

# Masculinity, Marginalization and Violence

## A Case Study of the English Defence League

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### Introduction

One of the most notable political developments of the last few years has been the rapid growth of a new street-based movement, the English Defence League (EDL). Emerging out of the fringes of the English domestic football hooligan scene in the early summer of 2009, the EDL's vocal opposition to what it calls 'militant Islam' appears to have garnered considerable support from marginalised and disadvantaged white working-class communities (Copsey, 2010).

The motivations of perpetrators of racially motivated hate crime (especially those whose violence is undetected) have received perplexingly little academic scrutiny to date (Chakraborti and Garland, 2009). This article is a first attempt at presenting material gained from accessing a group of young males who regularly use racially and religiously motivated violence. In doing this we employ three case studies, undertaken with male EDL supporters from working class backgrounds, and examine how they construct a specific form and style of violent masculinity. In all three cases we suggest that acute feelings of marginalisation and disadvantage prompt internalised negative emotions of disillusion and anger, which then manifest themselves through externalised hostility, resentment and fury directed at the scapegoat for their ills: the Islamic 'other'.

By making such an argument, we place ourselves alongside an emergent critical and psychosocial criminological perspective. In examining how violence is fostered both psychologically and socio-structurally, we are keen to move away from the 'victimological perspective' which has dominated understanding of racially- and religiously-motivated violence and instead examine 'the characteristics of offenders, the social milieu in which [racial] violence is fostered, and the process by which it becomes directed against people from ethnic minorities' (Bowling and Phillips, 2002: 14). We therefore align ourselves with other recent empirically informed criminological research which has sought to understand and explain how and why some men use violence, by recognising that:

Men who carry with them the deeply ingrained visceral dispositions that are the products of socialization within micro-climates of insecurity, aggression and domination often come to value violence and place its enactment close to the centre of self-identity ... the desire not to be dominated by another can become extremely potent (Winlow and Hall, 2009: 287-288).

The three young men interviewed for this article have arguably internalised and accepted the potency of violence, and in particular that which is motivated by bias or prejudice. They were former

members of violent football firms to which the lead author gained access during his long-term ethnographic study of football disorder (Treadwell, 2008). They are now active members of the English Defence League and have all attended a number of street protests organised by the group.

The empirical material presented here was gathered in the same authentic context that the violence occurs within, via ethnographic participant observation at EDL demonstrations and with the young men in their own local communities, and via conversations conducted with them in pubs, snooker halls, workplaces and their own homes in the immediate areas that they resided in; thus the accounts of violence presented here were not generated in formal interview settings. Justification for such approaches and limited populations is provided by Gadd (2009: 761), who has noted the tendency of late for some criminologists to regard 'case study approaches as the best hope we have of developing approaches that foster the "empathic creativity needed to truly understand offenders without forsaking the "rigor and transparency" needed to make our analyses credible'. While we do not provide full biographical details of our research subjects, we are 'conversant of the range of social contingencies that have shaped the research participant's life' (Gadd, 2009: 762) and have provided abridged histories here for the sake of expediency and word length. In addition, as the material presented is a small part of much wider author engagement with perpetrators of racist and faith hate, we feel comfortable in asserting that we are selecting material that is representative of the broader body of young men involved in the EDL.

It may be prudent to give some background to the English Defence League. Over a mere matter of months the EDL has grown into a large-scale protest organisation that regularly arranges provocative and aggressive demonstrations in areas with large Asian (and especially Islamic) populations. It campaigns vociferously against Sharia law and extremist Islam whilst claiming to be an inclusive, non-racist organisation that is open to all ethnicities. Reliant on twenty-first century methods of networking (such as Facebook and Twitter), and functioning in a world where domestic football 'banning orders' and prohibitive ticket pricing make football a less attractive arena in which to seek physical confrontation, the EDL has become something of a magnet for disaffected young males prone to resolving their disputes through violence (Copsey, 2010). It is capable of mobilising significant numbers of sympathisers to its protests, with, for example, over a thousand supporters being evident at demonstrations in both Nuneaton and Preston held on the same day in November 2010, and an estimated 4,000 at its 'homecoming' march in Luton in February 2011 (BBC, 2010; Malyon, 2010; McGee, 2011).

