the work of Connell, Messerschmidt (1993) provided the first clear attempt by a criminologist to consider the relationship between masculinities and crime. Incorporating, amongst other things, Goffman's phenomenology, Messerschmidt views crime as a resource for the 'situational accomplishment of gender'. Once again, the notion of power is important. Messerschmidt (1993, p.119) states:

[R]esearch reveals that men construct masculinities in accordance with their position in social structures and therefore their access to power and resources.

Messerschmidt recognises that as men's positions in terms of class and race vary, so will their resources for accomplishing masculinity. The importance of this literature will become further evident as the paper unfolds. The remainder of this paper focuses upon the key findings that emerged from the interviews with violent men.

## Findings

As indicated in Figure 1 below, the men's accounts of the functions of violence fall into three broad categories, all of which appear to revolve around the issue of control. On viewing these categories, what becomes evident almost immediately is the overlap between the three key functions. This will be elaborated upon as the analysis unfolds.

### CONTROLLING THE BEHAVIOUR OF OTHERS

- To eliminate threats of violence
- To establish 'justice'
- To achieve compliance

### CONTROLLING MASCULINE STATUS

- Protecting Masculine Status
- Asserting Masculine Status

### CONTROL: POWER AND PLEASURE

**Figure 1:** The Functions of Male Violence

## Controlling the Behaviour of Others: A Means to an End

This dimension includes the use of violence, or the threat of it, as a mechanism to control the behaviour of other men, either reactively (in order to establish what the men perceive as 'justice' or to eliminate threats of violence) or proactively (i.e. to achieve compliance). The latter might be exercised for several reasons including controlling the staff and customers of a bank that the offender is robbing or, more generally, to curtail annoying behaviour. In the first example the reward is tangible (i.e. financial reward) in the latter it is not. It is important to recognise that what these individuals perceive as an injustice may differ significantly from other individual's perceptions so that establishing justice is a subjective and personal perspective. Whatever the ultimate gains, and regardless of whether violence is reactive or proactive, it is exercised to establish and maintain control over the behaviour of other individuals in accordance with one's wishes. Additionally this category includes men's perceptions of violence as a form of control that extends beyond the individual. That is, some examples that the men have provided where violence is a 'useful' tool of control exercised by groups such as the IRA. The following section considers these sub-categories of 'controlling others' in further detail.

### To Eliminate Threats of Violence

Men in this category believe that their use of violence serves to prevent a potential attack by another individual and are in the business of self-preservation. Its functions stretch beyond the immediate setting however and have the potential to reduce the possibility of future threats as one becomes known as the kind of man who will not tolerate threats. The following quotes illustrate the use of violence to protect one's own well-being.

**Danny:** Well say someone came up and had a go at me and I've said 'right back off, don't want to know, go away' and if I knew that he was gonna use violence on me I'll try and talk me way out of it, but if I can't and its gone past that stage, I will use violence, I will eliminate the problem before I get hurt myself.

**Wilf:** If people want to hurt me or if there's a threat of violence or a heated argument then I will get angry, and if there's another one like me, standing off at each other, then usually it will come to violence. And I think violence is a way of manipulating people as well, to make them back off.

The men discussed a number of ways in which they perceived threats of violence, which included the body language of other men (such as clenched fists) and intense, fixed stares, which were taken as clear signals of a protagonist's readiness to fight.

**Gavin:** The situation that I was in when I had my sentence, it was either me or him, he pulled a knife out on me and it was either he stabbed me or you know.

Gavin is of the opinion that had he not retaliated he would have been stabbed and, as such, views his reactions as both justifiable and necessary. Whilst these men's accounts indicate a situation in which they state that violence is necessary to prevent a pending assault upon themselves, there is also evidence that by resorting to violence the men may offset future attacks also, not least because they will become known as 'hard-men'. As such the rewards extend beyond the immediate setting and overlap into the second grouping identified, 'controlling masculine status'. The following quotes further illustrate this:

**Jon:** Um, if you're being bullied by a group of boys and you cower from them they're gonna carry on and on cos they know they're gonna get the better of you. But if you um act aggressively against them, even though you might have a 'kickin', they'll think twice about picking on you again.

