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Doing Gender Locally: The importance of 'place' in understanding marginalised masculinities and young men's transitions to 'safe' and successful futures

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Abstract

Observable anxieties have been developing about the position of boys and young men in contemporary society in recent years. This is expressed as a crisis of masculinity, in which place is often implicitly implicated, but is rarely considered for its role in the shaping of young men's practices, trajectories and aspirations. Drawing on research conducted with young people who accessed a range of social care support services, this paper argues that transition means different things for young men in different locales and that local definitions of masculinity are required to better understand young men's lives and the opportunities available to them. We argue that home life, street life, individual neighbourhoods, regions and nations all shaped the young men's identities and the practices they (and the staff working with them) drew on in order to create

successful futures and ‘safe’ forms of masculinity. We suggest that this place based approach has potential to re-shape the ‘crisis’ discourse surrounding masculinity and the anxieties associated with young men.

Key Words: Gender, marginalised masculinity, place, locality, young men

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Doing Gender Locally: The importance of ‘place’ in understanding marginalised masculinities and young men’s transitions to ‘safe’ and successful futures

Introduction

Since the 1990s there has been an increasing anxiety in the global north about the position of boys and young men (Morgan, 2006; Kimmel, 2006; Roberts, 2014; Robb et al, 2015; Tarrant et al, 2015). These concerns have centred on a range of issues including boys’ supposed educational ‘underachievement’ (when compared to girls’), high rates of suicide and poor mental health among young men, and boys’ involvement in offending and anti-social behaviour. Similar concerns about these issues are also emerging in a range of other countries around the world (e.g. Edström et al., 2015).

These problems are often framed as outcomes of a ‘war’ on boys (Hoff Sommers, 2013), or a ‘crisis’ of masculinity (Morgan, 2006; Syal, 2013). But as others have pointed out, this discourse is far from novel and has a much longer history than the current ‘crisis’ suggests (Connell, 1995; Roberts, 2014). Nonetheless, what some studies have shown is that the loss of well paid, secure, industrial and manufacturing jobs, which has deeply affected the towns and cities that relied on these industries, overtly disadvantages some men over others (Nayak, 2006; McDowell, 2012; Ward, 2015a). This is highlighted in a distinct body of literature that highlights the relationship between gender, street culture and gangs within these former industrial contexts (Miller, 2008; Deuchar, 2009; Gunter and Watt, 2009; Gunter, 2010; Fraser, 2015). Although the generic categories of ‘men’ and ‘boys’ are often used in policy and cultural commentaries, in reality it is young, working-class men living in stigmatised places who most embody this anxiety (Morris, 2012; Ward, 2015). While place is often acknowledged implicitly in these narratives, it is rarely examined as a key factor in shaping young men’s lives and future opportunities.

While much of the work that looks at young men in ‘crisis’ or ‘at risk’ focuses on educational institutions (Martino, 2008; Ward, 2014a), there has been little research looking at these issues in

social care support or welfare services¹. These services regularly engage with very vulnerable young people within marginalised communities, playing an important role in empowering individuals, occasionally to ameliorate their vulnerabilities (Emmel and Hughes, 2010; Emmel, 2017). However, little is known about the role of these support settings in young men's lives (for an exception see Robertson et al, 2016 on community embedded groups for young fathers). This is because there is a limited understanding of the impact (if any) of place on the gender of young people deemed 'at risk'.

Given the relatively limited attention to the settings and services that young men engage with in their communities beyond education institutions, this paper explores young men's experiences of their localities and the role of support settings in helping them to transition to 'safer' futures. Drawing on a two year Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC] qualitative study conducted in different support services with people aged 16-24 (and the staff who worked with them), we add to the debate concerned with 'at risk' young men, and contemporary masculinities. We do this by specifically looking at the role that 'geographies of masculinity' (Gorman-Murray and Noble, 2014) play in masculinity making². We have found that local expectations of what it means to be a man are key to understanding the performances of young men's masculinities. These expectations demonstrate the significance of resources in localities (namely social support settings) for influencing the particular practices young men (and the staff working with them) drew on, and talked about, to create successful futures. This approach we suggest allows for a more complicated picture of gender relationships to emerge. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of place and place-based resources in the shaping of young men's trajectories, particularly in contexts where employment opportunities and participation in the labour market have been eroded or changed compared to what came before. Importantly, this paper also contributes to ongoing sociological debates both in the UK and the US around the changing and complex nature of contemporary masculinities (See Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Roberts, 2014; De Boise, 2015; Ward, 2017)

¹ We define welfare settings as 'the range of public and care settings and services that support the most vulnerable in society' (Tarrant et al., 2015: 63)

² See Robb et al., 2015; Tarrant et al., 2015; Featherstone et al., 2016 for other work from this project.