We have argued elsewhere that the EDL, while sharing some characteristics with establishing far-right parties, marks a different manifestation of the fusion of football violence and extremist politics (Garland and Treadwell, 2010). For example, unlike many of the far-right groups that have preceded

them, the EDL has championed women's and gay rights and a pro-Israeli stance, in an attempt to prove its democratic, non-extremist credentials while at the same time trying to show that Islam is anti-Semitic and opposed to homosexuality and women's equality. Yet while the EDL claims to be tolerant of others' religious backgrounds, it seeks to confront Islam because it believes the religion challenges an English, Christian way of life that it treasures.

Many of the EDL's views on Islam are broadcast in a manner much in keeping with traditional reactionary right-wing groups such as the British National Party. However, its concern with Islam at a wider level (and the conflation by many of its supporters of Muslims with all those of a south Asian descent) means that it fuses racial and religious elements of hate with the supposedly more progressive politics mentioned above. It is therefore both a continuation of, and a departure from, traditional far-right activity.

The EDL has undoubtedly provided a significant policing problem, with a demonstration in Leicester in October 2010, for example, requiring support from 13 other police forces and a total officer presence on the day of over 2,000 (Topping, 2010). Despite this substantial policing operation, the Leicester protest, like many others elsewhere, resulted in large-scale violent disorder (Fagan et al., 2010). The three individuals used as case studies here were part of the disorder at Leicester and at other times have also been involved in, and used, violence against the police, members of rival protest group Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and young Islamic men.

In basing our approach upon participant observation and ethnography we were allowed insight into the lives of those we studied, and aimed to show how the use of violence was personally understood and elucidated, as well as socio-structurally generated and formed. The case studies presented below were not exceptional; rather they were quite common to a number of the young men documented during fieldwork.

### **Masculinities and Hate Crimes**

Traditionally, much of the hate crime literature has taken a structured action approach, understanding the masculinity-accomplishing aspects of targeted abuse as the product of structural, rather than psychological, influences (Hood-Williams, 2001; Perry, 2009). However, we hope that our findings contribute to an emerging group of studies that examine the destabilization of masculinity and its connections to men's use of violence against outsider groups, but that links socio-structural factors with the psychology of individual conduct, thus moving towards a more psychosocial understanding of the generation of the masculine nature of violence (e.g. see Gadd and Jefferson, 2007; Winlow and Hall, 2009).

Our interest in men's violence is grounded in the belief that masculinity is multidimensional, varied, and malleable, and we accept the notion of a multiplicity of masculinities and that men's violence is only one of many resources available to them in the construction of masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1993). However, we would question the traditional way in which masculinity has been fused with crime and violence in much existing literature because it essentially equates them simply with maleness, while promoting socio-structural explanations without giving adequate consideration to why it is that only some men resort to crime and violence when thwarted by personal disempowerment (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007).

Various researchers (e.g. Connell, 1987; 1995; Messerschmidt, 1993; Edley and Wetherell, 1995) have suggested such structural models of masculinity where hegemonic forms are organised around the discursive subordination of others (particularly women and gay men). Yet attempts to connect masculinity to crime and violent crime, with reference solely to socio-structural explanations, are inherently problematic (Hood-Williams, 2001; Hall, 2002; Gadd and Jefferson, 2007). Criticism of this theoretical nexus is often aimed at the work of Messerschmidt (1993; 1997) but is arguably also applicable to Perry (2001). Messerschmidt and Perry draw heavily upon the traditions of critical criminology (and its concern with societal experience particularly being influenced by one's gender, race and class), developing further the idea that criminal practice could be a way of ensuring gendered privileges. They follow Connell's socio-structural model which Messerschmidt (1993: 63) notes, recognises that masculinity is crafted through structural processes, and 'social structures ... constrain and channel behaviour in specific ways ... and construct social relations of relatively durable quality yet obvious historical variability'. Furthermore, in western society, 'hegemonic masculinity emphasises practices toward authority, control, competitive individualism, independence, aggressiveness, and the capacity for violence' (Messerschmidt, 1993: 82).