Jon suggests that it is advantageous to 'show willing' and retaliate to threats regardless of whether one emerges as the victor. This is a recurring theme throughout many of the men's accounts.

## To Establish 'Justice'

The second way in which the men described their use of violence as a way of controlling other men related to their desire to 'get even', to redress a perceived injustice. These men felt they achieved 'justice' by harming an individual who had behaved inappropriately and as such felt both self-righteous and self-satisfied. Jimmy's account of a confrontation on his doorstep is a graphic example:

Um, the best example I can give you is years and years ago I can remember being at home and I'd come home, gone in the house and someone's banging on the door right, so I've come downstairs, opened the front door and said, 'what's your problem?'. Its a neighbour from the end whose drunk and they goes, 'that washing machine you've got in your house, you've pinched it because your a villain' and starts screaming and shouting and all the neighbours are out their windows and that. And he's said, 'ill smash all your windows' he's done a few people's, neighbours windows and all. I've said 'what's he on about', and I've gone in the house and got the crow bar put it behind the door and said, 'listen mate you'd better do one', 'do one, I'll do you' and I went bang and smashed him up because he's come to me house and really that's a no, no. You don't go to people's houses, especially when kids are in bed and he come and he done that and that's the best example I can give, people coming to your door.

Whilst Jimmy may have perceived the victim's behaviour as threatening, his use of violence was geared toward the function of 'getting even'. He could easily have produced the crow bar and threatened to use it, but instead chose to hide the bar until he was intent on using it to punish the victim for his unacceptable actions and accusations. The example provided below by Mario refers to his attempt to establish 'justice' as a school-boy in response to what he perceived as unjustifiable behaviour by his headmaster.

**Mario:** It was the headmaster in my comprehensive school. He was stupid, he was to blame, wouldn't have it like, but I think I shocked him enough into thinking twice about what he had done. I went in two minutes late so I missed my mark, so I said to my teacher, 'shall I nip down and get my mark now?', she said, 'no, wait till the end of the lesson and then go down and get it'. So that's what I done, I went down and the headmaster come and said, 'what are you doing?' And I said, 'getting my mark' and he said 'you just come in' and he wouldn't let me explain like. Next thing he dragged me in his office and give me the stick, he give me six of them. And then dinner time he always used to stand by the table at the bottom of the stairs, so during play time I filled my satchel with bricks and come dinner time, I dropped it on his head, but I missed him, from four floors up. I missed him, I hit the table next to him. So, he looked up at me, went a funny colour white, the next thing I knew I was sent home and I had to see a psychiatrist.

**FB:** Right, is that because they thought that what you did was extreme?

**Mario:** Yes, well I thought it was extreme when he started beating me with the stick, for no reason like.

## To Achieve Compliance

There are many reasons why one might wish to secure compliance from other individuals. In many senses this is, perhaps, the most common reason for aggression and violence amongst individuals from all walks of life, including those who would claim to disavow violence. Consider the behaviour of many parents toward their children, which is a useful tangent to take for a moment. Parents will often achieve the compliance of their children with threats and some use physical force. Some parents may also hit their children for bad behaviour in order to punish them, whilst simultaneously hoping to secure compliance in the future. Similarly, until relatively recently, corporal punishment in schools throughout Britain was a frequent form of punishment.<sup>[2]</sup>

The men's description of violence as a way of achieving compliance fell into several categories, the dominant being the instrumental benefits of violence as a controlling mechanism in relation to crime. For example, Jimmy, due to the nature of his criminal activities, used violence in an instrumental manner to control people whom he robbed. He viewed the threat of violence in particular as an absolute necessity if the 'job' was to succeed.

I think what you'll find with robbers, cos I'm a robber myself, when you're doing a job, you'll go in, but before you go in you make sure you know what your saying, so you go in and you say, 'on the floor, do as your told, nobody gets hurt'. And ninety-nine per cent of the time, nobody gets hurt. But soon as someone steps out of line, then the villain automatically knows what situation he's in and reacts to it because its a no no, i.e, they've gone for a panic [button/alarm] or they won't do that or .... Then the violence comes automatic with villains cos its speed and in and out, no messing about.