Doing Gender in Place

Jackson's (1991, 1994) work in the early 1990s first marked the start of a geographical interest in the social and cultural construction of masculinity and questioned aspatial accounts of men's lives. Interdisciplinary studies began linking the notion of place and space to employment (Massey, 1995; McDowell, 1997) and further work across a range of areas explored the complex relationship between masculinities in different spaces (Bell, 2000; Brandth and Haugeen, 2000; Berg and Longhurst, 2003). Using Raewyn Connell's (1995) concept of multiple masculinities alongside the work of critical men's scholars (Kimmel, 1987; Whitehead, 2002), an interdisciplinary collection of papers by van Hoven and Horschelmann (2005) entitled *Spaces of Masculinity*, explored the changes to gender identities and the place/space variations in the construction and reconstruction of masculine identities. In a critical re-evaluation of her earlier work, Connell writing with Messerschmidt, added to this direction by suggesting that to fully understand the gender order and the power dynamics within and between men, dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity must be seen to co-exist at the local, nation and international level (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The practices that shape gender therefore extend beyond male bodies. Like Bjornholt (2014), we suggest that the spatial and temporal dimensions of social research on men and masculinities is undeveloped by sociologists, although a noteworthy scholarship on young, urban, working-class men does make distinct links between masculinity, individual neighbourhoods, regions and nations and youth transitions (Nayak, 2006; Gunter and Watt, 2009; Gunter, 2010; Ward, 2015a). This literature demonstrates how local neighbourhoods shape the performance of young men's masculine identity and their transitions to adulthood, in the same way that other processes of identity formation, such as education and schooling do. However, whilst the local neighbourhood provides important context to work that has looked at street crime and gangs (Bannister and Fraser, 2008; Miller, 2008; Baird, 2012), this does not directly focus on the performance of masculinities and the attitudes, behaviours and processes by which this is made and unmade.

In former industrial localities, acceptable forms of working-class masculinities are still often displayed through dominant, toxic or extreme forms of behaviour (Willis, 1977). These displays of masculinity constitute acts of aggression, violence, physicality, substance misuse, drinking large amounts of alcohol and excessive heterosexuality and homophobic language (Kehily and Nayak, 1997; McDowell, 2003; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Kenway et al., 2006;

Ingram 2011; Ward, 2015a). Also described as ‘protest’ masculinities (Connell, 1995), they are often viewed as an outcome of marginalisation from economic resources, or racial signifiers (Sewell, 1997; Majors, 2001; hooks, 2004) indicating some of the ways in which traditional white and black working-class masculinities have fared in the new post-industrial economy.

Some studies conducted with young men offer a more complex account, highlighting that young men’s identities can be more fluid and complex, and that there are possibilities for constructing alternative masculinities that are not necessarily marked by negative behaviour (Anderson, 2009; McCormack and Anderson, 2010; Roberts, 2013). Furthermore, Elijah Anderson (1999), developing the work of Goffman (1974) in the US, highlighted that some young men behave in different ways according to the situation they find themselves in. He argues that young people from what he terms ‘decent’ families could code-switch, playing by codes of the ‘street’ and ‘decency’ dependent on the situation. This is vital for survival in violent inner-city neighbourhoods. For some working-class men, this ‘chameleonisation’ (Ward, 2015b) is crucial for establishing and maintaining reputation. Yet, despite the potential for increased fluidity in young men’s masculinities, as Heward (1996) and Connell (2001; 8) have cautioned, there is still a need to be attentive to the ‘fixing mechanisms that limit the fluidity of identities’, i.e. the structural contexts in which masculinities are performed.