Furthermore, Messerschmidt asserted that, due to structural positioning determined by race and class, some men were denied legitimate avenues by which they could make their gender and therefore 'for many men, crime serves as a "resource" for doing gender' (1993: 84). There is plenty of support for the view that masculinity and gender relations are socially structured and varied, with contested notions and versions of maleness and masculinity co-existent and locked in power struggles. Thus, for example, Edley and Wetherell suggest:

Manliness ... is a contested territory, it is an ideological battlefield ... if we look back in time, not only do we see that at certain points in history, one specific discourse of masculinity has dominated over all of the other alternatives ... but we also find that the efforts to control the meaning of masculinity have played a central role in the struggle for power between various

social groupings including classes, 'races', nations as well as men and women (Edley and Wetherell, 1995: 17).

Yet while we recognise how socio-structural constraints serve to underscore the crafting of specific violent masculinities, we are also keen to move to a 'third stage' model of thinking which is 'namely one which considers the psychological character of masculinity, in so far as masculinity is a kind of identity it must refer us to a study of the person' (Hood-Williams, 2001: 39-40). If, disproportionately, it is those men who face the loss of traditionally stable opportunities that figure most highly in the connection between crime and masculinity (Winlow, 2001; Hall, 2002), then we must undoubtedly understand the longer historical trajectories and socio-economic, political and cultural forces that shape such masculinities. However, we would aver that attempts to understand forms of male violence, in particular racist and religiously motivated hate violence such as that used by the EDL, need to recognise the inextricable connection between agency and structure, and therefore move toward being more socio-psychological or 'psychosocial', than simply structural (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007; Winlow and Hall, 2009).

We understand 'psychosocial' as the social scientific attempt to place the subject at an interface between the psychological and the social. This is an approach which notes the 'importance of emotion and memory as constitutive and dynamic components in the core of identity' (Winlow and Hall, 2009: 286). However, our view of psychosocial is not reliant upon providing subjective readings based upon psychoanalytic interpretations of factors which may (but also conversely may well not) explain the generation of individual behaviour. We are concerned that some psychosocial criminology, rather than being theoretically liberating, risks pathologising individuals based upon some interpretive reading of the psychological impact of events, which are said to shape behaviour. Rather, we simply recognise that identity is forged in specific socio-economic, cultural realms. To that end we must understand, as Slaughter (2003) has noted, violent criminal groups and violent men are the product of both socio-structural processes and individual psychology. Therefore he advocates just such understanding when he suggests, for example, that football disorder (an activity the EDL is heavily linked with – see Garland and Treadwell, 2010) can be understood in light of the fact that:

In terms of social fulfilment the football 'firm' can offer a source of status and meaning in a period where other sources have dried up, it neatly articulates (albeit in a not very articulate manner) his resentment and antipathy towards unwanted changes (Slaughter, 2003: 194).

In explaining further the way in which social marginalisation and masculinity intersect with violent offending, Whitehead has argued that masculinity may be considered a specific dynamic risk factor whereby men follow internal psychological scripts which facilitate violent offending by linking such aggression to the perpetrator's inherent manliness. He suggests that:

... man may demonstrate his masculinity by two categories of violence to other men: violence which includes victims in the category 'man' as worthy rivals and violence which excludes victims from the category 'man' as unworthy of being there. Masculinity as a dynamic risk factor in man to man violence is developed with particular reference to racism and homophobia (Whitehead, 2005: 411).

It is via a framework of socio-structural factors and individual feelings that we will attempt to demonstrate how three violent young, white working class men involved with the EDL make sense of their role and status as men against 'subordinate others', namely similarly-aged Asian Islamic males.

### **Young, White and Angry: Understanding the English Defence League**

Although there is a substantial body of work on the effects of racist violence upon victims, there is surprisingly little on the motives of those who perpetrate such acts (Sherry, 2010). In the rare exception when racially motivated offenders are interviewed, Gadd suggests that there is an inclination 'to collapse the feelings felt by particular offenders into the cultural milieu of resentment felt by marginalized white working-class communities' (Gadd, 2009: 756). Clearly this is not our purpose, as while we would be keen to highlight the socio-economic factors that underscore the violence of the 'lads' (as they term themselves) whose voices are heard here, we are equally concerned that they are not seen as wholly representative of a white, working class group that largely do not broadcast their frustrations in such violent demonstrations. In addition, a core criticism of structural accounts of violent, racist masculinities is that there is a failure to adequately acknowledge why some men, in some specific locations use violence, while others do not. Adding a more psychological insight might give better understandings of these differences.

