Violent crime can be a method for young men to achieve masculinity

Collier (2004) states that ' The relationship between men, masculinities, and crime has, over the past decade, assumed an increasing prominence within criminology.' This essay will explore the idea that men use violent crime in order to achieve masculinity. This essay will use Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity (1995) as a main theory in relating masculinity and violent crime. In addition to this, it will also look at power and how power shapes masculinity in society. Also, the idea that there has been a crisis of masculinity will be discussed and how this is able to link masculinity and violent crime together. Also, the environment of prisons will also be analysed and how these environments are a crucial place for men to assert their masculinity and gain status amongst the other inmates. In all, this essay will discuss the idea that the use of violent crime is a part of the male gender that men use to achieve masculinity, which is now seen as acceptable in society today.

Generally, masculinity is the set of social and psychological characteristics that a society considers to be typical or suitable for men. Individually, masculinity is what an individual man believes it is to be a man. Connell (1995) argues it is more suitable to discuss masculinities rather than masculinity because what it means to be a masculine can change due to time, place and the individual.

In society, crime is viewed as an activity that is generally carried out by men aged between 15 and 25 year olds. Men are more likely to commit violent crimes, sexual crimes and robberies compared to women. It is stressed that males are more likely to be repeat offenders and end up in prison several times. This may be due to the fact that they are carrying out violent

behaviours in order to achieve masculinity and a sense of power and control for themselves to inflict upon their peers and enemies as a way to show that they are in control. These type of behaviours are most likely to be carried out on those individuals who struggle economically and socially.

When looking at the idea that young men carry out violent behaviour to achieve masculinity, a question to ask is why men? Cohen (1955) answers this and states that ' Delinquency is mostly male delinquency.' This theory would suggest that males are most likely to carry out violent behaviour in comparison to females. This idea is further supported by Braithwaite (1989) who highlights that ' Crime is committed disproportionately by men.' Another reason why men are more likely to carry out violent crimes is explained by Silversti and Crowther-Dowey (2008) who state that men are more likely to be stopped and searched, arrested, remanded in custody and more likely to end up in prison. This suggets that because men feel that they are viewed negatively by others in society, they will act on this assumption and carry out the violent behaviours which they believe will allow them to achieve masculinity.

Connell (1995) highlights that there are five different types of masculinities. These include the ' Hegemonic Masculinity' which is seen as the most dominant masculinity in any social setting, which most men desire to be. Only a minority of men will achieve this type of masculinity. Second, ' Complicit Masculinity' which is viewed as men who do not conform to the hegemonic ideal, but they still benefit from the presence of the dominant male. These types of males recognise that their place in society is not one of dominance, but they are happy to benefit from the side-line due to the

dominance of the hegemonic male. Following this, the next type of masculinity in the hierarchy is ' Subordinated Masculinity.' These men are marginalised both physically and socially. Connell (1995) states that this type of dominance can take place in various ways including political exclusion, cultural exclusion, street violence, cultural abuse and economic discrimination. Connell further argues that the dominance of the heterosexual male and the subordination of homosexual males is the best way to describe this type of masculinity in society today. The next type of masculinity in the hierarchy is ' Marginalised Masculinity' who are often the non-white population who are from a low socio-economic class. These type of men are often marginalised because of the expression of the dominant hegemonic male. However, it is seen that they may display characteristics of hegemonic masculinity as a response to their marginalisation. Finally, the lowest masculinity seen in the hierarchy is ' Protest Masculinity.' Marginalised masculinities often look at the rebellious behaviour of young men. Connell (1995) argues that with these marginalised men, protest masculinity can exist. He argues that protest masculinity is built on the foundations of working class solidarity, which is viewed as a main element of marginalised masculinity. Protest masculinities embody a claim to power at a regional level, but do not have the economic resources and the authority to achieve this goal. As a result of this, these type of masculine's can display aggressive behaviour, as well as self-destructive, risk-taking behaviour. From this, violence is an available resource which can be used by young men in order to show others their manhood and authority. Overall, all men desire to become the hegemonic masculine with their social context.

Arguing Connell's theory, Messerschmidt (1993) argues that hegemonic masculinity is an expression of masculinity characterised by ' authority, control, competitive individualism, independence, aggressiveness and the capacity for violence.' He argues that men strive to achieve and purport a masculine gender identity, a presentation to the wider audience that they are a man. In order to achieve this identity, they use various resources such as violence. Messerschmidt (1993) labels this as ' doing masculinity.' He highlights that when normal middle-class expressions of masculinity are unavailable, men often turn to criminality as an alternative.

Freud explains masculinities through observations. Freud (1933) highlights the ' Oedipus Complex' where boys aged three to six initially have sexual desire for the mother but this is then removed by the fear of the father. Freud (1933) also points out the ' Wolf Man' where boys are forming into young men and become jealous of the mother as she is able to humiliate them. The young man then has a desire for his father and wants to display the same characteristics as the father as he will feel that this is appropriate behaviour. Following this, Gorer (1964) argues that ' all niceties of masculine behaviour- modesty, politeness, neatness, cleanliness – come to be regarded as concessions to feminine demands, and not good in themselves as part of the behaviour of a proper man.' This would suggest that men from a young age need to display violent behaviour in order to be seen as what it means to be a ' man'

Freud's work can be critiqued due to the fact that he did not continue with the focus of social influences on the construction of masculinity. Freud was an essentialist and believed that there are only two normative models of

development – boy and girl. He does not include the considerations of race, culture, ethnics or class in explaining masculinity. Chodorow (1994) criticises Freud and argues that his psychoanalysis is criticised because of the presence of ' normative masculinity, masculine bias, devaluation of women, homophobia and heterosexism.'

