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‘I’m proud of what I achieved; I’m also ashamed of what I done’: a soccer coach’s tale of sport, status, and criminal behaviour

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‘I’m proud of what I achieved; I’m also ashamed of what I done’: A soccer coach’s tale of
sport, status, and criminal behaviour

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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

Word count: 7830

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Douglas and Carless 2015, Papathomas and Lavalley 2012, Smith and Sparkes 2008). The life history method involves the narrating of an individual's experiences throughout their life course; usually involving several interviews between researcher and storyteller (Atkinson 1998). Its strengths include being able to gain a holistic perspective of an individual's life to help understand complex, subjective experiences and provides opportunities to explore temporal patterns and threads that link the different stages of an individual's life (Plummer 2001). Exploring narratives within a life history can help the participant develop and maintain a coherent identity by creating a story of their experiences (Crossley 2000). This approach may be particularly effective in empowering individuals typically marginalised by society by providing a platform for them to take control of their own stories (Bornat and Walmsley 2004, Stein and Mankowski 2004). It is no surprise then, that the life history approach has frequently been used to explore disadvantage and crime, including explorations of transitions in and out of crime (e.g. Oleson 2004; Simi *et al.* 2016), intermittent offending (Carlsson 2013), and masculinity narratives in Scotland (Holligan and Deuchar 2015). This method, therefore, seems particularly suited to explore the role of sport in a disadvantaged individual's life. The current study answers calls to hear the life stories of those from underrepresented groups (Atkinson 2002) by presenting the life story of John; a soccer coach working for a sport and education programme for disadvantaged individuals. By doing so, this study aims to present an in-depth insight into the role of soccer in an individual's life. The life history method provides a platform for John to describe his unique perspective on the complexities that exist between sport and anti-/pro-social development, and his reasons *how* and *why* participation in sport led him to these different outcomes.

Method

The Participant

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

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

Procedure

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

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

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

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

Analysis of Narrative

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

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

Results and Discussion

Early Childhood Memories

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

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

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

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

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

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

Drugs, Soccer, and an Organised Sport Programme

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

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

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

John began eulogising over his drug selling days.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was the people in the programme that changed me, it wasn't football.

Football was the tool to get myself involved, it was the people who helped me.

Definitely, without a doubt. I would always say that.

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

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

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

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

Present Day

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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