One view of racist and religiously motivated targeted aggression could be that it conforms to what has been termed 'protest masculinity' (Connell, 1995; Taylor, 1999). Connell claims that '[p]rotest masculinity is a marginal masculinity, which picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in society at large but reworks them in a context of poverty' (Connell, 1995: 114) and to a degree the lads we interviewed follow such a script. The EDL cleverly plays upon the present 'risky' status assigned to British (and particularly Muslim) Asians in the popular press over the course of the last

decade in a way that appears to have resonance with marginalised white working class males. As Mythen and colleagues have noted, recent media coverage of Islam has often portrayed it as being:

... connected to the problems of violent crime, 'honour killings', drugs, illegal immigration and fraudulent welfare claims. This perceived 'riskiness' operates mundanely as a threat to the 'fabric' of predominantly white British culture through transgression of school dress codes or refusal to neglect traditional forms of worship, and profanely through religious extremism and radicalization. In media and political circles ... dominant discourses have invariably defined British Muslims *en bloc* as a risky, suspect population, raising the intensity of scrutiny on Muslims in general and potentially exacerbating the degree of public suspicion directed towards young male Muslims (Mythen et al., 2009: 5).

Much of the dominant discourse surrounding Islam has therefore centred around issues of its supposed anti-British, anti-modern, anti-liberal and dangerous nature (Fekete, 2009; Williamson and Khiabany, 2010). Moreover, the twin elements identified by Law (2010) that are often conflated within the umbrella term 'Islamophobia' – anti-Islam sentiment and hostility directed at Muslim people – have been adeptly exploited by the EDL. In particular, the leadership of the EDL has been clever in the way that it has tapped into the frustrations of a disenfranchised section of the white working class whose grievances arise from a dense tapestry of social, economic and cultural conditions and neglects, the consequences of which are still being played out – post 9/11 and 7/7 – as part of a global, national and local narrative with, as Mythen et al. mention above, an increasingly explicit tone of cultural, religious and racial hostility. There is also a sense within these communities that the main political parties have prioritised service provision towards minority ethnic residents, migrants and asylum seekers, and the individual accounts of EDL members certainly seem to be predicated upon such concerns. It is also within these groups that the red-top media tends to find much of its readership. Analysis of posts on EDL websites reveals that the opinions stated often chime with sentiments expressed on online comment pages linked to newspapers concerning stories about 'Islamic terrorism' or 'fundamentalist Islam' (see Garland and Treadwell, 2010).

Without wishing to simplify explanations for racial or religious hostility (see Gadd (2009) for a neat summary of relevant debates), much of the EDL's support appears to stem from communities that are situated where a large Asian and Islamic population is found (for example, the likes of Birmingham and Luton). It is often in these areas where poor, socially excluded white communities live in close proximity to large Asian populations where there can often be very little interaction between these groups, and where mutual suspicion and hostility can develop (McDevitt et al., 2002;

McGhee, 2008; Finney and Simpson, 2009). It is within such areas, where the tensions are stoked by agitation and aggression from the EDL, that the 'prospect of violence and communities tearing themselves apart is very real' (Lowles, 2009: 7).

### **Violence and the EDL**

Our three case studies began with Robbie, an 18 year-old man from an 'average, working class' background<sup>1</sup>. His parents were separated, and he has had little contact with his biological father, who has moved on to a second family. Robbie resided with his mother and her new partner. His mother worked as a cleaner and her partner, whom Robbie got on 'dead well with', was unemployed but did bits and pieces of work, mostly labouring on building sites. Robbie was completing a college course and existed financially on his education maintenance allowance of £30 per week, and by occasionally making a bit of money from odd bits of work with mates. He had been involved in football violence with the local football firm for about a year, and had acquired a reputation as a 'game and handy lad'. Robbie had travelled to several EDL demonstrations and had been involved in confrontations with young Asian men at those, as well as unprovoked racist violence elsewhere. For example, Robbie described how away from the EDL on the streets of his home town, he had participated in an attack on what he described as 'a pyjama-wearing Paki kid' of about twenty when he and two friends (who were also present during the interview, and verified Robbie's version of events) encountered their victim in the street after a drinking session. Initially, the account of the assault gave little insight into the motivation:

