When Bad is Cool:

Violence and Crime as

Rites of Passage to Manhood

David Plummer and Stephen Geofroy

_____

Abstract

Modern society has brought greater opportunities for peer groups to play relatively greater and increasingly unsupervised roles in the lives of young men as they grow up. At the same time social and economic circumstances have created pressures for adults, who previously played a central role in guiding and mentoring young people, to become less important in their lives. The increased influence of peer groups has a strong impact upon the codes of masculinity that many boys aspire to and plays a central role in policing which masculinities are considered "acceptable". A potent combination of obligations for boys to act like "real men" and of pressures to eschew roles that have become discredited as soft, gay or feminine seems to be driving young men towards dangerous, risk-taking hyper-masculinities. The net outcome of these processes is for violence and crime to be increasingly seen as premiere ways of proving one's manhood in front of those who matter most to boys: their peers.

Introduction

This paper examines the "incitements" to violence and crime that are coded into contemporary Caribbean cultures. In particular, the focus is on gender, namely what developmental trajectories young males in Trinidad and Tobago encounter during the critical transitional years, often called the school years. These years constitute a modern-day "rites of passage"—the physical and cultural site where boys undergo the complex transition from childhood to young adult: the social settings where men are made.

Methodology

In Trinidad and Tobago the frequency of antisocial and criminal behaviour among male youth (often in groups) is an acute cause of concern. Our response is to offer an analysis that helps to make these trends more readily understood.

To do this, two sources of data are examined. First, there is the data reported by other Caribbean researchers which we will report and revisit throughout this paper. We have chosen this approach to provide an opportunity for both a literature review and further analysis of prior studies. Second, we report our own ongoing qualitative research into Caribbean masculinities; we relate it to the work of other researchers; and we draw together an explanatory framework for the gendered patterns of violence and crime in the Caribbean region.

The aim of this dual approach is to decode changing patterns of masculinity in relation to the patterns of violence and crime that have recently become more prominent in Trinidad and Tobago.

A qualitative approach is ideally suited to the tasks of exploring poorly understood phenomena and interpreting quantitative data. Unearthing explanations, clues and insights, enables the development of more useful theories for informing possible interventions.

Our own data consists of 54 detailed interviews conducted in Trinidad and Tobago between 2005 and 2008 with men drawn from diverse backgrounds aged from 18 to 38 years. Respondents were chosen from a wide cross-section of Trinidad and Tobago society. Purposive sampling achieved a mosaic comprising variables relating to race (in Trinidad principally African and East Indian descendants), socio-economic background (low, lower middle, middle and upper middle), geographic location (North and South Trinidad; rural and urban; the islands of Trinidad and Tobago), religion (Catholic, Protestant, Hindu and Moslem) and academic background (school completers and early school leavers).

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore and map the trajectories of developing masculine identity and performance (Alasuutari 1995, 3). This approach allowed us to engage in a flexible interview dialectic that is well suited for discovering developmental patterns, for identifying explanations and for theory building (Layder 1993, 41). The respondents were asked about growing up in Trinidad particularly with respect to peer groups, gender roles, family, community and school. Purposive sampling was undertaken

to identify participants who were well placed to shed light on the existing data. Theoretical sampling was used to deliberately seek out cases for further variation in the themes that emerged, including possible negative cases. This approach resulted in an interaction between data gathering and the evolving theory which moved between emerging concepts and new material. The resulting data was enriched and became more complex as cases were added and the resulting explanatory framework became correspondingly more complex and provided more adequate explanations of the processes involved. (Charmaz 2000, 519)

In addition to providing accounts of their own experiences, participants also acted as field observers of complex social systems. In this way, the data was able to capture observations of many additional participants and social systems (including villages, communities, schools and peer groups). A number of manoeuvres were undertaken to ensure that the explanatory framework that emerged was adequate, meaningful and had applicability to society more generally. These included the following: adding cases until saturation occurred; including diverse, variant and negative cases using theoretical sampling (Bryman 2004, 305); and relating our findings to those of other researchers.

