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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the life of John (a pseudonym), a soccer coach working with disadvantaged young people. Six open-ended life history interviews over a ten week period ranging between 45-75 minutes were conducted. John described how soccer was fully entwined with aspects of his former delinquent and criminal lifestyle, including missing school lessons to play soccer, the fusion of soccer and youth violence, and competing in teams with local criminals. On the other hand, a soccer programme for people with limited opportunities helped him leave behind a life of delinquency, gang fighting, and selling drugs. Moreover, he came to understand that soccer could help him satisfy his desire for social recognition and fit with a relational narrative in a more socially legitimate way. This study provides an insight into how soccer was used to thwart a soccer coach's formal criminal lifestyle, and also warns against uncritical assumptions that sport can serve as a panacea for deviant behaviour.

Keywords: sport; disadvantaged individuals; crime; life history

51 Introduction

52 The problem of youth crime, delinquency and gang behaviour has been at the centre
53 of public and policy makers' attention for several decades (Halsey and White 2008).
54 Moreover, with worryingly high unemployment levels of 16-24 year olds in the UK (13.8%;
55 Office for National Statistics 2016) and the US (12.2%; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015),
56 there is widespread concern about the prospects for young people. A host of individual,
57 social, and environmental factors that place youth at risk of antisocial and criminal behaviour
58 have been identified. These factors include, but are not limited to, hyperactivity at school
59 (Bernat *et al.* 2012), weak family support networks (Thornberry *et al.* 2003), and the
60 availability of drugs and community disorganisation (Herrenkohl *et al.* 2000).

61 Attention has been directed towards how these challenges can be overcome, with
62 participation in organised sport frequently cited as an option (Coalter 2012; Forneris *et al.*
63 2013, Hartmann and Kwauk 2011, Haudenhuyse *et al.* 2012). Despite the intuitive appeal of
64 such a hypothesis, seldom has research explored *how* or *why* sport can help divert
65 disadvantaged adults and young people from antisocial and criminal behaviours. The present
66 study aims to explore these processes by adopting life history methods to detail the life of
67 John (a pseudonym), a soccer coach who worked for a sports programme in the UK aimed at
68 educating disadvantaged individuals and minimising their risk of delinquency and crime.

69 There is a general assumption within the literature that sport helps young people build
70 character and develop moral values. For instance, sport is thought to provide opportunities to
71 overcome obstacles, cooperate with teammates, develop self-control, display courage, and
72 persist in the face of defeat (Côté 2002, Shields and Bredemeier 1995, Zarrett *et al.* 2009).
73 Based on this supposition, a number of sports-based diversionary and education programmes
74 have been introduced in an attempt to reduce crime, promote positive developmental
75 experiences, and provide employment and vocational opportunities for disadvantaged young

76 people (Forneris *et al.* 2013). During the 1990s, for example, the *Midnight Basketball*
77 programmes used the popularity of basketball in poor inner-city areas across the United
78 States to reduce crime and prevent violence from being carried out by young males
79 (Hartmann 2001). Similarly, the popularity of soccer in disadvantaged areas of the UK has
80 led to an emergence of programmes grounded in the principle that involvement in soccer will
81 simply divert a young person's attention away from crime at specific times when they would
82 most likely engage in such behaviours (Nichols 1997, Tacon 2007).

83 More recently, there is growing recognition that sport provides much more than a
84 diversion and positive developmental opportunities exist through involvement in sport
85 (Sandford *et al.* 2008a). Although adolescence is a potentially challenging period for young
86 people, the positive youth development perspective asserts that young people are resources to
87 be developed, rather than problems to be solved (Roth *et al.* 1998). Young people possess
88 innate motivational systems that, with the appropriate support, mentoring and engagement in
89 prosocial behaviours, can lead to positive development (Ryan and Deci 2000, Larson 2006).
90 Organised sport activities may provide potentially favourable conditions for this process to
91 occur. For example, disadvantaged population groups have reported enhanced teamwork,
92 social skills, initiative, and physical skill development as a result of sport participation
93 (Gould *et al.* 2012). Indeed, sports contexts may be particularly important for young people
94 from disadvantaged populations because often the communities they reside in make positive
95 developmental experiences less likely (Gould *et al.* 2012).

96 An essential ingredient in sport participants' development is thought to be the positive
97 relationships formed with caring adult mentors (i.e. coaches, support workers) within a
98 carefully structured programme (Camiré *et al.* 2012, Haudenhuyse *et al.* 2012; Petitpas *et al.*
99 2004, Smoll and Smith 1989). The role of the sports coach extends well beyond skill
100 development, for instance, caring and humorous coaches have been linked to disadvantaged

101 sport participants approaching practice sessions with increased enjoyment and enthusiasm,
102 and holding positive future aspirations (Cowan *et al.* 2012). Caring coaching environments
103 have also been associated with enjoyment, positive attitudes towards coaches and teammates,
104 commitment, and prosocial behaviours (Fry and Gano-Overway 2010, Gano-Overway *et al.*
105 2009).