Whilst this paper’s focus is on place based accounts of young masculinities, we also acknowledge that our analysis of masculinities draws on the tradition of understanding gender as a performance, which operates through everyday interaction within these multiple spaces (Goffman, 1976, 1977; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). As masculinities are constructed in relation to other social inequalities it is therefore only in the situated, empirically grounded analysis of actual men in actual places, that we can understand power relationships and these performances of masculinity better. We now outline the study in more detail, before moving on to an interpretation of the accounts of young men and the support workers they come into contact with in their localities.

Context and Methods

Our ESRC funded study, *Beyond Male Role Models*,³ explored gender relationships between young people and those who worked with them, in a range of welfare settings and support services in the United Kingdom (Robb et al, 2015). These services were run by the children's' charity, Action for Children, or smaller regional providers (Ward et al, 2015). Whilst our main focus was on the gender identities of workers and young people, our findings highlighted that relationship building and care practices were valued more by the young men than the gender of the worker.

Empirical data collection consisted of a series of individual and group interviews involving young service users (aged 16-24), supported by some participation observation⁴. A total of 93 participants⁵ were interviewed either individually, in pairs or as part of group interviews (see Figure 1 for the detailed characteristics of these participants). The types of support services where interviews took place included those that worked with young offenders, care or foster leavers, young carers, young fathers and young people with additional learning support, behavioural needs or needed mentoring support. Fieldwork was undertaken in a range of urban and rural communities across the UK including the West of Scotland, North Wales, Cornwall, Dorset, and South-East London where services were located. These communities ranked high on multiple levels of socio-economic deprivation, with large numbers of young people disengaged from formal education. Due to ethical considerations, we have kept the identification of individual communities to a minimum.

In this article, we focus predominantly, although not exclusively, on two sites; the first, a post-industrial rural town in the West of Scotland, at a project that worked with young men who had been released from prison; and the second site, in South-East London with young men who engaged with different mentoring services and young father's projects. While large, heterogeneous areas, both shared similar industrial heritage and have experienced rapid post-industrial decline

³ ESRC Grant number: ES/K005863/1.

⁴ Alongside the interviews, a short video film of the project was also produced, featuring young men and those who work with them, in order to share the findings of the research in a lively and accessible way, and to stimulate discussion about the implications for policy and practice. The film can be viewed at: <<http://www.open.ac.uk/health-and-social-care/research/beyond-male-role-models/node/14>>.

⁵ All names in this paper have been anonymised.

around dock work. While we recognise that these places have their own distinctive histories and characters, these two field sites are comparable to other post-industrial communities that have attracted previous research attention (e.g. Gunter and Watt, 2009; Fraser, 2015), particularly in relation to young, working-class masculinity. This supports a more sophisticated dialogue with existing research and an extension of these findings through emphasis on the importance of support spaces in these localities, as key mechanisms in the shaping of young men's transitions to safer adult futures.

The individual and group interviews took place in a wide variety of locations in the field sites, including youth centres, meeting rooms, offices, cafés, and occasionally in private homes. Research participants, whether young people or staff, were provided with information sheets explaining the research process and confidentiality issues, and were invited to sign consent forms. They were also given a voucher as a thank you for taking part. A flexible semi-structured interview schedule was used, in which participants were encouraged to talk about their past experiences and current lives, with a particular focus on their identities as young men (or in the case of young women, their opinions of young men), their experience of support services and their relationships with staff. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and then analysed (together with fieldwork notes kept by the researchers) by the research team using thematic analysis to identify key themes (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The team used a primarily inductive approach to thematic analysis, where codes and themes were developed from the data content. In practice, this meant thoroughly reading and re-reading transcripts, coding the data in relation to the research questions and developing themes as individuals, and then a review of these themes in discussion with the wider team to finalise them.

Several key themes emerged from the qualitative study (See Featherstone et al, 2016), but a particularly strong theme was that young men's masculine identities were powerfully defined by locality and place, and perhaps more significantly, via their interactions with support services. Support services were often seen as spaces of refuge, guiding young men to develop 'safe' masculine identities.