**Robbie:** There were three of us and we got this Paki, and I got him to the floor, just pulled him and he went down like this [gestures, uses his hands to cover his face and makes a shocked expression] and then I just kicked him in the face as hard as I could. The first time I tried it just glanced off his head, but then I tried again and my shin hit him square in the face, and it properly hurt my shin like, then the others had a go, we left him looking in a right state. I nearly felt bad, then I just thought 'Fuck him and all his kind'.

**Interviewer:** What started it?

**Robbie:** I guess I was pissed, but really, he was a Paki Muslim youth, he just deserved it.

As Hall notes, 'physical violence is also more likely to occur in front of a male audience' which suggests 'that many lower-class males are anxious to secure admiration in subcultures that are characterized by mimetic rivalry, where young men judge each other quite ruthlessly on their performances of normative sub-cultural expectations' (Hall, 2002: 46). Other research also indicates



that such hate crimes are commonly committed by males in groups where peer pressure, and the desire to impress friends, is paramount (Byers et al., 1999; Franklin, 2000). Yet Robbie did not suggest that that factored too much; indeed, while he stated to the researcher that violence is 'the sort of thing that happens when you get groups of lads together and drunk, it weren't about me trying to impress the other lads', we cannot know Robbie's deeper motives and whether peer approval forms part of the psychological reward of such episodes. Initially it would seem that the motivations for Robbie's violence were little more than racism alone. However, further knowledge of Robbie's background and personal experiences of victimisation helps to develop an understanding of why he became involved in racist and religiously motivated hate violence. One episode in particular seemed to have acted as a trigger:

**Robbie:** I was always a good lad at school, college never in trouble till I turned 16. It was then I got into football violence, started knocking about with the lads like.

**Interviewer:** How did you join the firm then?

**Robbie:** Just tipped up, I knew lads in it already, but I wanted to, so I just started running with them.

**Interviewer:** So you had never been in trouble before?

**Robbie:** Never even properly had a fight. I did get battered by a load of Pakis at college, they all jumped me. I'd had like an issue with one, but they all did me, got me on my own and properly wrote off. They properly kicked me head in big style, put me in hospital. You know what they are like, won't fight on their own, but all jump in together. That properly, well it put me on one for a while. I felt properly vulnerable and intimidated, but then I started to think, 'This is no good. I can't live in fear'.

It seemed that in common with a number of violent men, Robbie made an active decision that violence was a resource that he would deploy as a counter to his own personnel victimisation, and it would seem that such a feature runs common in the biography of many violent men (Winlow and Hall, 2009). Robbie seemed to have formed a resolve to retaliate and not be victimised in future, yet his response was not immediately to engage in racist violence; rather he sought opportunities to test himself psychologically, to prove he could cope with the dent to his pride resulting from his victimisation and manage his fears:

**Robbie:** That is one of the reasons I started running with the lads. They said to me, 'Your arse will go when it comes on top, but you stand with us, you don't run off', and that kind of forced

me to deal with the issue if you know what I mean, and from then I never looked back. I wasn't going to get battered again. I wanted to know that the next time someone wanted to fuck with me, well, I just wanted to be sure you know, if something like that happened again ... well it wouldn't you know. I won't get battered like that again. If a Paki wants to try it with me now, well it will go down differently.

Robbie appeared to have responded to his personal experience of violent assault by casting Asians as a homogenous group that requires 'putting in its place' through violence:

**Robbie:** They got it together, the Pakis, and now whites run scared of them a lot of the time ... You get them now, blowing themselves up on trains – we have to do something about that. I want them to feel fear, put it back on the Pakis, you know. I love the satisfaction I get when I know that they are shitting themselves cos the EDL are on the way to give it to them. But they need to be put in place, they didn't come here to run the show, it's about time that we give them some of their own fucking medicine.