106 In contrast, participation in sport may not always lead to positive youth development
107 and involvement may even lead to negative consequences. For instance, in a study exploring
108 the relationship between sport participation and male violence, those who participated in high
109 school sport were more likely to demonstrate violent behaviours than their peers who did not
110 play sport (Kreager 2007). In addition, despite the supposition that sport serves as a
111 protective factor against alcohol and drug use, high school sport participation has also been
112 associated with substance abuse among young adults (Eitle *et al.* 2003). Sport participants
113 may also be subjected to discrimination (Oliver and Lusted 2014), physical, sexual, and
114 emotional abuse (Fasting *et al.* 2011, Stafford *et al.* 2013, Stirling 2013), and experiences of
115 coach intimidation and control (Bartholomew *et al.* 2009).

116 What is essential, therefore, is to explore the specific elements of sports that help
117 facilitate positive experiences and prosocial development. Aside from the importance of
118 caring coaches, there still remains little evidence concerning the effectiveness of sport and the
119 potential mechanisms that may lead to positive change in disadvantaged young people
120 (Coalter 2007, Draper and Coalter 2016, Sandford *et al.* 2006). Equally, there is a need to
121 investigate how sports participation encourages poor lifestyle choices and negative
122 consequences in certain circumstances, because the link between sport participation and
123 prosocial development may be overly simplistic (Crabbe 2006).

124 An approach to qualitative inquiry gaining popularity in the extant sport, exercise and
125 health literature is the life history method (e.g. Carless 2008, Carless and Douglas 2013,

126 Douglas and Carless 2015, Papathomas and Lavalley 2012, Smith and Sparkes 2008). The
127 life history method involves the narrating of an individual's experiences throughout their life
128 course; usually involving several interviews between researcher and storyteller (Atkinson
129 2002). Its strengths include being able to gain a holistic perspective of an individual's life to
130 help understand complex, subjective experiences and provides opportunities to explore
131 temporal patterns and threads that link the different stages of an individual's life (Plummer
132 2001). Exploring narratives within a life history can help the participant develop and maintain
133 a coherent identity by creating a story of their experiences (Crossley 2000). This approach
134 may be particularly effective in empowering individuals typically marginalised by society by
135 providing a platform for them to take control of their own stories (Bornat and Walmsley
136 2004, Stein and Mankowski 2004). It is no surprise then, that the life history approach has
137 frequently been used to explore disadvantage and crime, including explorations of transitions
138 in and out of crime (e.g. Oleson 2004; Simi *et al.* 2016), intermittent offending (Carlsson
139 2013), and masculinity narratives in Scotland (Holligan and Deuchar 2015). This method,
140 therefore, seems particularly suited to explore the role of sport in a disadvantaged
141 individual's life. The current study answers calls to hear the life stories of those from
142 underrepresented groups (Atkinson 2002) by presenting the life story of John; a soccer coach
143 working for a sport and education programme for disadvantaged individuals. By doing so,
144 this study aims to present an in-depth insight into the role of soccer in an individual's life.
145 The life history method provides a platform for John to describe his unique perspective on the
146 complexities that exist between sport and anti-/pro-social development, and his reasons *how*
147 and *why* participation in sport led him to these different outcomes.

148 **Method**

149 ***The Participant***

150 John is a 31-year-old soccer coach from the UK, who works full-time for a sports
151 programme aimed at educating young people not currently in education, employment, or
152 training. Through a combination of practical soccer activities, employability support and
153 lifestyle guidance, the programme aims to provide participants with the necessary attributes
154 to move into educational or employment opportunities following the programme. John's role,
155 therefore, extends well beyond developing the sport specific skills of the programme
156 attendees. His practical coaching sessions are underpinned by a variety of 'life skill themes'
157 (e.g. communication, teamwork, creativity) that can be transferred into other life domains
158 following involvement in the programme.

159 This career was preceded by sporadic spells of antisocial behaviour, gang fighting,
160 and selling illegal drugs. From a large working class family, John grew up in an urban area
161 recognised as one of the most deprived zones in the UK. In his early teenage years, he was
162 strongly affiliated with a local gang, regularly fighting against other groups of young people
163 from neighbouring areas. After leaving school with no qualifications, John worked several
164 labouring and retail jobs before becoming involved in selling illegal drugs in his mid 20s; a
165 lifestyle he became immersed in for two years. The emergence of a sports-based diversionary
166 programme in his local area gave him the opportunity to engage in a more legitimate activity.
167 It is within this programme that John has spent much of his adult life as a participant,
168 apprentice coach, and now full-time coach.

169 ***Procedure***

170 Following approval from a university ethics committee, data were collected through a
171 series of life history interviews between John and the first author. Prior to the first interview,
172 John provided full written consent and was informed that he could withdraw from the
173 research at any time and that all data would be stored and presented anonymously. The study
174 was embedded within an interpretivist paradigm that assumes a relativist ontology and a

175 subjectivist epistemology (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Interpretivism views that everyone
176 sees the world from a different perspective, thus multiple realities exist so it is impossible to
177 establish universal truth. Moreover, the researcher is thought to play an active role in the
178 research process by working together with the participant to create meaning collaboratively
179 (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Within the current study, the first author was not a neutral
180 participant with a detached view, but an involved participant who helped compose an in-
181 depth account of John's life story. Moreover, the first author was an 'insider' (Carless and
182 Douglas 2013) who had previously worked as a sport coach in a similar programme to the
183 one John now works. This may have shaped interpretations of John's story through shared
184 experiences and helped to build initial rapport ('...I trust you as a person, so I've got
185 absolutely no problems opening up and telling you').