The causes of crime are complicated and multifactorial, and this paper does not set out to explore them all. Instead our focus is particularly on the social-developmental stories that underpin patterns of violence and crime involving young males, especially when these are patterned and repetitive and relate to shared codes. Understanding of these phenomena will be greatly advanced by the insights from our qualitative research, as we seek to explain how young men make sense of the world around them and how crime and violence might come to be positioned as an obligation of honour for young men rather than as a shameful transgression. To date our interview findings along with cumulative evidence from other researchers build a compelling case that the incitement to violence and crime is deeply encoded in existing hegemonic masculine constructs that hold substantial sway in Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere in the Caribbean and beyond.

Results
Sowing the seeds
All societies attach paramount importance to ensuring that their young people develop a coherent gender identity as they mature. Gender identity formation starts from birth, often when the parent's first words are "is it a boy or a girl?" From that time forward, the child's development is deeply inflected with gender conventions that govern appearance, disposition, style of speech, deportment, bodily function and so on. Of particular note is the finding of Bailey and colleagues, confirmed in our own investigations, that boys learn from an early age that they should be risk-takers (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart 1998, 17).

While some latitude is allowed for younger children to "transgress" gender norms, the older the child and the closer he is to being an adult, the more stringent is the pressure to conform to gender expectations. This is certainly true of Caribbean boys. Bailey and colleagues found that by ten years of age male children realise that features of "traditional" masculinity—including toughness, physical strength and sexual

dominance—are expected of them (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart 1998, 53). One respondent gives a local example of such a construct as he perceived it in the rural community in which he grew up:

> *Guys were supposed to be this rough neck, tough, hard person who always getting in trouble and not obeying anyone…and that was more or less what influenced me because even in growing up with my stepfather…that is what I saw from him and the guys in the area same thing so I thought that that is how the guys supposed to carry about themselves… (LS, aged 26; chef)*

As fundamental as they are, these gender expectations are not explicitly taught through formal schooling. Social life is saturated with gender conventions that are deeply embedded in the social fabric. These conventions are so normalised that they easily pass by unnoticed—until of course they are transgressed when they are glaringly, sometimes painfully, obvious.

Here are the words of one gay youth who describes his experience of growing up and feeling "different" and the attendant difficulties of transgressing gender norms.

> *I first realized my sexuality when I was seven years old but I never really paid any mind to it. But as you get older you realize people have less tolerance for people who were "confused" with their sexuality…that is when I started experiencing it as a bad thing, when other people had a problem with it…I went to a breaking point where I just did not know who I was. (NKO, aged 26; self-employed)*

NKO ended up seeking psychiatric treatment for his resulting depression and in an attempt to resolve his dissonance.

That is not to say that gender conventions are set in concrete, nor are they innate—gender identity and enactment are an accomplishment of growing up. Masculinity varies enormously across cultures and down time. Moreover, no man performs masculinity in quite the same way as his peers. To capture this variability and diversity the plural term "masculinities" was coined. However, gender theorists also acknowledged that there seems to be a dominant set of standards against which other masculinities are evaluated but which no male conforms to absolutely. This set of standards is known as "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1995).

It seems likely that these shared hegemonic standards are variable across cultures and time. Indeed, within different social settings, varying idealised forms of masculinity will dominate. Willis (1971) discerns in his research on British working class boys that conceptions of masculinity take on class dimensions: the culture of the factory floor having parallels with what is termed "counter school culture". Willis argues that the inherent "masculine chauvinism" of the latter results in a loss of opportunity by destining its adherents to lower paying and lower prestige jobs (52). In his analysis, the irony is not

lost on him as he pinpoints that there is "an element of self damnation in the taking on of subordinate roles in Western Capitalism…this damnation is experienced paradoxically as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance." (3)

While socio-economic position is one factor, masculine constructs differ by age as well. The expectations of men by society at large almost certainly differ from the prevailing expectations of what a "real man" should be by an adolescent male peer group.

The danger with many peer group constructs is they often valorise narrow, physical, hard versions of masculinity. As a result, academic pursuit—traditionally regarded as an important element of masculine excellence—is nowadays often the first to be sacrificed. In contemporary Caribbean Anglophone societies, not unlike elsewhere, masculinity entails a fear of being seen as "sissyish", and anything considered to be effeminate comes under pressure to be rejected: this includes education which is widely seen by boys to be both effeminate and "nerdish" (Bailey, Branche and Henry-Lee 2002, 8).