Performances of Hyper-masculinity

Across all of the research locations, we found that forms of hyper-masculinity were operating in the background of many young people's lives. We define hyper-masculinity as extreme practices or behaviours of dominance, like violence and other high-risk behaviours, which have the potential to be harmful both to men and to others (Connell, 1995). In the literature, hyper-masculinity has been most associated with young, economically (often BME) deprived men, with such practices observed in comparable marginalised contexts (e.g. Anderson, 1999, Gunther, 2010; Fraser, 2015), highlighting parallels with macho street cultures elsewhere. These displays prevailed as the dominant form of masculinity available to the young men we spoke to, and acted as a default reference point. In both the West of Scotland and South-East London the young men and those working with them, were particularly aware that there was pressure in the localities in which they worked, to be a certain type of man or perform certain manhood acts (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009):

Int: Do you think there is a certain pressure to be a certain type of man in this area [West of Scotland]?

Tom Ah definitely, some of the guys I was involved in were pretty heavy guys

Int:by heavy you mean dangerous or dodgy or that sort of thing?

Tom: ...aye, aye, drugs, money lending, all that kinda stuff, steroids, 'I'll shoot you' and all that, madness you know what I mean, quite bad guys

[Male worker, white, West of Scotland]

Jonas: Round this area [South-East London] there are a lot of fickle people, you get me, like me I'm twenty five so I know what it's like growing up, I was exactly the same, you get me? It's to want ... I used to want to be, I used to want to rob people and be known for it and sell drugs and be known as a bad guy round here and blah cos I thought that was cool, you get me?

[Young man, BME, South-East London]

Tom was a member of staff employed on a programme working with young male prison leavers in Scotland. He had grown up in the area and engaged with the support service before becoming a member of staff there himself. He consequently presented an awareness of the pressures affecting the young men he worked with and the types of activities that they might engage in. In the London field site, Jonas similarly described some of these pressures, but argued that as he had got older, he had been able to distance himself from these more destructive displays of masculinity. Michael, in a separate interview, elaborated further on these displays:

Michael: Gotta act in a certain way and just try to impress people, try to stand up, don't be a pussy, kind of smoke more, you kind of get known, you're kind of like, yeah, just kind of like, and make people like you, kind of like famous and that.

[Young man, BME, South-East London]

Acts of 'hardness' expressed through displays of violence, taking drugs and involvement in illegal activities, all helped to create expectations about the types of performance of manhood that were valued in these localities. These expectations seemed to go beyond any ethnic or racial boundaries, but were certainly located within particular class groupings. Michael's point also illustrates that these hyper-masculine displays are about survival, not just a way to impress people in order to be liked or to build status in the community. It was also a way to ensure that he would not be given the derogatory label 'pussy' and be feminized, and therefore seen as weaker and a potential target for abuse.

This local knowledge based around these expectations of hyper-masculinity and how they played out in everyday interactions, extended further to gang culture. Gangs in both the West of Scotland and South-East London were considered a central breeding ground for much of the behaviour described above, shaping valued masculinities in ways that were hard to resist, supporting existing research findings (Gunter and Watt, 2009; Gunter, 2010; Fraser, 2015). These were closely tied to specific territories:

Int: So when you say territorial issues, you mean around here?
Davey: I'm from [place name removed], so lots of different schemes⁶ that fight with each other, gang fights, and I used to be involved in that as a wee boy like
Int: Right, so how did you end up getting involved in a gang then?
Davey: Nowt, just nothing for us to do, and always a gang of us on the streets, just hanging around the community centre, and so we'd fight against other centres, ours ended up getting wrecked
Int: So there's a big problem with gangs around here then?
Davey: Oh aye, massive man, they got shooters [guns] and that

[Young man, white, West of Scotland]

For many of the young men, being involved in gangs was not a straightforward choice – it was a consequence of growing up in their neighbourhood. Further, the displays of masculinities produced within these gangs were the most readily available for young men to identify with. Alternative expressions of masculinity were marginalised and difficult to embody.

Although we have chosen to focus on two post-industrial locales in this paper, it is worth noting that gangs were not limited to the larger cities we visited, and were often a problem for young men living in rural parts of Cornwall:

Lewis: And like within Cornwall, you got your gangs as such, like people in gangs are presumed as more hard and they can go around and beat up everyone, and everything like that, and whereas people who aren't in gangs as such, they are more kind of like, they won't want to fight.

[Young man, BME, Cornwall]

⁶ 'Schemes' is a local term that the young men used to refer to residential areas, usually social housing where they lived. In London, these were often called 'ends'.