186 Interviews were held in a private room located at the venue in which John worked as a
187 coach. This ensured John was at ease and gave the first author an insight into John's natural
188 social environment (Werner and Schoepfle 1987). In total, six interviews ranging between
189 45-75 minutes in length were conducted over a ten week period. Although we accept that
190 multiple versions of John's stories exist, six interviews was deemed a sufficient critical data
191 mass to tell this particular version of the story. The first interview provided John with an
192 overview of the research processes and encouraged him to reflect upon his early childhood
193 memories. This initial interview also provided an opportunity to build rapport and familiarise
194 John with the interview setting. Subsequent interviews discussed the various stages of John's
195 life in a non-linear manner. Conducting the interviews in this way was not discouraged and
196 adhered to the open, flexible and interactive nature of a life history interview (Plummer
197 2001). This led to some topics being discussed in more detail than others, hence the varying
198 lengths of interviews. During each interview, the first author attempted to act as a 'witness'
199 of John's experience by actively listening and affirming John's narration of his story (Stein

200 and Mankowski 2004). This was achieved by encouraging John to describe events and issues
201 (e.g. ‘tell me about your early experiences as a participant in the programme’), but also to
202 express his feelings and emotions during such times (e.g. ‘how did you feel during this
203 time?’). At the beginning of each interview, John was provided with an opportunity to add or
204 clarify anything that had been discussed in the previous interview. This was also a useful
205 ‘ice-breaker’ that settled John back into the interview environment. Directly following each
206 interview, the digital recordings were listened to in full and a written summary was produced
207 by the first author to allow immediate reflection of the data and key points. These written
208 summaries were then shared with the co-author who offered and encouraged further
209 reflection on the data. Each interview was transcribed by the first author before the
210 subsequent interview and shared with the co-author who acted as a ‘critical friend’ (Smith
211 and Sparkes 2006). Their role was not to ‘agree’ or achieve consensus but rather to encourage
212 reflexivity by challenging each others’ construction of knowledge (Patton 2002).

213 *Analysis of Narrative*

214 Adopting the position of *story analysts*, the authors employed analytical procedures,
215 strategies, and techniques to explore John’s story in terms of content and structure (Smith and
216 Sparkes 2009). This approach has been used previously in life history research in sport (e.g.,
217 Carless and Douglas 2008, Carless and Douglas 2009), and enabled us to link John’s stories
218 to relevant theoretical concepts (Smith and Sparkes, 2009). Moreover, the authors were
219 concerned with the *whats* of the story (i.e. what happened during John’s life), rather than the
220 *hows* (i.e. how he told the story; Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Specifically, the authors were
221 interested in the organisation of John’s story and how key themes identified in the structure
222 of his story changed or developed throughout various stages of his life (Smith and Sparkes
223 2009). We were also conscious of embracing John’s stories as complex, flexible, and multi-
224 dimensional by embracing contradictions and conflicts in the stories. The first author

225 conducted several close readings of the written transcripts and summaries to become
226 immersed within the data. Annotations were placed in the margins of the transcripts which
227 were grouped together to identify emerging themes. Meaningful quotations representing the
228 key themes were then placed on a timeline of the key stages of his life (i.e. early school years,
229 teenage years, young adult life, present day) to allow us to see how these key themes changed
230 or developed throughout John's life. Where quotes have been used in the manuscript to
231 illustrate these key themes, minor amendments have been made to the wording of some to
232 protect the anonymity of the participant. There is a risk within the story analyst approach of
233 disengaging the participant from the analytical process (McMahon and McGannon 2016). We
234 attempted to prevent this and ensure the meaning of John's narrative was not lost in these
235 amendments by providing him with the opportunity to comment on our interpretations of his
236 life story. John believed the interpretations of his life story reflected his experiences and
237 feelings; therefore, no further amendments were made to the manuscript following this
238 process. He concluded that 'the stories are great, they're detailed, and they are stories I still
239 tell the young participants I work with today'.

240 **Results and Discussion**

241 *Early Childhood Memories*

242 John recalls fond early childhood memories in which he spoke of a relatively
243 harmonious upbringing living with his mother, father, and five siblings.

244 Home life has always been alright with my Mum and Dad, we had quite a lot
245 done for us, Mum and Dad have always looked after us... We always had to
246 work for things; we had a good moral upbringing. If we ever wanted money or
247 anything like that we were always told 'you've got duties round about the
248 house'. Taking the bins out was my job.

249 Strong family support networks have been consistently underscored as a protective
250 factor against gang involvement and delinquent behaviour (Thornberry *et al.* 2003), yet
251 John's story provides an anomaly as, around the age of seven or eight, John began to engage
252 in a variety of mischievous behaviours, often citing boredom and thrill seeking as the cause.
253 John reflected upon these early childhood memories.

