

Masculinity, Spirituality and Routes out of Gangs and Organised Crime



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Sergio's Story

Age: 28

Born: one of the most socially deprived areas of South Central Los Angeles; raised in Boyle Heights.

Boyle Heights, a neighbourhood characterised by poverty, low educational attainment rates and high levels of gang-related crime. His family is of Mexican descent.

Sergio's father is involved in drug dealing and violent crime, and serves several prison sentences. When he is at home, his father is addicted to heroin.

Age 7

Sergio's father is involved in a larger-scale drug-related crime. He is arrested, tried and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Age 8-9

Sergio is sexually abused by his older brother. Sergio is traumatised and avoids telling anyone because of his sense of fear and guilt.

Age 10-12

Sergio's mother divorces his father and re-marries, and the family moves to Boyle Heights, another socially disadvantaged neighbourhood with multiple gangs. His older brother moves to Mexico.

Sergio's step-father has two sons. Sergio's older teenage step-brother is sent to jail for violent crimes.

Sergio has outbursts of rage and violence in the house and at school due the trauma of the sexual abuse.

Age 13-17

Sergio begins to hang out with the gang members in his neighbourhood. He begins to smoke weed regularly.

His mother throws him out of the house, and he begins to sleep at the houses of his homeboys and, eventually, the local cemetery.

Sergio begins to use methamphetamine, and quickly becomes addicted to it. This means he doesn't have to sleep or eat too often.

With his 'homeboys', he makes money by selling drugs so that he can fund his drug habit, and buy clothes. He supplies the other homeboys with drugs so that he can sleep in their apartments. He inevitably engages in gang shootings to protect his drug patch and his 'homies'.

Age 18-19

Sergio is arrested for drug dealing and violence, tried and goes to jail for 16 months.

Age 20-24

Segio is released from jail but quickly falls back into the gang lifestyle.

He meets a woman, and she becomes pregnant. Sergio promises to stay clean, but quickly falls back into drugs. He begins dealing again to fund his habit.

Sergio is arrested again and is in jail when his daughter is born.


Age 25-26

Sergio serves time in jail again. While inside, his daughter is taken into care. He feels he has lost everything again.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

ACEs	Potential Impact
<p>Abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Physical- sexual- Verbal <p>Neglect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- emotional- verbal <p>Growing up in a household where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- there are adults with alcohol and drug problems- there are adults with mental health problems- there is domestic violence- there are adults who have spent time in prison- parents have separated <p>+ bereavement; bullying; poverty; community adversities such as living in a deprived area, neighbourhood violence etc.</p>	<p>People who reported experiencing four or more ACES are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4x more likely to be a high-risk drinker• 16x more likely to have used crack cocaine or heroin• 6x increased risk of never or rarely feeling optimistic• 3x increased risk of heart disease, respiratory disease and type 2 diabetes• 15x more likely to have committed violence• 14x more likely to have been victim of violence in the last 12 months• 20x more likely to have been in prison at any point in their life

Masculinity, Violence , Gangs and Desistance



- Violence as a means of enacting a hegemonic male identity when other resources and opportunities are unavailable (Messerschmidt, 1993; Connell, 2005; Muncie, 2009; Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Holligan and Deuchar, 2015).
- Salient nature of ‘turning points’ and identity (re-) construction in the criminal desistance process (Maruna, 2001; Carlsson, 2012).
- Intervention programmes in facilitating desistance, and ‘doing masculinity’ in alternative ways (Carlsson, 2013; Decker *et al.*, 2014; Flores, 2014; Sogaard *et al.*, 2015; Deuchar *et al.* 2015)

USA (Los Angeles)



- Racial segregation from 1920s followed by collapse of Black Power Movement in 1960s led to Crips, Bloods and Latino gang culture.
- Cross-neighbourhood ‘gangbanging’, inter-racial conflict.
- Guns and ‘fast money’ as signifiers of hyper-masculinity.
- Prison gangs and criminal distinction.

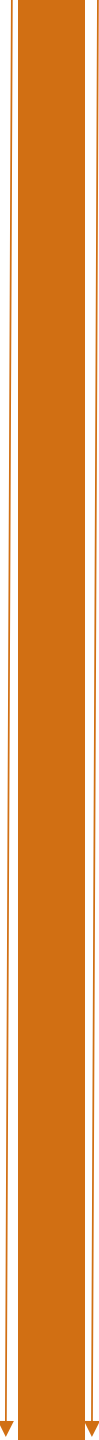
I was nine years old when I got jumped into my gang ... like five guys from the neighbourhood got together. Since I was the youngest one – everybody else was like fifteen – so they whooped my ass ... for about 15 seconds, then we got up ... and celebrated and they give you a gun and say ‘OK, these guys are your enemy now’ ... I was basically looking for family, looking for some type of father-figure, you know? And then my older ‘homies’ were father figures. (*Marcos, LA, 36*)

Denmark (Copenhagen)




- Motorcycle gangs inspired by American biker gang culture.
- Linked to organised forms of criminality.
- Hyper-masculine values and perspectives.