Furthermore, it is stated that violent crime and masculinity are linked in how males participate in the creation of their perceived reality. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender does not come naturally to individuals, it is performed. This theory can help understand the idea that individuals have a perceived idea of what it means to be a man. This is further argued my Meidzian (1991) who states that the idea of what we believe it is to be a man is often reflected in the media. Men can often look at strong male figures in the media and have a desire to be like them as they portray the role of the hegemonic male, the strongest masculinity. The violent behaviour of strong dominant males portrayed in the media may result in young men mirroring this behaviour as they will want to become the most dominant male in their society and will feel that carrying out this behaviour is appropriate due to the dominant males shown in the media and how they behave and act.

Another way that young men can use violence to gain masculinity is due to the idea that they have been exposed to this idea from a young age through the education system. Garner (2013) highlights that male students are more interested in football and fighting rather than reading and writing. This supports the idea that young males see that violence is acceptable from a young age. Since this idea that young men see violence as acceptable

behaviour to achieve masculinity in education, this will also be evident in the societal context. This is further supported by the research carried out by Giddens (2009) in which it is stated that marital rape was only seen as a criminal offence in 1991. This shows that violent behaviour is seen as socially acceptable by individuals and as a way for males to gain gender power and influence over females. Although it is known that males are more powerful than females, Connell states that there is a hierarchy within both genders with hegemonic being at the top. This is backed up by Zdun (2008) who highlights the idea that females need to have a male defender. By females wanting this male defender, they are accepting that they are further down in the hierarchy compared to men. Women are conforming to the idea that it is acceptable for young men to carry out violent behaviour as a way to gain masculinity as they want a companion who will be able to defend and protect them so that they can feel that they have power and control themselves.

Violence and masculinity have always been used as a mechanism in order to assert power and control. Individuals feel that they need to come together and be part of a community and so they follow natural gender norms and accept the idea that males are more powerful than females and are able to display power and control over them. An example of this is fighting amongst males which may be unacceptable by those who have power and status, but acceptable by the individuals who are from a socio-economic deprived area. Katz (2003) argues that young men who feel neglected by society often use violence to assert their masculinity and show that they have power even though they may be further down in the hierarchy of masculinities. This idea is further supported by Gilligan (2010) who points out that males may use

violence as a way to gain masculinity because they feel shameful because of their deprived background. This shows that if violence is to show power and control, then these young men are often disadvantageous in having power and control in other areas of their masculinity identity to gain the status of the hegemonic male. Crosset (2000) suggests that men understand each other and the idea that they need to use violence in order to achieve their masculine status. This could also suggest that men feel it is vital and necessary to participate in violence in order to be seen as acceptable and respected in society amongst other males. This stresses the idea that the violent characteristics that males display and act on are inevitable as they want to be able to assert their masculinity upon others.

It is also argued in society there is a ' crisis of masculinity' where males have become uncertain regarding their gender identity. Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) discuss the social disorganisation theory which shows how the acceptance of diversity and improvements for female equality causes a threat to masculinity. Brod (1987) states that the use of violent crime in a sure way to achieve ' masculine identity.' This will assure the individual and others of their masculine status. This crisis is masculinity supports the argument that violent crime is a way for young men to achieve masculinity. However, Mac an Ghaill (1994) argues against this idea and state that hegemonic masculinity is unrealistic and that the crisis of masculinity is more of a problem due to this issue.

In prisons, there are often various forms of violence and more masculine identities due to the inmates due to the idea that prisons create violent masculinity. This is due to the fact that men in prisons often use violence as

a method to defend themselves from other inmates and their masculine identity if it has become questioned by others. Carribine and Longhurst (1998) state that prisons facilitate hegemonic masculinities, and if inmates are unable to achieve anything else, they will often turn to violence. Sabo et al (2001) supports this idea and states that violent confrontations in prisons are a way to gain status and power over the other inmates. However, in prison the hegemonic masculine identity can become threatened due to the commonness of homosexuality in prisons. Homosexuality can also be used as a violent way to achieve masculinity within prisons as this can be used as a form of sexual violence against those who are heterosexual which contrasts with society where being homosexual is seen as being feminine and the inferior sexuality.

Overall, society has different views on what it means to be masculine. In society, it is evident that violence is a way to achieve masculinity as a way to assert power and control, especially those who struggle in the class system and struggle economically. It can be argued that males should not be imprisoned and marginalised from society because of the behaviours that they have carried out which they see as acceptable in society and as a way to achieve masculinity. Instead, society should have a bigger influence on these individuals and help rehabilitate and reform them into citizens who can carry out acceptable behaviour and follow the rules and regulations of society. However, it is also important that the individual takes responsibility for their actions and is willing to reform themselves on order to become a better individual that will fit into society. In order to help achieve this, there should be more awareness made by those have a great influence in the lives

of young men in regards to the behaviour that is carried out such as lead male characters in the media. It is also important that society plays a role in helping reduce this violent crime as a way to achieve masculinity, to do this, it is vital that society takes into the account the circumstances of the individual who committed the crime as the may have a deprived background and feel that violence is the only option for them to gain control. Society will be able to help rehabilitate the individuals and make them a better law abiding citizen. This will help reduce the levels of violent crime that is being carried out.

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