254 I'd probably say I was mischievous in a way because I was hanging about with
255 people who got up to no good. We would light fires and stuff like that when
256 we were younger. I don't know if I told you but when I was younger I used to
257 love the sound of windows smashing and we would go smash windows or
258 glass bottles. But I'd imagine we weren't the only ones who done all that kind
259 of stuff, I think that was just 'run of the mill' for kids our age. We'd play
260 football, we would light fires, we would catch bees and wasps and try to get
261 them to fight each other in beetroot jars.

262 John's narrative suggests that he misbehaved as a child because of the enjoyment he
263 felt from doing so; a popular motive for young people engaging in illegitimate activities
264 (Sharkey *et al.* 2011). John also discusses how engaging in such behaviour was 'run of the
265 mill for kids our age', perhaps conforming to social norms within his community. John
266 continued to describe himself as a child and highlighted his love for soccer.

267 But I think as a kid I was definitely outgoing, and very active. If you asked me
268 how to describe myself that would be it. Still sporty, I loved football, I loved
269 the local football team and I was always really into that. I used to go to the
270 games with my uncle.

271 At this stage in John's life, he revealed little tension between his story and the broader
272 'tough masculinity' cultural narrative of young boys in urban Scotland (Lawson, 2013).
273 Alongside the mischief, soccer represented a hobby to partake in with his peers, and as a

274 means of entertainment to enjoy with his family; perhaps unsurprising as soccer is a popular
275 activity within disadvantaged areas of the UK (Tacon 2007).

276 *The Slide into Truancy and Youth Violence*

277 At the age of 15 (a year before his statutory school leaving date), John left school with
278 no formal qualifications. He expressed his dislike for secondary school in the few years
279 preceding this.

280 I never enjoyed school. I wasn't a daft boy by any stretch, but I just didn't like
281 school. When I was about 14 I could see myself not going to school...I only
282 used to go in on a Monday and Tuesday for football, we got a football period
283 on a Monday and a Tuesday.

284 Truancy from school is a risk factor associated with gang involvement (Hawkins *et al.*
285 2000), and at a stage of compulsory education where John was losing interest, only the appeal
286 of soccer would tempt him to attend school. John reflected upon his reasons for truanting.

287 It's a hard one, even now I hate classroom-based stuff, even at 31 years of age
288 I hate it. Hate is a strong word, I dislike it. I've got a low attention span, even
289 now I love practical work, always have done. Whether that's been on the field,
290 at secondary school I didn't enjoy that kind of work. Being in a classroom all
291 day was difficult to deal with.

292 When discussing this stage of his life, a strong theme emerged concerning his desire
293 to play soccer at school. John recalls the lengths he went to just to attend a soccer class not on
294 his timetable, emphasising a potentially disruptive consequence of being in love with soccer.

295 So I'm in there on a Tuesday morning and this teacher is talking about theory
296 and I'm like 'oh my god!', I'm looking out and seeing this football and I'm like
297 'I'm not going back to electronics'. The following week I hid in the changing
298 room when the register was being taken and I went out to join the other class

299 for football... Then I got caught, and I got banned from the school football
300 team, banned for the trials, everything, I was raging!

301 It was at this same time that John became involved in a local gang; a path John
302 described as 'inevitable' for youngsters growing up in his area, suggesting a helplessness to
303 counter broad social norms. This also concurs with evidence suggesting that young people of
304 low socioeconomic status are most at risk from joining a gang (Rizzo 2003). John described
305 this period in his life.

306 I started running about with some silly boys from my area, colourful people,
307 people from well-known families, and I remember there was the soft drink
308 factory and when we were 15 we had wire clippers, clipped the back of the
309 fence and went into the back of the truck and stole crates of soft drink. We
310 took it to the local shops and sold it, that was us getting money. There was a
311 shop with an old shop keeper and we used to jump in and steal crisps and stuff.

312 This antisocial behaviour is juxtaposed by John continuing to recall a 'supportive
313 upbringing' whereby his parents continually made attempts to instil moral values in him and
314 his siblings.

315 Over the course of the next couple of weeks my dad was saying 'you're going
316 back to school', I said 'no', he says 'if you're not going to school you're going
317 to work to make money'. So he managed to get me out, get me a job and I was
318 making some money. It was casual work but I was getting money. So my dad
319 was still drilling the right things into me, making sure I got work.

320 In addition to his parents' role in making them 'good people' with 'strong values',
321 John described how his parents ensured they were always well looked after.

322 They've always been there. They could see the competition in the street, who
323 was wearing the best clothes and stuff like that... I wouldn't say we always

324 had the most expensive stuff, but we were always somewhere in the middle,
325 making sure we would always fit in, we were never the outcast.

326 Despite empirical evidence to the contrary (e.g. Howell and Egley 2005, Thornberry
327 *et al.* 2003), this continual family support was not enough to prevent John from swapping
328 soccer for more antisocial activities.