Like Robbie, Tim and Chris were also committed members of football gangs, and had been involved in football disorder since the ages of 14 and 16 retrospectively. Tim was very much the image of 'hard masculinity', a physically intimidating individual and well known as an organiser of football hooliganism. He, unlike Robbie and Chris, admitted to a history of racially motivated violence, which pre-dated his involvement in the EDL. For example, he relayed the story of how he attacked a black male while in the company of a friend, Warren, who validated Tim's account:

**Tim:** This big coon, he comes up to me, [and says] 'Got a fag bredrin?' [sic]. I was like, 'I don't give to third world charities', he was like, 'What the fuck?', and he came at me [Warren starts laughing] but before he could I just hit him once, one punch and he went straight down, it was the sweetest punch ever. It was only like a jab but he was out before he hit the floor.

**Warren:** I thought you'd actually properly killed him mate, cos he was like fitting.

**Tim:** [laughs] Honest he was, he was just lying face down in a pool of his blood, shaking like, his dreadlocks sprawled out, it was funny as fuck like. He looked like the Predator on glue.

At the time of the fieldwork, Tim was unemployed, yet had managed to accrue enough of a reputation that he 'got by' immersing himself in local markets, legitimate and illegitimate, trading off his reputation. While he was not regarded as a skilled practitioner of violence, and certainly was not

one of the feared members of his area's criminal elite, he was similarly not as socially excluded as others who lived on the same predominantly white sink estate, where high intergenerational unemployment limits the life opportunities of many of the young people of the area. Tim could raise the capital to buy the expensive designer attire that is favoured amongst violent football casuals (Treadwell, 2008). Yet his background has been punctuated with periods of imprisonment and drug abuse that is often found amongst racially motivated offenders (Sibbitt, 1997; Gadd et al., 2005). Tim's early life was also largely unhappy, as he outlined:

**Tim:** I grew up in care, and now I have had my own kids taken away and put into care. It all started when my lass left me, and now they [social services] have bought into her lies and shit, and say I am violent and dangerous so I can't have contact with her or the kids. But I have never, never been violent to her or me kids. At football yes, but I love me kids, now they have took me kids away. Social services seem determined to fuck my kids' life up like they fucked up mine when they took me off me parents and put me into care. That was where all my problems come from.

Chris's background and life circumstances were more stable than those of Tim. He was in his late 20s, in a settled relationship with the mother of his young child, and had ceased much of his involvement in football violence due to a civil banning order made against him by the courts. He had maintained his contact with lads in the firm, still occasionally had a drink with them, and attended 'the odd EDL demonstration'. Chris had been involved in several episodes of racially motivated violence, both at EDL rallies and in his local community, which he was happy to talk about:

**Chris:** I was arrested for a racially aggravated assault on this Paki taxi driver, but that all disappeared after some of the lads got involved and the firm that he [the victim] worked for got him not to turn up at court; made it known that bad things would happen if he did. Then I got done for a racially aggravated public order offence with a Paki bouncer up town, got into a row and sounded off, but they ended up just dropping that down and I got a fine. I haven't been convicted of the worst stuff, luckily.

Chris discussed his violence during an EDL demonstration, where he punched and kicked a young Asian man after confronting a group of young Asian male counter-demonstrators. His account was given amongst friends who had also participated in the assault:

**Chris:** After we got over the fence, I hit this Paki in the face and he just looked so shocked. So I hit him again and that put him down, then we gave him a fucking good kicking.

**Interviewer:** How did you feel afterwards?

**Chris:** [looks perplexed] Now I feel good, because most of the time I see them I feel this internal rage, like anger at them. I see them as the enemy to be truthful, no different to them in Afghanistan fighting with the Taliban. I remember one of my older mates who was inside telling me how, while he was inside [in prison] on the day of the London bombings, and a load of them [Asian inmates] were smiling and joking about it. That just makes me angry, and now I see what I done, when I did that Paki, as special.

**Interviewer:** Special?

**Chris:** It was personal, you know, in a way that football violence is not. I'd say I was ... I was proud afterwards. It made me feel like I'd made a stand [laughs].

Unlike Robbie, Tim and Chris did not have specific experiences of violent victimisation at the hands of Muslim men, but instead they internalised and transformed everyday experiences of mixing with Islamic communities, interpreting incidents as vindictive and personal affronts that made them feel subordinate. As Tim stated:

**Tim:** It's just the fucking way they are, taking the piss. It's the double standards we have in this country towards them, how they get everything given to them that they want. The lads are all arrogant little pricks that reckon they are hard, they are nothing. Honestly mate, I love hitting Paki youths, I love it when you get Paki lads that think they are hard. I will feel better today when I have hit a Paki lad.