Similarly, Simon, a less prolific armed robber, recognised the importance of controlling and manipulating people with the threat of violence in order to effectively secure what he wanted:

I mean this might sound, but like I say I'm gonna be truthful to you, but what I've found, done a few armed robberies in my life, and what I've found is that if you go in and act aggressive straight away, you end up coming out with what you want with no one getting hurt, whereas I've seen, or I've met people, that have gone in with a gun say, and they've pointed the gun at someone and said 'give me the money' and the persons refused and they've either ended up getting shot or severely hurt you know, so I've found, to act aggressive, in robbery aspects, has got me what I wanted much quicker and less fuss.

Simon achieves control quickly and simply with a threat of violence. To return to the example of parental control once more, it is difficult to separate Simon's use of threats to achieve compliance from those of parents.

Several of the men highlighted the use of aggression and violence within wider society, for example by organisations such as the IRA, and how it had gained them a means to an end. In this way they reasoned that violence could have beneficial outcomes.

**Luciano:** It's like, if you've got two businesses and one's bigger than the other, you know, they can easily push the other one out of business can't they. Dominant party always wins.

For Luciano, the person in control emerges as the winner. Jimmy simultaneously views violence as a way of winning, referring in this instance to what he perceives as the IRA's achievement in overcoming the British Government.

**Jimmy:** The British government they've backed down to terrorism and violence. So they're saying it does work, and the villains are looking at it who are in long term jails, looking at all the terrorists saying, wow you've achieved somut, you've won, they've give up, they've backed down because of violence.

Finally, Clinton and Jeff focus upon the benefits of violence in order to win wars against other nations.

**Clint:** Um, well violence has always been necessary, since the beginning of time, but it's not something that I'd now want to live with. How was this country built, know what I mean? It was built on robbing the rest of the world, wan't it? We went over, battering the country, killing them off and then like bringing back the wealth to this country. It's the same for every human being, you've got to fight for whatever you believe in.

**Jeff:** Look at India with the nuclear bombs and that, I mean they've been threatened by the Americans and the English all grouping together, sanctions and all of that and if they don't pull their socks up then, you know, we'll act with aggression.

The latter statements point to a situation in which the men view violence as an inevitable and natural response to competition for land, resources or domination. For these men their own acts of violence are merely reflections of what exists in wider society, therefore normalising and justifying their use of violence.

It is tempting to assume that it is some tangible reward, not control itself, that is the underlying goal of violence in such encounters, but this assumption is dispelled when one examines carefully the role of violence in armed robbery. It has been established that robbers are unlikely to resort to violence if the victim complies to his or her demands. Moreover, robbers are less likely to physically attack and injure victims when they are armed with lethal weapons (Conklin, 1972; Hindelang, 1976; Luckenbill, 1980). Alternatively an unarmed robber is more likely to physically attack the victim(s) as an opening move (Luckenbill, 1980). The possession of a firearm provides a credible threat, and achieves the desired levels of control almost instantly, whereas the absence of one may not. Hence it becomes necessary to display violence to show that the offender means business in order to establish control in ways that are not necessary when wielding a gun. In short, the potential for control may be significantly reduced in the absence of a firearm. As Campbell (1993, p.92) notes:

When the offender demands that the victim 'hand it over' or 'give it up' he is referring not only to money but to control. If the victim laughs<sup>[3]</sup>, pulls a gun, or kicks him in the stomach, then control has been seized from him and with it his tough image and self-esteem.



In summary, it is control and the associated rewards (particularly to self-image) that are acquired that are the key to understanding men's use of violence in robbery, not financial reward. If money were the motive, "we should all be watching our backs when a woman follows us down the street" (Campbell, 1993, p.91) - which of course we do not.

Aside from the obvious material rewards accruing from offences such as armed robbery, tangible rewards can emerge in other ways. Jeff provides an example whereby coercion in the form of aggression achieves the full assistance of the prison doctor who is otherwise apt to 'fob him off'.