329 All of a sudden playing football and scoring a goal wasn't enough anymore. So
330 we started bringing boys down from our school and we'd go down straight
331 after school to fight *The Nasties* which gave us a bigger team. Before we knew
332 it there was hundreds of us, we'd fight this group and that group. Basically the
333 fighting would consist of, there's a massive field about 500 yards long and we
334 would be running back and forward fighting, throwing bricks, in and out of
335 bushes.

336 It became apparent from John's narrative that his emerging lifestyle had benefits.
337 We had Katy, Louise, Emma, and Claire who were all good looking girls and
338 they used to go about with us and then we had Ronnie who was like the alpha
339 male of the group... When you were with him when you were younger the
340 girls were always there so you always went with that and the girls hung about.
341 We built dens and we used to play dares and stuff like that.

342 In addition to this advantage, the importance of social identity and being recognised
343 by his peers as being 'part of the gang' began to emerge.

344 Sometimes as younger people you kind of need something to identify yourself
345 with. In the summer we played football all the time but in the winter when we
346 couldn't play football we would stand about in spare bits of ground and you
347 could see other people from other areas standing and then we just go start
348 throwing bricks at each other, chasing each other up and down. It was never in

349 my nature to be that type of person but I went with my pals, I just kind of got
350 involved.

351 In addition to satisfying a need for discipline, protection, and excitement, gang
352 involvement has also been related to a sense of belongingness and identification with peers
353 (Sharkey *et al.* 2011). In John's case, peer influence and attention from the opposite sex
354 overrode his natural disposition and familial support. Being a member of the gang
355 represented an opportunity to be recognised within his social networks as one of the 'in
356 crowd' or 'cool kids'. John also recalls the powerfully motivating potential consequences had
357 he chosen not to join the gang.

358 But my pals were there, and I had to do it... Otherwise I'd be called names.
359 'You're a shitbag', sorry for the language. But that's what we would have been
360 called. Everyone would know you, saying 'he's rubbish', 'he doesn't run
361 down', 'what's the point in you being here?' You would get slagged.

362 These relationships with peers are an influential component of adolescent
363 development and one that can lead to both positive and negative outcomes (Kelly and
364 Anderson 2012). John's narrative suggests that peer pressure along with the opportunity to
365 gain a valued identity were contributory factors to joining the gang. This need for social
366 recognition appeared in his other major pastime.

367 ...with the people I played football with I was always the best player, and I
368 didn't want to go and not be the best player. I didn't want to go and hear
369 somebody telling me I wasn't good enough. I was quite scared of rejection.

370 John was content with being recognised as the best soccer player in a weak team,
371 despite a plethora of opportunities.

372 ...when we were in Spain the second time, Craig Blair (pseudonym) was there
373 and he asked me to go for a trial with FC United (pseudonym) and I said

374 'yeah', but I didn't go... He said 'I'll get you a trial with FC United because
375 you were magnificent out there'. And I said 'yeah yeah that sounds good'. I
376 was then telling everybody I'm getting a trial, then I didn't go.

377 John appeared to value the praise and acknowledgements received from his coaches
378 and teammates, which seemed to prevent him from taking a chance with a better team and not
379 being recognised as being the best player. Instead of pursuing more challenging opportunities
380 with a better team, John chose to continue to play soccer alongside his close friends for his
381 local team. The relationships he had with his peers were influential in John joining the gang,
382 and it also appears that these relationships with peers and teammates appeared to influence
383 the decisions he made about where he would play soccer. This may reflect a relational
384 narrative which prioritises relationships and connectedness and whereby on-going
385 engagement in sport is determined by relationships with others, rather than performance itself
386 (Douglas and Carless 2015). Indeed, the role of social relationships and a sense of community
387 whereby sport participants depend on one another is a particularly influencing motivating
388 factor among disadvantaged communities (Draper and Coalter 2016, Sandford *et al.* 2006).

389 Despite enjoying the 'buzz' he got from being part of the gang for three years, and the
390 recognition he received from his peers, John recalls an incident whereby a fight against a
391 rival gang led to him being held in police custody; an incident he believes brought an end to
392 his gang involvement and a step-change in his story to align with social norms.

393 I was still a minor at the time. I remember the policeman coming in and saying
394 'your dad's here'... I remember the morning quite vividly, I was sitting in the
395 living room, my dad was facing across me sitting having his cereal reading the
396 paper... He walks by me and I just remember the sound of the spoon hitting
397 the bowl as he drops it then he just punched me an absolute cracker. He was

398 like 'if you ever embarrass me like that again, I've not brought you up to be
399 like that'. Since that time I was like right, I need to put a stop to this.

400 John recalls how his parents were influential in his decision to leave the gang. In
401 particular, his father had a central role in his eventual retreat from gang life: 'I wasn't a
402 troublesome teenager but I could have been, but I think my parents made sure that I didn't.' A
403 framework that can be used to help understand the processes involved in disengagement from
404 gangs is Ebaugh's (1988) role exit theory. This theory outlines the various stages of role
405 transitions an individual goes through to establish a new identity. In the previous scenario,
406 John described how being held in police custody and his father's reaction was important in
407 his initial disengagement from the gang. These 'turning points' are an important stage of role
408 transition, and John's account of the influence of his father is consistent with previous gang
409 research emphasising role families play in disengagement from gangs (Decker *et al.* 2014,
410 Giordano *et al.* 2002). Subsequently, John 'stopped hanging about with the people I used to
411 hang about with' and started working nightshifts with his father in various factories until the
412 age of 19. This period lasted until the age of 24. Unfortunately, the links John had made with
413 the gang in his teens proved difficult to break.