As a result different masculinities arise in parallel and are said to compete. In light of this, the influence of the dominant masculinities, the tensions between competing masculinities, and the ways in which gender performance is policed, are all key elements of the present analysis.

The school years: Obligations, taboos and the rites of passage of manhood
While the first few years of life are spent largely in the home environment, the time soon comes when the child is mandated to enter school and responsibility for the child's formal education is taken over by the state. The school system brings young people together *en masse* and streams them into groups of similar ages. This period is a critical time: young people enter the school system as young children; they transition in the company of their peers; and they emerge as young adults some 10 or 12 years later.

This developmental process (which is largely encapsulated in the school years) bears a close relationship to the traditional "rites of passage" originally described by Van Gennep in 1909 (Van Gennep 1960, ix, 67). Classic rites of passage theory provides a framework for understanding how young people "come of age" in traditional societies. The process is divided into three phases: separation, transition (also called liminality) and incorporation. While there is a tendency not to think of modern developed societies as having such "rites", the school years do indeed follow this pattern: separation from the original status as a toddler in the family; transition in the company of peers during the liminal school years; and reincorporation into society some years later with a new status of young adult.

The outcomes are similar for both traditional rites of passage and for the developmental process that the modern institution of the school manages, and which we might consider the centrepiece of the modern passage to adulthood. In both cases the task that is achieved is a change of status from child to adult and both ensure that gender identity is indelibly imprinted on the participants. However, the passage provided by modern schooling differs in a fundamental way from the traditional rites of passage. The

traditional rituals of "coming of age" generally entail a much more compact liminal phase in the company of adult mentors, whereas modern schooling involves a liminal phase that extends over many years from kindergarten to matriculation in the purview of the peer group.

For most boys, the transitional school years are the period when they consolidate and craft their masculine identity. The process reaches a climax around puberty when physical maturation peaks. The gender identity that emerges reflects social conventions, personal agency and group identification. All along the way, boys' options are shaped by an extensive system of social obligations and taboos which channel their emerging identity along socially acceptable lines:

> *Yeah, that is one of the biggest influence in school, out ah school. I feel peer group is the whole problem…peer group has play a big influence, according to like whey yuh friends saying yuh might want be hip...remember yuh doh want nobody watch yuh different. (DJ, aged 21; road worker)*

The *gender obligations* that come into play will relate in some general way to the prevailing standards of hegemonic masculinity but they will also largely reflect the sorts of masculinity that dominate in the boy's personal world (these are best thought of as "localised" hegemonic masculinities). These obligations dictate how masculinity should be performed in order to satisfy the intense social scrutiny that young males are subjected to in their own social network.

In the following quote DJ talks about the pressures any son of his would have to undergo as he grows up:

> *…if I have a son now dey de problem go arise too, 'cause when he growing they go be telling, like people around him, and people in de neighbourhood and who older, if he like acting different nah, what I mean, like he not really on violence, well like liming on de block like them kinda…they go say "How you moving so? You really not like your father, way! How you so boy" Same peer pressure again like pressuring yuh nah so like eventually he might like start ah liking, might drift to that…(DJ, aged 21; road worker)*

Similarly, the *gender taboos* that young men are constrained by have an inverse relationship with hegemonic standards in that they demarcate what boys should *not* be like and what they should *not* do. Once again, these taboos are influenced by personal agency and the everyday social milieu of the boys' lives, but in general they relate to taboos about being emasculated, feminised, infantilised and marginalised. Almost always they speak to the deepest modern masculine taboos of all: homophobia and femininity.

This model leads to an important point concerning the genesis of extreme, anti-social masculinities. The combination of the status-enhancing obligation to perform in

masculine ways and the pressure to publicly eschew characteristics that are subject to gender taboos—both of these factors exert pressure on young men to act out more extreme masculinities. Through this dual system of obligation and taboo, hypermasculinities are positioned as the ultimate expression of manhood and are seen by boys as a sure way of earning status. By enacting them, boys can prove their masculinity publicly (and that is what counts) while simultaneously disavowing any links with femininity or homosexuality.