Um, well I'll give, for instance, like the doctor here. He probably thinks half the time that you're having him over and I've found that if you go down there and shout a bit or get a bit, you know, frustrated, then he's more likely to help you, rather than if you just sit there like a lamb and he'll just put you off like, kind of thing. Um, I dunno, I mean I, I see it like this, you can go down there and talk to him all nice you know ask him for help and he's not interested. You show a bit more aggression and all of a sudden he wants to help you, know what I mean, so I dunno. Yea it does, if the other persons weaker willed than you, just the slightest bit of aggression is gonna tilt his judgement isn't it.

To summarise, compliance is sought for a variety of reasons and it is often the case that the men believe that anything short of violence will not achieve the necessary compliance they require.

## Controlling Masculine Status/Identity

Very much tied in with the notion that being in control is necessary and beneficial, many of the men indicated that violence or the threat of it was an important way of controlling other people's perceptions of themselves as 'macho' guys who 'shouldn't be messed with'<sup>14</sup>. This was seen as a particularly relevant image to portray to male peers. Violence as control in this respect represents the least concrete form of reward - nothing tangible is gained (it would appear) other than respect and status. But of course how others perceive us has important implications for how we come to perceive ourselves (see for example, Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Moreover, by controlling other people's perceptions of self, one can simultaneously control the ways in which others treat and respond to oneself to beneficial ends. Reputations are therefore powerful ways of affecting how one is treated by others. Jenkins (1996, p. 5) provides a useful definition of social identity, he states:

Social identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us).

With this in mind factors such as gender, social class and age, along with issues such as whether the individual is employed, their previous convictions for violence and their wider reputation within the neighbourhood - will all have an important bearing upon their social identity as they are all examples of factors that affect how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. Social identity is a crucial concept that helps to make sense of the men's use of violence as a controlling mechanism. As Jenkins (1996, p.4) notes:

Identity is not 'just there', it must always be established.

Moreover, he notes that one's social identity is never a final or settled matter:

Not even death can freeze the picture: there is always the possibility of a *post mortem* revision of identity ....

Hence, one's social identity is forever open to re-interpretation and is available for re-negotiation. Regardless of the fight that a man had and won last month, failure to replicate this display of masculinity may lead to a re-evaluation of that individual's identity.

Several authors have identified the existence of face-saving or status protecting violence amongst men (Toch, 1969, Polk, 1994, Tedeschi and Felson, 1994). Tedeschi and Felson, for example, make the distinction between assertive and protective self-presentations. The former are attempts to establish particular social identities and tend to be predatory in nature; the latter are face saving actions performed when an individual believes a valued identity is threatened. The purpose is to restore status and respect (Tedeschi and Felson, 1994, p.250). Similarly, Toch identified self-image promoters and self-image defenders (1969, p.175-176). Both forms of status control were observed in the men's accounts, as the following insights illustrate:

Daniel: Well, like I say I was into the drugs, only cannabis but because I was doing cannabis obviously I was going to meet everyone else doing everything else. And they are not

necessarily people that I would want to meet, they're tough people and it is a business to them, big money and they are tough and they will sort their problems out. You have to act tough to a certain extent then so they wouldn't come and give you grief. They'll sit and say, 'well yea, he's alright, he knows what he's doing, he can look after himself, fine, the type of man we can do business with'.

Daniel believes that by being prepared to use violence he will be perceived as an appropriately 'tough guy' by the men he deals with. He promotes an image that he believes will be beneficial for his interactions with other 'tough minded' men. Other accounts fall more into the 'face-saving' or 'self-image defending' category in that they are more blatantly reactive in nature, as the following illustrates.

**Mario:** I mean some people they're having a go at you, and your sat there quiet and they think you're a Muppet and then all of a sudden you start showing some aggression and they back off then, they see the other side of you.

**Luciano:** If someone says something to you it's like you know if you don't do something about it then you're made to look stupid, you know? Or, or sort of I suppose that's where the male, masculine thing comes into it, like you know, if you back down then you're, you know, a coward or whatever.

**FB:** Right, so even if you didn't actually feel angry with somebody you think that lots of men just feel that its something that they have to do?