414 *Drugs, Soccer, and an Organised Sport Programme*

415 At the age of 24, those who he had formed relationships with during his teenage years
416 were influential in introducing him to selling drugs:

417 Well my job was coming to an end and we got an opportunity from my pal's
418 older brother who was into that for a long time. We went to a party one night
419 and my pal said 'look we've got a chance of taking a quarter of cocaine' and
420 then we'd split it into grams, it was never full grams, we'd weigh it in at 0.7, rip
421 people off because people don't carry scales about with them. Then we'd sell it
422 and you'd make money off it. As I said, at that party we made a bit of money,

423 then before you know it we started selling it to other people. Then through
424 circles of playing football and stuff like that you meet other people and you
425 start getting into the business a bit and you know a bit about it. You start
426 becoming quite comfortable in it, knowing the prices, what kind of stuff is
427 good, and before you know it you're so caught up in it it's unbelievable.

428 John began eulogising over his drug selling days.

429 I could go and buy the best of gear, be the top level of society. Wearing
430 Armani, having no thought for value. Just going into shops and spending my
431 money, 'I'll buy that, it's £400, I'll just buy that.'

432 As well as the materialistic rewards associated with his lifestyle, other advantages
433 were revealed:

434 For me it was just about having this standing amongst all my peers. Years ago
435 I use to go about with James and fight the East Street gang so I was in amongst
436 that crowd. But now I was firmly one of the crowd, I wasn't somebody that
437 had to hang on, I had people coming up to me, the feeling of people coming to
438 me and asking if they could borrow money from me.

439 At this stage of his life John continued to play soccer for local amateur teams, often
440 using this as an opportunity to sell drugs.

441 I'm going to the football at the weekend, playing football with the guy that I
442 get it from, weighing him in, and I'm walking away with unbelievable amounts
443 of money, crazy amounts, probably more than I am making now.

444 Soccer was also an opportunity to meet known criminals; individuals he might never
445 have met had it not been for soccer.

446 I mean I'm not just talking about notorious characters from an area, I'm talking
447 about notorious crime clans. Going out with them at the weekends, thinking

448 nothing is gonna happen with me, feeling untouchable, thinking you were with
449 gangsters. Simply because I played football with them, and then I done that
450 with them as well, I thought this is brilliant man.

451 Despite the adage that sport builds character and is an effective diversionary activity
452 from criminal and anti-social behaviours (Crabbe 2000, Nichols 1997, Skinner *et al.* 2008),
453 John's story reveals that participation in sport does not automatically lead to positive
454 outcomes. As a child, John skipped classes at school so that he could play soccer with his
455 friends. In later years, going to the same place that he played soccer led John to begin
456 throwing bricks at other gangs of boys, and playing soccer in his mid-twenties gave him an
457 opportunity to sell drugs to teammates and meet likeminded individuals. As such, John's
458 story appears to support the belief that the relationship between sport and anti-social
459 behaviour is complex and contains many paradoxes (Ekholm 2013).

460 John now loved being recognised by his peers for the 'standing in the community' he
461 now had as a drug dealer. John reinforces the notion that street level drug dealing is
462 associated with enhanced social status (Collison 1996). Moreover, he corroborates the idea
463 that the status, power, and recognition associated with selling drugs were rewards that could
464 not be obtained within legitimate employment (VanNostrand and Tewksbury 1999).

465 ...me and him were going to football, all the other boys were turning up in
466 work vans, working hard for their living and I'm like 'pfff working is for losers
467 man'. I used to say things like that, 'working is the loser's game', then you
468 think, why did I think that because the whole period of my life apart from that
469 two year period I always worked. I done nightshift and all sorts of different
470 jobs. But there came a period when I was driven by money, I wanted all the
471 best clothes. I could go out, I was in amongst it, going to the nightclubs at the

472 weekends. Having all the best of gear, talking to all the nicest of girls thinking
473 'I'll get you a drink'.

474 John had described clearly enjoying aspects of the criminal lifestyle, so when asked
475 what made him change his life, he responded: 'Cheesy...Soccer Crew'. Soccer Crew (a
476 pseudonym) was the name of the educational programme where John participated in weekly
477 sessions at a venue in his local area and competed in monthly tournaments against teams
478 from other areas. John reflected on the early days as a participant in the programme.

479 It was brilliant, Andy taking the sessions. We used to get loads of numbers...
480 there used to be 25/ 30 people at one session and it used to be carnage, but
481 brilliant. There used to be people coming from loads of different areas. It was
482 just a new concept so loads of people were buying into it... It was brilliant to
483 meet all these different people.

484 John went on to discuss his reasons for joining the programme.

485 Football has always been my number one passion throughout my whole life,
486 I've loved it. Whether it's been playing out on the street, playing in school
487 teams, or playing *Football Manager*. Everything that I've done, there's always
488 been a football element. There's never really been a part of my life where
489 football hasn't been there.