Lewis, who had just left foster care, explains here that even in a rural area, gang culture and being in a gang was important in defining what type of man you could be in a marginalised community. If you were not in a gang or not able to fight, then you were not deemed as tough, or ‘macho’. Other staff members, who had themselves been in gangs as young men, could use this knowledge to help further understand why young men found solace in these kinds of relationships. James, who worked with young care leavers in Cornwall for example explained some of the benefits for less advantaged working-class young men to being in a gang:

To me it was the most exciting time of my life, the gang thing was the most connected way, yeah and that gang mentality, ah I know it might sound stupid now, but at the time, you haven’t got anything, again if I look at my children, the last thing they would do would be to get involved in a gang, because they have been brought up in a 2.4⁷, they’ve had this, they’ve had that, whereas I was brought up in a 2.4, but it was an abusive family and you had a laugh with your gang members, it was good as well because you got girls, quite easily, drugs quite easily.

[Male worker, white, Cornwall]

Gangs form part of the wider relational contexts and interdependencies of these young men. Nonetheless, while the gang provides a source of protection, belonging and male camaraderie, it was also a breeding ground or gateway into selling and taking drugs (Gunter and Watt, 2009). Johnson and Burt, during the group interview in the West of Scotland, elaborated more on this and highlighted how dangerous this could be for young men:

Johnson: There are a couple of boys like ken⁸, who I hang about with the now you’ll see, they get their names for not drinking, but they’ll be sitting sniffing Moonshine⁹ sitting smoking hash, maybe there’ll be folks sitting there drinking, but their main thing

⁷ 2.4 = 2 point 4, average size of a UK family.

⁸ In certain parts of Scotland, the word ‘Ken’ is used repeatedly in place of other words such as ‘you know’, or ‘you understand’ or sometimes simply as an add-on-word at the end of a sentence.

⁹ Moonshine is a term used in this part of Scotland to refer to a white powder substance [not homemade alcohol as in the US] thought to contain Methadone, extracted from plant food. Whilst not illegal, it is highly toxic and unfit for human consumption. <https://drugs-forum.com/forum/showthread.php?t=108852>

will be getting a sniff up their nose, and I've seen, it myself, everybody on this Moonshine is wanting to be pals, but I've seen boys snort 100s and 100s of pounds in a day, over the weekend, because it's that moreish ken, couple of boys in [sniff, sniff] that's a gram, £20, there you go

Int: So does that add to the reputation then if you've got the drugs?

Johnson: Aye, he's a dafty, he's on that stuff, it's no helping the young folks these days

Burt: It can lead young people into selling drugs as well, like, I'll just sell a wee bit and in a few weeks I'll have a stack of cash, I'll pay off my debt then I'll just stop selling drugs, before they know where they are, they are then taking the drugs as well and that's even more debt.

[Focus Group Interview with young men, white, West of Scotland]

As with Elijah Anderson's (1999) research in the US, our young men further reported that the need to maintain these aggressive forms of masculinity was essential in order to survive on the streets. Being able to recognise and take on these symbols was crucial as it promoted a powerful message to others in their communities. The social resources available for these young men to take up alternative forms of masculinity were extremely limited, and often associated with risk and harm greater than that produced by drug taking and aggressive behaviour.

'Blemished' place/blemished masculinities

Within popular and policy discourse marginalised communities where spatial and structural inequalities are experienced, are specifically targeted and problematically stigmatised. This reinforces segregation and results in the pathologisation of those who reside there (see Wacquant, 2007; McDowell, 2012; Ward 2014b). Those who live in such 'vilified' places are therefore also stigmatised based on race and class, as well as through what Wacquant (2007: 67) terms the 'blemish of place'. Powerful representations about place, being from a particular place and expectations about the associated displays of hyper-masculinity, resulted in the negative stereotyping of these young men. There were also examples of structural racism and gendered state

violence resulting in the specific targeting of young black men, as observed in previous research looking at other contexts (Anderson, 1999; Miller, 2008):

Joan: Every day. Every day they get thrust against the wall, every day they get harassed, you know it's getting more, it was worse before but...this disproportionate stoppage, you know, how many to one white person, you know, I mean to a black person and they have to deal with this. [...]. Whatever, this is their reality and therefore they have to, this is what they deal with here.