Policing manhood

We have argued that the social fabric is deeply impregnated with gender conventions. These conventions are so omnipresent that they are taken for granted and often only become obvious when transgressed. It was also argued that boys start being indoctrinated for their gender role from birth. The implication is that instead of being innate, gender roles are socially constructed, that they need to be learned and that elaborate social systems exist to ensure conformity. The observation that a gendered identity is a social accomplishment is confirmed by research that demonstrates that gender conventions vary radically across time, in different cultures and at any one time within a culture. According to Gilmore (1990, 25),"Boys have to be encouraged, sometimes actually forced, by social sanctions to undertake efforts toward a culturally defined manhood, which by themselves they might not do."

To this end, there is a general yardstick against which masculine performance is measured. This yardstick is *hegemonic masculinity*. Hegemonic masculinity is no more than a normative ideal or a symbolic construct. While its influence is everywhere, no one man embodies all hegemonic standards fully. And as a symbolic construct, its influence is only as great as the social importance attached to it. For the social code of masculinity to be as influential as it is, it must be valorised, embraced, policed and enforced. The existence of such a system of gender role monitoring was alluded to above when we noted how gender conventions become starkly obvious when transgressed. In fact when transgression does occur people become acutely aware and indeed anxious.

There is probably no time in life when policing and enforcement are more intense than for young males during the school years, especially around the time of physical maturation. This is the time when the social conventions of gender are not only being internalised but they are also being "tried on for size". GK gives a good example of gender policing as he recalls an event at secondary school.

> One day ah guy came with a Simpson's T-Shirt, well we give him real
> hell, "Is Simpson's? Man, that is so old, yuh hadda pick up a Stone Cold
> T-shirt". (GK, aged 22; library assistant)

Getting it wrong can result in severe loss of face and heavy social sanction. But this invites further questions: Who polices and enforces gender codes for young boys during the school years? Whose standards are boys judged against?
While we know that gender conventions are omnipresent, our research indicates that the most immediate and influential mechanism for policing young men's gender performance

during adolescence is the peer group. There is also evidence that peers are intensely interested in the gender performance of their compatriots: peers continually "swap notes" and interrogate each other about their exploits and they exact penalties from those they judge as not measuring up in the quest for manhood. Penalties can range from shaming, humiliation and exclusion through to violence.

In policing each other's gender performance, the attendant issues of norm and measurement of transgression arises. What standards do boys use when making their judgment? Certainly, the criteria they adopt do bear some relationship to the hegemonic standards that dominate in society at large. However, as indicated above, the masculinity performed by young men differs markedly from the gender performance of older, more senior males in the community:

> *...it different 'cause like what is acceptable to a person like your age wouldn't be acceptable to my age too, check? (DJ, aged 21; road worker)*

We conclude that the explanation to the question of what yardstick is being used lies in understanding how peer groups and youth culture work.

Young people are not mere cultural sponges that simply mimic what they see in the wider culture or what older men do. On the contrary, our evidence (which resonates with that of other Caribbean researchers quoted here) reveals youth culture to be a dynamic fully fledged culture that is quite capable of operating semi-autonomously from society at large and often in opposition to it. Barry Chevannes (1999, 24) argues that peer groups exert an influence over boys that frequently exceeds and contradicts the influence of the boys' families. Similarly, JL relates the adverse influence of the peer group in the following quote:

> *Most of my friends, they was up to trouble, I was up to trouble, I was that kind of type... I shame to say it now but... I used to actually get a kind of high off of it nah. (JL, aged 22; office assistant)*

The implications of these observations are far-reaching. Instead of youth culture being a hapless pawn of capitalism or a Frankenstein invention of the American mass media, it turns out to be the creative lifeblood of both of these. Clothing styles, musical genres, figures of speech, popular trends are just as much inventions of "the street" as they are the products of big corporations. After all, for clothing, music and other trends to sell, they need to strike a chord with the young people who buy them. More often than not the marketing resonates with the gender standards that young men revere and aspire to—the real commodity being sold is masculinity. In the words of Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart (1998, 55):

> Street influences were particularly telling in that transition period to
> adulthood…Many of the styles on the street were accentuated as the

basis for securing what was imagined to be an adult masculine identity. The street was trouble, yet it was where a man was made.