490 After spending six months attending the programme on a weekly basis and growing
491 relationships with programme staff, John was offered the position of apprentice coach. He
492 was subsequently invited to travel with the programme organisers and 16 other young people
493 to Spain. Here he would spend three weeks participating in coaching sessions and gaining his
494 first ever qualification. It was during this time that John decided to stop selling drugs.

495 If there was one thing that was going to take me away from the life I was
496 leading at that time it would have been a football organisation. Luckily for me

497 the programme did pop up at that time. I was in the youth projects and Dan
498 came in and he just asked me to get involved in football, I just thought 'aye', I
499 thought I was a good football player and thought yes, here's a chance to
500 showcase my talents and be again held in a good standing within another
501 community.

502 Providing opportunities for youth to be involved in leadership roles has been found to
503 be associated with increased developmental experiences (Hanson and Larson 2007).
504 Moreover, the promotion of autonomy and peer leadership is thought to be a particular
505 effective coaching strategy when working with disadvantaged individuals (Flett *et al.* 2013).
506 This should, however, only be provided when participants have the necessary confidence and
507 self-esteem to seize the leadership opportunity (Cowan *et al.* 2012). As an apprentice coach,
508 John was given more responsibilities during the soccer sessions, which made him realise that
509 his need for social recognition could be satisfied in a more legitimate way.

510 When we spoke about the whole drugs thing it was about having a standing in
511 the community, whereas now I actually had a standing in something that
512 meant something. Alan was letting me take warm-ups, when I think about that
513 now I'm like 'warm-ups?' That's so basic but at the time I was getting this
514 responsibility. It was brilliant, we were looked upon as leaders in the group.

515 John's desire for social status and recognition led him into a gang lifestyle in his early
516 years, drug dealing in his adult life, and now into soccer coaching. John also highlighted
517 another important reason for his lifestyle change.

518 It was the people in the programme that changed me, it wasn't football.
519 Football was the tool to get myself involved, it was the people who helped me.
520 Definitely, without a doubt. I would always say that.

521 Organised sport programmes for disadvantaged populations have been recognised for
522 their impact on the behaviour and engagement of their participants. However, this positive
523 impact is more likely to sustain if positive relationships with adult mentors are formed
524 (Sandford *et al.* 2008b). John reflected on the influence of his boss and others in the
525 programme.

526 He (the head coach) made so much difference to what I've done and where I
527 am. I'll never forget it, he's been a massive part of my development and where
528 I am. No matter who I meet, I would never have a bad word to say about him.
529 Simply because he's had such a massive impact on my life. Not just my career,
530 my life... They invested time in me, they invested money... Even to this day I
531 could probably pick the phone up if I ever needed to talk to him.

532 John suggests that the appeal of playing soccer was the 'hook' to get him involved in
533 the programme, however, participating in the programme and becoming an apprentice coach
534 was not enough to lure him away from his previous lifestyle. Instead, the genuine care and
535 attention shown by the head coach towards him, often investing personal resources in him
536 was vital in John's personal transition during the programme. John described the effect the
537 coaches of the organisation had on him.

538 I was looking at what Brad and Andrew were doing every single day, they're
539 out coaching, they're loving it, getting paid well and getting to do these kind of
540 things. That was when it really clicked that I wanted to be a football coach.

541 ***Present Day***

542 For the last 4 years, John has been working full-time for the organisation as a sports
543 coach delivering sport and education programmes for disadvantaged adults and young people.
544 John discussed the impact this job has had on him.

545 That's the sort of stuff I strive for now, to help people. Whereas I think before I
546 was striving after the wrong type of recognition, certainly the wrong type of
547 standing in the community. I want people to see me being successful at
548 something good, worthwhile, something I can make a difference from.

549 John still indicates that his desire for recognition remains, but now his role is
550 to care for and support the young people he works with; in a similar way to how he
551 was supported through the programme and away from his illegitimate lifestyle. John
552 continued on this theme.

553 For me, it's my duty, I feel it's my duty to make sure I get all these guys to
554 move on. See in ten weeks time I want to meet these guys walking through
555 town or walking through a shopping centre and I say 'alright Neil how you
556 doing?' 'I'm good yeah, I've just got a day off today, the kids are fine, I'm
557 going on holiday, I've got money. Thanks'. It's not about getting the thanks but
558 it's just that he's done it. I managed to push another one there, because
559 somebody done it for me and I just feel that now I'm in a position where I can
560 help. I want to help, it's not just about being here and turning up every day and
561 getting paid because I don't get any financial incentives for getting people jobs
562 or college places but it makes me feel good when somebody comes in with a
563 college letter saying I've got an unconditional place, I'm like 'yes there you
564 go!'

565 The use of past life experiences to help new generations of young people resembles
566 *generativity* (Erikson, 1968), in which John can pass on care, empathy, and support to the
567 young people he works with in a similar way to how the head coach of the organisation
568 supported him. Such caring, empathic coaching behaviours have been found to be particularly
569 important for disadvantaged populations (Cowan *et al.* 2012, Gould *et al.* 2012).