**Luciano:** Ah, undoubtedly, I think that ninety percent of men feel the same way, you know. Uh, I wouldn't categorise myself as, um like I said, a person that would just be violent for the sake of being violent, you know.

What is particularly interesting about Luciano's description of violence is that he does not categorise himself as a man who would be violent for no apparent reason, yet he talks about the importance of having to use violence as a way of protecting his male pride. To him, and perhaps many other men, violence achieves honour and respect and is not, as an on-looker might suspect, pointless or unnecessary. Rather it is an important means of projecting and protecting a tough masculine image. Luciano's reference to 'a certain circle of people' illustrates, like Simon, the importance of male opinion. These men feel it is essential to uphold their status in the community in order to gain respect and are more than willing to resort to violence when confronted with a challenge to their masculinity. Whilst most of the men referred to the pressures associated with male friends and associates, there is also evidence that some men feel the need to intermittently enhance their masculine status to manipulate the perceptions that a female may hold of them.

**Simon:** Um, a girlfriend, a girlfriend, I've come home from work and we had a little dog and my girlfriend was walking the dog and the guy in the next block of flats from us has called her a fucking slag and told her to keep her dog away from his dog, you know. And I got home and she was in tears, and so straight away I've gone straight round his house and I think that was necessary for her reason as much as me, because she was living with me and she knew who I was basically. If I hadn't have done anything she would have looked at me in a different light, and at the time I didn't want her to, I wanted her to think of me as someone who could protect her. Most of the violence I've been involved in, I feel, no, I can't say that, some of it's been unnecessary, but most of it, I feel, has been necessary because of the group of people I'm associating with.

## Control: Power and Pleasure

Finally, there is evidence from the men's accounts that violence sometimes serves no other goal than to exercise the feelings of power and pleasure that are derived from an ability to control other individuals. For some men, controlling others enhances their self-esteem and feelings of powerfulness and as such violence can be pleasurable. Whilst pleasure was the least often mentioned goal of violence it is important to consider this goal in order to gain an overall appreciation of the possible functions of violence. Moreover, pleasure can be viewed as an additional feature of both other categories mentioned. To elaborate, the successful robbery of a bank might involve thrills in terms of the control achieved and financial rewards gained. Megargee (1982) noted the thrills that can accompany violent crime in commentary from one of his graduate students (who had formerly served thirteen years in prison for armed robbery and murder). The student described 'the adrenaline high' he had achieved when

robbing a bank, and the "heady feeling of power that came from being in total command of the situation with the omnipotent power of life or death in his trigger finger" (Megargee, 1982, p.122). Similarly, Katz (1988) believes that thrill is an important part of robbery and that its appeal is exclusive to men. In addition, an element of pleasure is undoubtedly derived from establishing 'justice' or offsetting an attack. Finally, it is both rewarding and pleasing to enhance and protect one's masculine identity. In short, it is not necessarily violence itself that is pleasurable but what is gained from its use in controlling others.

**Paul:** , and to be violent towards someone, for whatever reason, it gives you, it gives you a feeling of power, it gives you, um, you feel good in yourself, you know.

**FB:** Because of the power?

**Paul:** Yea, it gets the adrenalin rushing, you know, it's like a rush from top to bottom and you just feel so good in yourself and when you're actually involved in a confrontation with other men and violence, you know a fight or whatever, you know, you feel so good. Later on, when you go away and you think about what you've done, it will make you realise and then it will make you feel bad. But at the actual moment when you're in a confrontation and then that turns to violence and you're actually involved in the whole thing, it does give you such a good feeling, you know.

Mario similarly talked about the pleasure he had derived from violence, in this case group violence enacted at football matches.

**Mario:** Well I suppose it was part of the way I was brought up and where I was brought up like, I'm a football fan and it just seemed part and parcel of being a football fan. I used to enjoy it, it was a break like, you know, we used to go for a good punch up. First football match I went to when I was fifteen with my brother. He took me to watch a quarter final, brilliant, brilliant. I could see them fighting and I wanted to get involved then like, but I was a bit young.