But the remaining task is to pinpoint where youth culture itself emanates from. The observation that youth culture can operate semi-autonomously from wider society implies creativity and agency among youth cultures: in effect, that youth culture comes from within itself. According to our evidence this occurs through a phenomenon called "rolling peer pressure" (Plummer, 1999). We found strong evidence that cultural codes and traditions are passed down the chain from older boys to younger boys. (In this model, peers do not necessarily share the same age, but instead are age stratified and the defining characteristic is that they share an affinity with youth culture). CM paints a vivid picture of rolling peer pressure in the socialisation of his peers during the transition from primary to secondary school:

> *A boy coming from primary school he feel like he is a weak boy…he would be for a little while like the primary school children. He wouldn't know what to do. He would have to adapt to the school environment. So by a next three weeks you might see him adapting, getting to know children, getting to see how children behave and how they does dress and the new style like how children bore [pierce] their ears like how I bore mine. To see how to attract the girls, right, to see how to be popular. (CM, aged 18; student)*

A sanitised version of this phenomenon can be seen in the way rhymes and jokes are passed down through generations of children virtually unchanged. Likewise, we found evidence that vulgarities and harsh practices are also handed down the chain from one school grade to the next, especially when adults are out of earshot, at lunch time, in the school ground during recess, and when going to and from school.

That peer group culture is particularly active at times and in spaces where adult influence is minimal was a striking finding of our data. Indeed what we generally found was that wherever there is a supervisory "power vacuum", peer groups readily intervene and assert their power. In the modern world, there are a number of new factors that appear to contribute to prolonging the opportunities for peer groups to assert their influence over young people's lives (see Table 1). The net effect of all of these factors is to increase the opportunity for peer groups to orchestrate young people's lives at the expense of adult guidance, mentoring and role modelling.

Table 1: Factors that increase the influence of peers over young people and reduce the role of adults

- the protracted liminal school phase between dependent childhood and working adulthood extends a boy's exposure to and membership of peer groups;
- shift schooling where students attend school in the morning and have the afternoon free (or vice versa) provides more time for "hanging on the block" or in the malls with peers;
- larger classes where teachers have less time to devote to individual students;
- less supervision in critical "free time" periods especially lunch, recess and in transit to and from school;
- the presence of zones that are not frequented by supervising adults such as change rooms, the middle of the school ground and playing field, the streets and lanes in the vicinity, shopping malls, on public transport;
- greater economic pressures on parents to work longer hours away from home;
- exposure to "virtual" peer role models through the media and the Internet;
- poorer socio-economic settings in which young people have less private space (away from the street) where they might otherwise escape the domination of the peer group. Inevitably their study time is also compromised.

Violence, crime and peer group masculinities

The considerable influence of male peer groups and youth culture on young men as they mature is a key finding of our work. Avoiding being targeted by a group, on the one hand, and being accepted by peers, belonging to a peer group, and gaining the protection of a group, on the other, are important issues for boys as they develop. In this vein, FD confesses to feeling pressured to do what he knew to be wrong:

> *The peer pressure caused me to want to be involved in that because when you seeing friends you want to be part of the group and you don't fit in if you not doing what they doing. So I was pressured to go along that line. (FD, aged 21; university student)*

JD and HJ speak for many boys as they recount how they had to struggle not to become victims of peer dynamics but instead to assert themselves in the secondary school context. In the following quote, we see how boys learn to negotiate the "hot house" pecking order of the peer group, which includes the use of violence:

> *Petty little fights, we were just trying to impress or it was a "ranking thing" because you now come in and you trying to show you is not a*

> *softie nah! I can't remember what they were about but I remember I used to fight a lot. Probably if someone call me a name I mighta cuffed them up. I used to fight to gain respect. (JD, aged 24; secondary school teacher)*

Likewise, in the following case, violence is a key element in how boys negotiate peer group politics in the school ground:

> *...this is junior sec [junior secondary school] and you can't take nothing from nobody cause once they see you ent doing anything they just like continue pushing you around. So is like you have to let them know where you stand. So I does be like "I not taking nothing from nobody at all"...I might just tell them something and they might get vex and then it go end up in a fight, some major fight in junior sec. (HJ, aged 19; manager's assistant)*

In contemporary settings, where the traditional rites of "coming of age" are lost and where adults increasingly move into the background during adolescence, the peer group will fill the vacuum. Both vertical and horizontal relationships as well as changing features therein constitute significant influences on a young man's life (DuBois and Karcher 2005, 83). In effect, the balance between "vertical" mentoring by older role models shifts to favour "horizontal" mentoring by peers. Especially in cases of serious dysfunction in family relationships the peer group provides affirmation and responds to the need to belong, which, in turn, reinforces the influence of the peer group. In many cases, a boy's universe is defined by the peer group, and the group offers extensive support and role modelling. Members of the group can become the most significant people in a boy's life and they offer a reference point for approval and disapproval. In Chevannes' (1999, 30) words the peer group during adolescence virtually replaces parents as the "controlling agents" or at least provides a powerful "countervailing force" to them.