570 Disengaging from criminal behaviour is complex, and often there are various residual
571 consequences as a result of detachment from these roles (Decker *et al.* 2014). For instance,
572 former gang members often still hold social ties and emotional attachments to their former
573 gangs and associated individuals (Pyrooz *et al.* 2010). The transition from career criminal to
574 football coach is not absolute and John admits to still receiving invitations to reunite with
575 friends from his past, but he prefers to distance himself entirely from that environment.

576 There's some of my old pals I don't hang about with anymore. They'll say 'let's
577 get a night out'. During the bank holiday they were all like 'do you want to go
578 out on Sunday?' I was like I'm not going out and they were like 'why not man?
579 It'll be brilliant'. And do you know what? I bet you it was brilliant but I know
580 when they go they're going to be taking drugs, and I can't be going into that
581 environment because it might remind me of who I was. All it takes is for
582 something very unlucky to happen, like holding someone's stuff. Jailed,
583 criminal record, everything I've done, everything I stand for is out the window.
584 I wouldn't be a role model anymore.

585 John appreciates that his life has been difficult, but he is now satisfied with how he is
586 now looked upon by his family.

587 So now my family can be proud of me and I know they are. That's probably
588 where I get that now, I've got that standing in the house now, I'm making my
589 own money, I'm looking to get my own house, I've got my own motor. I don't
590 rely on anybody. And now my mum probably looks at me and can go 'my
591 boy's a good one'.

592 **Summary**

593 The aim of this study was to produce an account of the life of John; a soccer
594 coach who works for a sport and education programme in the UK. Overall, John's

595 story provides insight into the role sport and status played in his personal
596 development. John's story revealed that the sport context presented a legitimate
597 alternative for satisfying his need for social recognition, and this may be generalisable
598 to others in areas with high levels of social deprivation. Throughout the interviews,
599 John's narrative favoured descriptive accounts of life events over the emotional
600 experience associated with these experiences. It is not uncommon for males from
601 disadvantaged backgrounds to reveal a 'detached emotionality' which is consistent
602 with the 'macho identity' that emerges from working class culture in the UK
603 (Holligan and Deuchar 2015). All narratives are considered performances rather than
604 windows to experiential truth (Reisman 2008, Smith and Sparkes 2009) and John can
605 be seen to perform a version of himself that upholds these masculinities. Future
606 research, could explore innovative qualitative methods that seek to penetrate this
607 narrative performance in order to tell an alternative, more embodied, side to the same
608 story.

609 Adopting life history methods provided an opportunity to explore complex
610 factors that may have not been captured by other forms of qualitative research (i.e.
611 structured interviews). By presenting an in-depth account of John's life we were able
612 to reveal various tensions, misalignments of narrative and moral dilemmas that he has
613 faced across his life course (McLeod 1997; Smith and Sparkes 2009). At times he
614 enjoyed aspects of his criminal past. At other times, he was ashamed of what he had
615 done. Consistent throughout John's story, however, was the relational narrative and
616 John placed a significant value on the importance of relationships across his life
617 course (Douglas and Carless 2015). For instance, he valued his relations with peers as
618 an adolescent gang member, and spoke of how these relationships prevented him from
619 pursuing more challenging opportunities as a young soccer player. His story also

620 revealed that it was his relationships with coaches and mentors that helped divert him
621 from delinquency and criminal behaviour. Therefore, John's story supports research
622 highlighting the importance of social relationships within sport as a mechanism
623 toward personal development among disadvantaged individuals (Draper and Coalter
624 2016, Gould *et al.* 2012, Sandford *et al.* 2006), and also the importance of
625 relationships and stable employment in the positive 'career' changes of former
626 criminals (Sampson and Laub 2005). From a broad perspective, John's words support
627 the potential significance of these programmes in the personal development of
628 disadvantaged individuals. It is important, therefore, to educate coaches and mentors
629 within these programmes about the importance of developing caring, supportive
630 coaching environments with programme participants. Policy makers, programme
631 organisers and researchers must therefore work closer together to help develop a more
632 evidence-based approach to the design and delivery of such programmes.

633 Nonetheless, John's story also challenges the simplistic assumption often held
634 about the developmental potential of sports. Despite the belief that sport is a potential
635 panacea for several social issues, in John's case it was also synonymous with his
636 times of gang membership and criminal activity. Hence, this life story not only sheds
637 light on the role soccer can play in positive personal development and reducing
638 criminal activity, but also aspects of sport that can be fully integrated into a criminal
639 lifestyle. John's story provides substance to the argument that mere involvement in
640 sport does not automatically lead to prosocial behaviours and character building, and a
641 more critical approach is required (Coalter 2007; Giulianotti 2004). It appears that the
642 sport-antisocial behaviour and crime relationship is complex (Ekholm 2013), and
643 involves interactions between various personal, social, cultural and contextual factors.
644 It would be beneficial for future researchers and crime prevention practitioners to

645 adopt a holistic perspective, rather than an individual risk factor approach, and
646 explore the sport-antisocial behaviour and crime discourse by hearing more life stories
647 from sport participants from underrepresented groups (Atkinson 2002).

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