[Female worker, BME, South-East London]

As Kellen from the same area further explains below, some of these expectations were fostered by stereotypes or media representations of black youth culture which were linked to community, irrespective of behaviour. The ability to recognise a more authentic performance of hyper-masculine behaviour, as opposed to simply wearing similar clothing from the same place, was based on a complex understanding of the reality of the lived experience:

Kellen: Yeah, well the stereotypical would be obviously black male, hoodie, like trainers, you know what I mean? But the actual people that are being bad could be anyone, you know what I mean? And that's the reality. You're not really going to know unless you know innit? Like if you have the knowledge actively being in that, then you understand by looking at them. But sometimes you wouldn't need to look at them you can just feel their presence, the way they walk, the way they talk. And some people the way they talk is like hood, do you know what I'm saying?

[Young man, BME, South-East London]

Kellen identifies that those that truly embodied 'hood' in his community did not need to wear particular types of clothing and act in certain ways to be known – their reputation was generated by something more nuanced, and was about being recognised *within* the community, not necessarily by authorities, or by those outside. Similarly, in the West of Scotland, in order to

maintain peer respect within these communities, an authentic reputation had to be created, as Johnson explains below. Yet this carried great risks and was often challenged by other young men. Those who successfully challenged a reputation could then improve their own status:

Burt: And with ya past, people think, oh he's like, he used to be a bit of a boy so...

Jimmy ...used to have a reputation....

Burt: Aye, reputation, aye.

Johnson: That's why one of the biggest things that happens in [name of town] and [name of town] is if you've got a reputation of being that person, then you've done things in your past, those folk who are just coming up, will try and make a reputation for themselves, so they just take a pop at you....it's like a jungle ken, it's back to that environment

Ralph Just think of it as a place with a pack of wolves in it, everybody is fighting to be...

Johnson ...be the alpha male basically

[Young men, white, West of Scotland]

For these participants, their reputations were created through gang violence on the streets and had an enduring quality. In Goffman's (1963) terms they remained 'tainted' by their history, so when trying to embody alternative or what we conceptualise as 'safe' masculinities, by distancing themselves from these behaviours, problems could occur. This is described by Roy, a male support worker in Scotland:

Roy: At the minute we got one lad from here who has stabbed another lad, in the community and they were friends and had been friends all their lives, so we have been doing a lot of work with the second guy, who has lost face because he got stabbed by this other guy. In the hierarchy of the outside world, he is lower down, he's not such a big shot as he were...we done a lot of work, a lot of conversations about that, trying, I don't know if we are going to be able to work on that, maybe, maybe.

[Male worker, white, West of Scotland]

Here Roy illustrates his awareness of the world outside the centre that the young men inhabit and is careful not to dismiss this in his work with the young man that had been stabbed. His local knowledge helps him to understand the situation and how an incident like this, which he describes as a loss of face, could result in retaliation from the injured party, effectively putting his transition to a stable future at risk. In marginalised contexts where reputation can be essential for young men's survival, it's importance should not be understated when examining their behaviour, or attempting to provide them with options that are more pro-social. In the final section of this paper, we now explore what transitions to 'safer' masculinities looked like in difference places.

Creating 'safe' masculinities and successful futures

Away from the locality and the requirements of hyper-masculinity it fostered, the young men who attended the services we visited were engaged with workers in building alternative futures and what we describe as 'safe' masculine identities, engendered by this process. By safe, we refer to their aspirations for otherwise normative engagements in the labour market and the ability to support a family. In the West of Scotland, these young men's aspirations consequently reflected traditional gendered scripts relating to work and care:

Wayne: Hopefully have a decent job and me own house probably, try and start a family, see what happens

[Young man, white, West of Scotland]

Adam: Just get a fucking decent job, I got a wee child to provide for

[Young father, white, West of Scotland]

Burt: For me now my life's about getting a job, family, basically, in a nutshell it is family, that is like, very, very important

[Young men, white, West of Scotland]

For others, like Eddie, employment would enable him to stop borrowing money from his female partner, and strive to achieve the working-class male breadwinner role of an earlier industrial era:

Int: So if you had a choice, what job would you want to do?