This influence can be amplified for boys in the absence of a significant adult male presence in the school or home as testified to in the words of LS:

> *... growing up I never had a father figure and I never had a brother or anything like that to play with and I thought that these guys at school (well more high school than primary school) we like "Aye that's how guys supposed to carry about themselves". So I will just fall in with them. (LS, aged 26; chef)*

LS goes on to recount how susceptible he was to the influence of the peer group and how his learning reflected what we earlier described as "rolling peer pressure":

> *It was very easy for me to be manipulated by them, by their actions rather, because to me that is the way to go, that's the way guys should carry about themselves because I never had anyone to sit me down and*

tell me "well look you have to do this and as a fella yuh supposed to be doing this" and…to show me the right thing…And the guys were like my bigger brothers because it is more or less the bigger fellas I used to lime [socialise] with until I reach form three and everybody started following me yuh know and eventually I just became the leader of the pack. (LS, aged 26; chef)

When primary responsibility for managing the "rites of passage" to manhood falls to the peer group, then the prevailing masculine codes and expectations that emerge will closely reflect those of the group. Groups buy into youth culture—they develop a culture of their own—so that a "pecking order" and interactions can become highly codified. We found that peer groups are vigilant about the gender performance of their members and can enforce severe sanctions against transgressors whether belonging to their own group or another. SM paints a vivid picture of this finding:

Well, if a next one take a next one girl, back in secondary school, dey would bring up dey gang after school beat him up or if dis one geh a little licks [beating] today, tomorrow yuh stay home in the afternoon waiting by the gate of the school he and his group will wait dey patiently; when yuh turn up licks for yuh. (SM, aged 21; office assistant)

Peer groups can develop problematic relationships with the wider society depending on what standards are valorised. We found that groups often held hard, risky, rebellious, sexually dominant masculinities to be the pinnacle of modern manhood and therefore something to aspire to. Under these circumstances, rather than being seen as an antisocial threat, crime and violence can instead be seen as manhood fulfilled and the glue that keeps the peer group intact. Here is Wesley Crichlow's account:

In an attempt to temporarily secure my masculinity or hyper-masculinity and hegemonic heterosexuality, I participated in events such as stealing… breaking bottles with slingshots or stones on the street, engaging in physical fights, and "hanging on the block" with boys until late at night. (Crichlow 2004, 200)

In the following case JL describes how crime can involve performance where the peer group (in this case a gang) is the primary audience. JL had been kidnapped by a group of thugs. Here he recounts how it was important for one of his abductors to earn his "stripes", (to secure his rank in the gang):

… the man had the gun by my head and his hand actually sweating, sweating on me, so like this man he is probably doing this just to prove a point to the whole gang nah, just to show he is capable…(JL, aged 22; office assistant)

There is often a very thin line that distinguishes a peer group from a gang. When asked about this difference, the young men in our study were hard pressed to distinguish

between them, apart from being a matter of degree: gangs are peer groups that have become more codified, more powerful and whose activities spill onto the streets.

Conclusions

Young people are "primed" for their gender roles from a very young age. However, in terms of gender development, there can be scarcely a more critical time than the school years. This is the period when boys undertake the difficult journey from being a toddler to being a young man. In effect, the school years frame the modern day "rites of passage" when young people "come of age".

Changing social and economic circumstances have produced conditions that have tended to reduce the role of adults in young people's development and hand considerable influence over to peers. Peer groups play a particularly significant role in young people's lives in situations where adults are increasingly absent. The net effect of the decline in traditional community life, of mounting pressures on adults to work long hours away from home, and of assigning responsibility for children's education and upbringing to the state means that peer groups play an increasingly important role in "coming of age". At the extreme, the role that members of the older generation play in (vertical) mentoring is largely absent during critical periods of young people's development, and this leaves the way open for peer groups to fill the vacuum and for members of the same generation to assume a dominant role in each other's lives (horizontal mentoring): kids raising kids.