**FB:** Can you remember why you wanted to get involved, what was it that attracted you to it?

**Mario:** Well everyone was laughing, you know, it was a buzz going around.

**FB:** Haven't you ever thought you could go and enjoy a football match without having the fighting at the end?

**Mario:** Well I have done when I've took my children to the match. But on my own, you know, couple of pints and heads go.

Finally, some of the men discussed situations where they felt control had been taken from them (e.g. imprisonment) or where they had been confronted with a situation beyond their immediate control, which further points to the critical importance of feeling in control.

**FB:** What kinds of things most often make you feel angry and frustrated nowadays, not just in prison but outside as well?

**Clint:** Well now, being a prisoner, it's lack of control isn't it?

**FB:** What about outside?

**Clint:** Um, same thing.

**FB:** Give me an example then, what might you not be able to control outside?

**Clint:** Um, other people basically isn't it. I mean, people don't do what you want them to do necessarily do they? I mean I don't like being lied to, so like then it goes on to violence from there really. I'd ask them, talk to them first, then it would be a demand then it would be violence, yea.

## Discussion

In summary, the evidence presented<sup>[5]</sup> suggests that violence is essentially orientated toward the goal of control. Whilst control is exercised for a multitude of reasons, some for none other than the pleasure and sense of power gained from controlling others, the underlying goal is to take command of the situation one is confronted with or has created (in the case of robbery). The overarching benefit of violence appears to be the establishment and maintenance of control. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that violence has so often been associated with uncontrollable urges or 'out of control' individuals (Freud, 1938; Kutash, 1978; Gottredson and Hirschi, 1990). Further evidence that the underlying goal of violence is control emanates from the men's accounts of what causes them distress or anger. Most frequently cited were feeling threatened, being ordered around, being owed money, people undermining their integrity by lying to them, or individuals treating them with disrespect - the latter were often referred to as 'people taking the piss'. Each of these aggression inducers can be seen to, in some way,

challenge or undermine the men's authority and power and, by extension, their masculine identity.

What is clear from this analysis is the manner in which the various goals or accomplishments of violence overlap. To elaborate, it is often the case that the men achieve some desired outcome in another individual whilst simultaneously enhancing their masculine status. Put another way, control of one's masculine identity and control of others appear to be intrinsically linked and it is difficult to separate their relative influences upon the men's use of violence. The following quote taken from Clint illustrates this point succinctly:

It comes down to respect don't it, in the end? People start paying a bit quicker and things like that.

In this example, Clint recognises the dual goals of ensuring outstanding debts are repaid on time and simultaneously being accorded respect.

It would appear that the men's identity and their desire to control other people are mutually reinforcing. To elaborate, it is necessary to control one's masculine status (i.e. appear a tough guy) in order to hold the necessary credibility to control others. If you are not perceived as a 'tough guy' no one will feel threatened by you and yield to your attempts at control. In turn, you have to control others in order to keep bolstering your masculine identity. Hence, if you are unable to deal with an individual who threatens your masculine identity, you may no longer be perceived as a 'real' man; in turn, the more your ability to control others is undermined, the less masculine status you hold. Masculine pride and control are opposite sides of the same coin. The two are intimately connected, they feed off each other and rise and fall together, so to speak.

Researchers have consistently proposed a basic distinction between expressive and instrumental forms of crime (see Megargee, 1982) and where homicide and other interpersonal acts of violence are concerned, expressive theories often gain primacy. Robbery and burglary, on the other hand, are often viewed as instrumental in nature, as are kidnapping or hostage taking - all of which are viewed as motivated by financial gain. In stark contrast, as Felson (1998) observes, fights are usually thought to be expressive because they apparently rarely accomplish anything. Felson notes, however, that this assumption is being reviewed. Tedeschi and Felson (1994), for example, deviate from the traditional distinction between expressive versus instrumental violence, arguing instead that all violence is goal-oriented and that expressive violence does not exist. The current findings suggest that such a re-evaluation is an important move in a fruitful direction and somewhat overdue. Finally, it is important to mention an interesting piece of work by Campbell (1993) who, somewhat uniquely, explores both men's and women's understanding of violence in relation to control. In her text, 'Out of Control', Campbell explores the different ways in which men and women understand aggression and violence. Campbell (1993) notes a clear distinction in the ways in which men and women view their own violence; women, she claims, perceive outbursts of anger and displays of aggression as a 'loss of control'. Men, on the other hand, view their acts of aggression as a means of 'gaining control'.