**Chris:** I am a maintenance worker, right; I work hard, put in effort. But when you work for our lot, you do contract work for the council. You see what the Pakis get, and it properly fucks you off mate, ten of them in a big house, one of them working as a taxi driver, the rest on benefits. I see their places, and they always have better tellies than what I have. Three or four cars on the drive, and I see that and I think, 'I was born here, and I work, and I am paying for these smelly lazy cunts, when they can't even speak fucking English?' I hear these politically correct cunts tell me it is good for England, well I see it every day, and I can't see how it is. All I see is my Gran lives in a shit flat while some of these cunts are given every luxury, only to treat them like trash anyway. These Pakis lads, right, they like our benefits, but not our laws.

Interestingly it seemed that it was Asians 'lads' that were selected as appropriate rivals for a wider sense of frustration and resentment shared by other EDL members. Both Chris and Tim's accounts specifically mentioned males or 'lads' as the categorical rivals in a process of 'othering' that works to ostracize minority ethnic males while designating them worthy victims of violence (Whitehead, 2005; Perry, 2009). Such a view was evidenced in Chris's own words:

**Chris:** The Paki, the Muslim, to me is the enemy, they are like everything we are not, like Sikhs and Hindus are not cunts, the Indians, they are ok. They are not like Pakis. Pakis are different. It is like they enjoy taking the piss and trying to fuck around with us. Like Sikhs and Hindus, and the blacks, they know you have to follow English laws, but the Pakis, the Muslim ones, basically, they are all different. They come here to take advantage of us, they sell fucking smack, rob off whites but not their own, force young girls into prostitution. They are fucking scum.

By placing themselves against what they perceived as the criminality and aggressive sexuality of young Asian Islamic men, who they believed presented a threat to white women, Chris casted himself in the role of 'patriot' who would 'not just lie down'. He also reflected many of the tabloid fears about young Asian men's predatory criminality, a theme which is also encountered in more general literature on community segregation between white and Asian communities (Cf. Grover, 2008). In addition, Chris, Tim and Robbie all emphasised their own 'heroic' role, following a script that Whitehead (2005) suggests is familiar for men who stress their own personal qualities in using violence. As Tim said:

**Tim:** You seen the footage on the web, after we went over the fence, you see me right at the front, leading the charge at the MDL<sup>2</sup>. It only shows that white lad getting battered though; it doesn't show how when we went at them they fucking ran off like the cowardly fucking cunts they are. Whenever I get the chance mate I am at the front, I will fucking have it with them.

Yet it would seem that Chris's and Tim's violence, reflecting a psychosocial view of their activities, was also the product of a more general social experience whereby they felt marginalised and threatened in their own community. Smith (2006: 28) has argued that underlying much racist violence is 'unacknowledged shame' and that the defences of 'denial' and 'repression' that protect the individual reveal feelings of weakness and subordination. Yet whereas Robbie suggested his shame largely arose out of victimisation, Chris's experience of shame appeared to stem from feelings

of isolation and marginalisation in his local community, a predominantly Asian area where as a white male he was in the minority:

**Chris:** I've never had any choice but to live amongst them, no say in it, cos I can't afford white fucking flight mate. I'd love to be away from them, but on my wages the only place I can afford is in the middle of Jalalabad. It's alright for people who don't, but I have it all the time around me, them lot, they take the fucking piss. Blocking the path off outside the mosque when I am with me lass trying to get the pushchair down the road; it's them treating me like shit in the shops, ripping me off, no fucking 'please' or 'thank you'. They can't even speak English, most of them. My flat, I smell their fucking stinking food everywhere I turn, throwing their rubbish all over the streets. They made our area shit, and I have to live with it. The bloody people who call me racist don't. Then I see them with cars, I can barely afford to put petrol in my car, and I work 50 hours a week. They all bought on the social, they got more money than me, looking after one another, fiddling everything and I do get fucking angry. It burns me up in here, properly gets me raging. And what can I do? If I get angry, if I lose it I get locked up. That why I love the EDL and will fight for them, because they're protecting people like me.