Eddie: Anything man, I just need to get a job, before I top meself, so I can have a wee bit of stable income and stop mitching off my Mrs all the time (laughs)

[Young man, white, West of Scotland]

Waged labour itself was not enough however; the labour had to be associated with acceptable forms of working-class masculine employment:

Dan: As long as I am not sat in an office, bored out of my head, yeah no, got to be active and get out, much rather be active and hands on

Int: Ah right, do you find you were better at that at school, hands on stuff?

Dan: Yeah, I only went to P.E, I couldn't be arsed with anything else

[Young man, white, West of Scotland]

Frankie: Well hopefully the boys are gonna help me get some tickets, try and get some rope tickets

Int: For like scaffolding or something?

Frankie: Aye that's it, for working at heights like

[Young man, white, West of Scotland]

These sorts of accounts were common and reflect what Rutherford (1988) refers to as 'retributive masculinity' – or the reliance on a historical, stable, narrative of masculinity to re-establish the traditional privileges associated with being a man in a given community. For others, working in a

pressured environment such as a busy kitchen, provided a space to reformulate masculinity in a less obviously retributive way, but still fitting with ‘appropriately’ traditional masculine environments of danger, busyness and toil:

Int: And where do you want to be say in three or four years’ time?

Terry: I want be a chef. I was a commie chef in a hotel for six months. That job was good, aye people cannee take the pressure of the kitchen, but I love it, it’s good

[Young man, white, West of Scotland]

The comment on pressure is interesting here because for Terry this makes him stand out above others who he does not think can ‘take it’. Within his account, it is necessary to be masculine and tough to work in this environment. Despite the changing economic order in contemporary western societies, these ideas of what constitute acceptable employment and therefore masculinity, are based on traditional male dominated working-class occupations. These perceived future occupations involve working in physical, if not tough environments, where working with the body is considered preferable over other forms of labour (Ward, 2015).

By contrast, for the young men in London, a much larger, global and connected city, the route to an acceptable and ‘safe’ form of masculinity differed (Stahl, 2015). For these young men educational courses enabled them to find work in a knowledge-driven economy after the removal of more traditional opportunities for working-class labour market participation (e.g. dock work). Others spoke of creating their own individual employment opportunities by setting up their own companies such as a locksmith, a clothes designer or I.T services, although these represented precarious routes in the current economic context:

Int: Where do you see yourself going then? What’s your, like, your future, where are you?

Cesar: In college at the moment.

Int: What are you doing in college?

Cesar: Digital media...that's why I want to get in that industry. I created my own social media site, other things. Going into like movie graphics.

[Young man, BME, South-East London]

Cortez: I'm really serious about business and that, design my clothes, that's what I'm planning to do, and obviously, IT, so I'm good at computers and websites and that.

[Young men, BME, South-East London]

Kellen: Yeah I'm a qualified locksmith. I'm trying to build a company with my cousin at the moment.

[Young man, BME, South-East London]

In contrast to the young men in the West of Scotland, those from London were embracing the post-industrial era more readily, or at least demonstrated an awareness of what they needed to do to be upwardly mobile and flexible, even if these routes were not readily accessible for them. These young men seemed less interested in traditional markers of working-class male respectability, such as starting a family or acquiring their own home, and were influenced more by consumerism and a desire to gain masculine capital (de Visser, et al., 2009). They see this route as being possible through acquiring money, apparently achieved through finance based higher education courses:

Int: What would you want to study at uni?

Johan: If I was going to uni, I'd probably do business management or business accountancy.

[Young man, BME, South-East London]

Michael: Like, yeah, I have a few ways innit. Business, I'll definitely do a lot of business. Business Studies, I'm not a type of guy to just sort of, I'm doing business at college, I'm going to go to uni and do business, I'm going to do a Masters.

[Individual Interview, Young Man, BME, South-East London]

Despite being around the same age as the young men in the West of Scotland, further and higher education featured more predominantly in these young men's future aspirations. Some of this was based on family experience at university:

Cortez: I've got a few brothers and a few cousins who actually went to uni.

Int: What would you study?

Cortez: Information Technology

Int: And where would you, if you were going to go to uni, where would you go to do IT, at a uni round here, or?

Cortez: No, as far away as possible.