While peer groups can be a powerful force for good, they can also be an extremely bad influence. Peer groups provide support, protection, a sense of belonging, and an opportunity to swap notes as young people confront difficult developmental challenges. Peer groups can also demand conformity to group codes as they actively police gender performance and they can administer harsh sanctions for transgressions. While general guidance is provided by dominant masculinities in society at large (so-called hegemonic masculinity), youth culture endorses its own variations of acceptable masculinity which are actively policed by peer groups. We found evidence of uncompromising gender expectations and enforcement by young males; we also found the rejection of gentle, intellectual and caring masculinities which were labelled as feminine or gay and therefore taboo, and the valorisation of hard, risky, dangerous and sexually dominant masculinities which represent the ultimate in manhood. This combination of deep taboos being used to discredit "soft" masculinities and pressures to prove one's manhood by acting out "hard" masculinities act in concert to promote hyper-masculinities. However, given that masculinity transcends class and race, what do we make of class and race differences when it comes to gender, violence and crime? We believe that in addition to factors such as culture and role models (Lewis 2008) a key difference relates to space. Young men in poorer circumstances who live in crowded conditions spend more time on the streets in the company of peers. Young men from more affluent settings have greater opportunities to escape the tight control of peer groups.

In effect many of the social "problems" that contemporary society confronts represent a fulfilment of the gender expectations that are coded into the social fabric which young people are primed for. If young men are indoctrinated with the belief that "real men" are

tough, risk-taking and dominant, then we should not be surprised when they act out those expectations. As Barry Chevannes (1999) wrote in reference to the roles that young men play in contemporary society: "we reap what we sow". Far from being seen as antisocial aberrations, violence and crime are positioned in youth culture as being among the ultimate ways for youths to fulfil their social obligations and to be real men (Messerschmidt 1994). Of course, not all boys go down this path and this is where the role of personal agency and alternative role modelling comes in. What seems to have changed in recent years is a shift in the relative importance of "vertical mentoring" from the generation above in favour of greater "horizontal mentoring" from peers.

REFERENCES

Alasuutari, P. 1995. *Researching culture: Qualitative method and cultural studies*. London: Sage Publications.

Bailey, W., C. Branche, and A. Henry-Lee. 2002. *Gender, contest and conflict in the Caribbean.* Mona, Jamaica: SALISES.

Bailey, W., C. Branche, G. McGarrity, and S. Stuart. 1998. *Family and the quality of gender relations in the Caribbean.* Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research.

Bryman, A. 2004. *Social research methods.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Charmaz, K. 2000. Grounded Theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* 2nd edition, ed. N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, 509–535. London: Sage Publications.

Chevannes, B. 1999. *What we sow and what we reap—problems in the cultivation of male identity in Jamaica.* Kingston, Jamaica: Grace Kennedy Foundation.

Connell, R.W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Crichlow, W.E.A. 2004. History, (re)memory, testimony and biomythography: charting a buller man's Trinidadian past. In *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*, ed. R.E. Reddock. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.

DuBois, D. and M. Karcher. 2005. *Handbook of youth mentoring*. London: Sage Publications.

Gilmore, D.D. 1990. *Manhood in the making*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lewis, T. 2008. No Role Models for Black Youths. *Trinidad and Tobago Express*, July 5, 2008.

Layder, D. 1993. *New Strategies in Social Research*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Messerschmidt, J.W. 1994. Schooling, masculinities and youth crime by white boys. In *Men, Masculinities and Crime: Just Doing Boys Business?*, ed. T. Newburn and E.A. Stanko. London: Routledge.

Parry, O. 2000. *Male underachievement in high school education.* Mona, Jamaica: Canoe Press.

Plummer, D. 1999. *One of the boys: Masculinity, homophobia and modern manhood.*

New York: Haworth Press.

Van Gennep, A. 1960. *The rites of passage,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
(French original 1908)

Willis, P. 1977. *Learning to Labour*. Westmead: Saxon House.