Of the three, it was only Tim that has supported other far right groups (he declared an admiration for Combat 18)<sup>3</sup>. Like Chris and Robbie, he advocated and justified violence targeted against Islamic youths, and his testimony showed he has previously engaged in such behaviour (something which both Robbie and Chris vehemently denied they had). It is interesting to note that Tim had also been involved in aggressive behaviour against young black males, whereas in contrast neither Chris nor Robbie had.

### **Conclusions: The Need to Hear 'Lost Voices'**

In this article we have charted the views, experiences and actions of three young males who had become involved in the activities of the English Defence League. We have seen that all three had a history of engaging in disorder through being part of football hooligan crews and also that all three, as broader research may indicate (Ray et al., 2004), had a history of aggressive behaviour and violence. In the case of two of the research subjects especially, their deprived background had left them with a feeling of resentment towards local Muslim populations whom they felt had been unfairly prioritised in the allocation of scarce local authority resources.

Each of Robbie, Tim and Chris revealed prejudicial feelings towards Muslims and directed much of their inner shame, anger and rage towards young Muslim males whom they saw as 'fair game' for

targeted harassment and abuse. Indeed one, Chris, admitted to a sense of pride after he had physically assaulted an Islamic male, which somehow made him feel as though he had 'struck a blow' not just against the 'Islamification' of his local area but also against the broader Islamic diaspora.

It is this connection between anger, marginalisation, alienation and frustration felt by so many young men in deprived white working class communities, that the EDL has been adept in exploiting. It seems that the violence that has marked so many of the EDL's demonstrations has also been a feature of the lives of many of those who attend its rallies. As Hall (2002: 54) notes, the 'politically pointless detonations of violence that occur among the young men who wander the streets, pubs and clubs of the de-industrialized zones are often triggered by the frustrations experienced in struggles over inadequate material resources ... and in some instances can be racially or ethnically motivated'. Furthermore, such acts of racist violence are perhaps best conceived of as an attempt to re-establish control and to 'escape from shame into a sense of pride' (Ray et al., 2004: 335-6), particularly in the case of one of our case study subjects, Robbie, who may have had a large degree of 'unacknowledged shame' after being beaten up by a social grouping (Muslim males) who he considered to be inferior to himself and those of his own ethnicity.

Yet it is vital to note that despite the suggestion that fighting is supposed to enable the men to rise beyond their innocuous existence, it in fact reinforces social order and power relations. As Hall has suggested, the rewards for such behaviour tend to lock individuals into further social exclusion and marginalisation, rendering much violence a highly addictive but ultimately futile pursuit (Hall, 2002: 44). So while the reading of their violence on a surface level might regard it as either psychically liberating or psychologically fulfilling (Whitehead, 2005) the use of violence further locks Robbie, Tim and Chris into the cyclical marginal positions and frustrated identities that precipitate their aggressive behaviour. The violence of the men featured in these case studies is, in reality, a shallow psychological pyrrhic victory in their own imagined battles as their marginality becomes transformed into the negative violent racism for which white working class are frequently castigated (Macey, 2002).

We are concerned that traditional attempts to link masculinity and crime have failed to connect these structural factors with individualised experiences. While the violence of the three case study men can be more accurately understood as symptomatic of men's perception that they are losing power within an ever-changing, multicultural landscape, and that the use of violence may somehow stem this loss, it also needs to be regarded as a psychological process of individual identity-making. What is especially concerning is that the cases of the three young males discussed here reflect many of these issues, and yet they are by no means atypical of the broader population of disadvantaged

and disenfranchised white working class men that we came across during our research. Unless and until their voices are heard and their concerns listened to, then there is every danger that the English Defence League will seem ever more appealing as an outlet of violence to increasing sections of England's 'lost' communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the three case study subjects have been anonymised to protect their identities.

<sup>2</sup> The MDL is the Muslim Defence League, a group seemingly set up in the wake of the EDL.

<sup>3</sup> Combat 18 are a neo-Nazi group notorious particularly for a number of violent assaults upon minority ethnic people and anti-fascists in the 1990s (see Lowles, 2001).