Both sexes see an intimate connection between aggression and control, But for women aggression is the *failure* of self-control, while for men it is the *imposing* of control over other' (Campbell, 1993: 1). [Emphasis in the original].

Campbell equates female aggression or violence with expressive theories of violence and males with instrumental theories - in this latter case violence is seen to serve some larger purpose for the men involved - i.e., control of another person's behaviour, or a situation.

The current findings essentially support Campbell's work insofar as control is essentially viewed as instrumental and desirable by the men. Moreover, Campbell's arguments may help, in part, to explain why women are generally less violent than men - their perceptions of its ultimate benefits differ. Women may not perceive violence as beneficial or goal-orientated in the way that (some) men appear to. The word 'some' is crucial of course, and we should not lose sight of the fact that not all men use violence as a mechanism of control. Equally, violent men do not behave violently all, or even most, of the time. This is not to suggest that non-violent men do not also strive for control nor women for that matter. Rather that most women and many men have found alternative means of maintaining control that do not involve violence. The departmental boss of a university or large firm can quite easily manipulate, coerce and control other individuals within the firm without recourse to violence and can use subtle means of settling a grievance such that how we coerce individuals and redress grievances differs, but the underlying motives are much the same. As Levi (1997, p.872) notes:

[S]ome high status people expect respect and may react aggressively - for example, by firing staff or 'freezing' partners - when contradicted or thwarted: whether this ever comes to be defined as 'violence' or 'violent crime' depends upon what they do and how they do it."

## Concluding Comments

It has been suggested that one of the underlying mechanism of violence identified amongst the men interviewed for this study, was a desire to control the behaviour and perceptions of others and in particular to protect, and where possible, enhance one's masculine identity. This raises two important questions; firstly, why does some men's masculinity appear to depend so much upon the ability to exhibit 'toughness' in the form of control? Alternatively, why are the two (masculinity and control) intrinsically linked? Secondly, why do some men use violence as a means of securing control whilst others do not? These questions are beyond the scope of this paper suffice it to say that violence would appear to be an option of control used more readily by some men than others. Perhaps, ultimately, the answer lies, as Messerschmidt (1993) suggests, with men's structural positions, and their access to power and control. We all, arguable, want other individuals to do as we wish some, or even most, of the time and we all have grievances against other individuals. That we deal with these issues by non-violent means may be a reflection of how we perceive specific situations and our power and ability to deal with them. Whatever the answer to this complex issue, it would appear that the most accurate way to conceive of these men's violence is to consider their actions as one particular manifestation of masculinity. In one respect their actions may be viewed as more overtly violent than other individuals, yet it is not so very different, perhaps, in terms of the goals sought. It would therefore be appropriate to speak of a subculture of masculinity, not of violence (see Wolfgang and Feracuti, 1967) as this would negate the range of other forms of violence perpetrated by diverse individuals and fall into the trap of failing to recognise that violence is socially, culturally and historically defined.

## Notes

1 Some of the men were not, at the time of interview, serving a prison sentence for an act of violence but for drugs-related offences or burglary. However, all had committed an act of violence in the recent past.

2 Corporal punishment was abolished in schools throughout Britain under section 47 of the Education Act 1986.

3 For a very interesting article on the problems generated when robbers do not achieve expected levels of compliance or fear see Emerson (1970), 'Nothing Unusual is Happening'. He discusses the fate that befell two armed robbers who tried to hold up a party of thirty-six prominent, middle-class women, but couldn't get anybody to believe they were for real.

4 'Machismo' comes from the Spanish noun 'macho' which means male. The concept is generally taken to imply some enhanced level of masculinity or as defined by Megargee 1982, p.130), 'a stubborn masculine sense of honour'.

5 I can, of course, only speak for the data collected for this particular study and am aware of its potential peculiarities.

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