[Individual Interview, Young Man, BME, South-East London]

Despite coming from similar backgrounds and from areas with high levels of social and economic deprivation, in contrast to the young men in the West of Scotland, the city of London offered wider, potentially more accessible opportunities. For the most part the young men from both places recognised that this respectability would come through waged employment that brought status, albeit via different occupations. This data suggests that successful transitions into adulthood mean different things for young men in different locales. Place not only impacted on the formation of a masculine self, but also on these young men's everyday experiences within specific places and spaces, which shaped the way future education and employment choices and relationship opportunities were viewed. These findings emphasize the significance of place, and its role in shaping the divergent concerns of young men in relation to their experiences, opportunities and aspirations, than existing debates would suggest.

Conclusion

In this article we have explored and developed understandings of the relationships between young masculinity, class and place. The analysis presented in this article highlights young men's

experiences of their localities and the place-based challenges they face in transitioning to ‘safer’ adult futures that can engender alternative masculinities. Looking across contexts, including the three on which we report in this article, we have observed remarkable similarities in displays of machismo and hyper-masculinity. However, responses to these opportunities available in the labour market and the young men’s transitions to ‘safer’ and acceptable masculinities are localised, with implications for variation in young men’s aspirations. Consequently, although these performances of hyper-masculinity were not place specific, they had their own local characteristics and consequences, routed in the histories and traditions of each locality and community. These findings are a direct challenge to broader policy explanations e.g. crisis discourses of young men’s behaviours that are directed, often unproblematically, at particular types of men and boys from particular types of places. The empirical data presented highlights the importance of a focus on the localised character of interlocking systems of inequality, such as race and class and their relationship to place, factors that are often skirted over or written out in some research on young masculinities. Wider crisis commentaries and policy explanations therefore do not take account of local or structural factors, including the processes that encourage men to perform in hyper-masculine ways. Similarly, this lack of context renders invisible, the significant role of wider networks of support within communities, including social support services that provide safe spaces for young men where they can engage in trusting and empathetic relationships and develop key skills and aspirations.

The ‘blemished places’ we compare reveal distinct similarities and differences that emphasise the place-based nature of certain masculine behaviours, that are tied to the resources available in these post-industrial places. In the West of Scotland, safer adult futures were limited and linked more closely to traditional employment practices and the desire to support a family. The wider opportunities in London meant that for these young men, education was a key route in achieving their aspirations for more successful futures. These routes remain precarious and uncertain in both places. These young men not only lack the resources to begin on these routes, but they also need to survive in these localities which requires them to perform in hyper-masculine ways that are in tension with finding and holding down meaningful employment in this wider economic context. This process involves a complex process of code switching (Anderson, 1999) and chameleonisation (Ward 2015b) by young men who are already extremely vulnerable.

We have therefore argued in this paper that in practice and policy terms, there is a need to really understand young men's issues as shaped within specific contexts and localised cultures. It is these issues that need tackling if some of the broader societal concerns surrounding young men (e.g. the crisis in masculinity discourse) are to be resolved. The findings presented show that place impacts on the continuous reproduction of gendered, classed and racial inequalities through performative acts, not only placing individuals into categories, but also reproducing identities. Family life, street life, individual neighbourhoods, regions and nations all helped produce differential performances shaping young men's masculine identities. We would argue then that local expectations of manhood appear to be key to understanding young men's masculinities and the particular practices they (and the staff working with them) drew on and talked about in order to create successful futures and 'safe' forms of masculinity. This influences who they are and the possibility of who they can become.

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Figure 1

Location	Service Type	Service Users Age	Staff Interviewed Male	Staff Interviewed Female	Staff Ethnicity White	Staff Ethnicity BME	Young Men Interviewed	Young Women Interviewed	Young People Ethnicity White	Young People Ethnicity BME
West of Scotland	Young offenders	16-25	6	2	8	0	17	0	17	0
Cornwall	Care Leavers	18-23	3	8	11	0	4	2	6	0
	Young people with Additional Needs	13-21	0	1	1	0	4	4	8	0
Devon	Young Carers	16-18	0	1	1	0	1	2	2	1
	Care Council	16-21	0	2	2	0	3	3	6	0
	Young Inspectors	16	1	0	1	0	0	3	3	0
North Wales	Respite	3-19	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0
South East London	Young Fathers	16-21	1	0	0	1	4	0	2	2
	Mentor Scheme	16-26	0	1	0	1	17	0	0	17
Total			12	17	27	2	50	14	44	20