[It was] a place where I could actually be masculine ... it is a masculine brotherhood ... masculine values. No women allowed in the club ... Harley Davidson's, it's Rock and Roll music, it's big beards and long drives on motorcycles and prostitutes in Germany. It's very, very masculine. (*Poul, 31*)




Scotland (Glasgow)

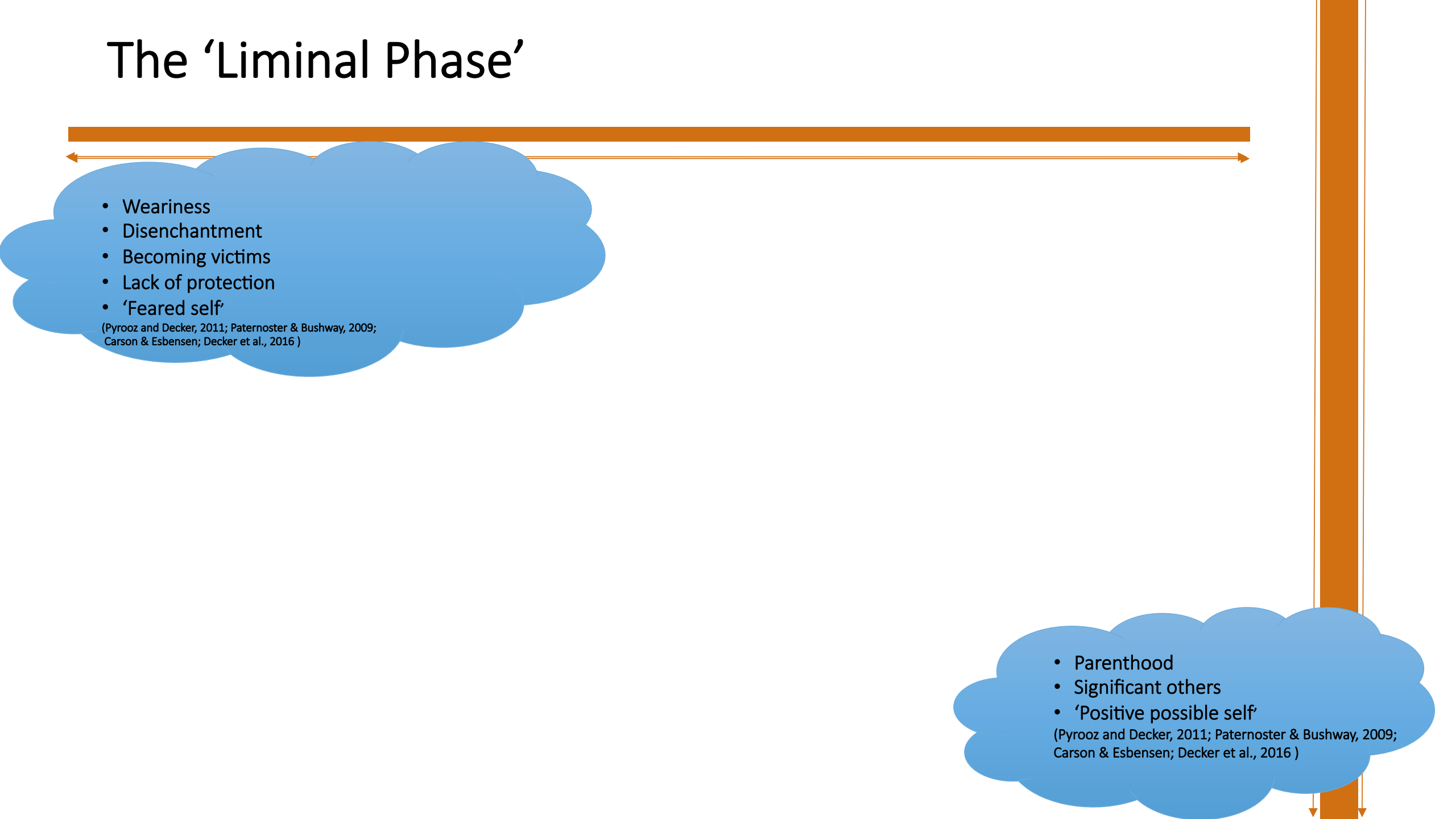


- Territorial and recreational violence.
- Knife carrying.
- Demonstrating physical prowess.
- Some gang evolution: from expressive to instrumental criminality

We wouldn't call ourselves Young Teams mate. That's for wee guys ... no c*** would take you serious [We] are mates that ... deal drugs together Don't have like a gang name, know. (Mark, 22)



The 'Liminal Phase'

- 
- Weariness
 - Disenchantment
 - Becoming victims
 - Lack of protection
 - 'Feared self'

(Pyrooz and Decker, 2011; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009;
Carson & Esbensen; Decker et al., 2016)

- Parenthood
- Significant others
- 'Positive possible self'

(Pyrooz and Decker, 2011; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009;
Carson & Esbensen; Decker et al., 2016)

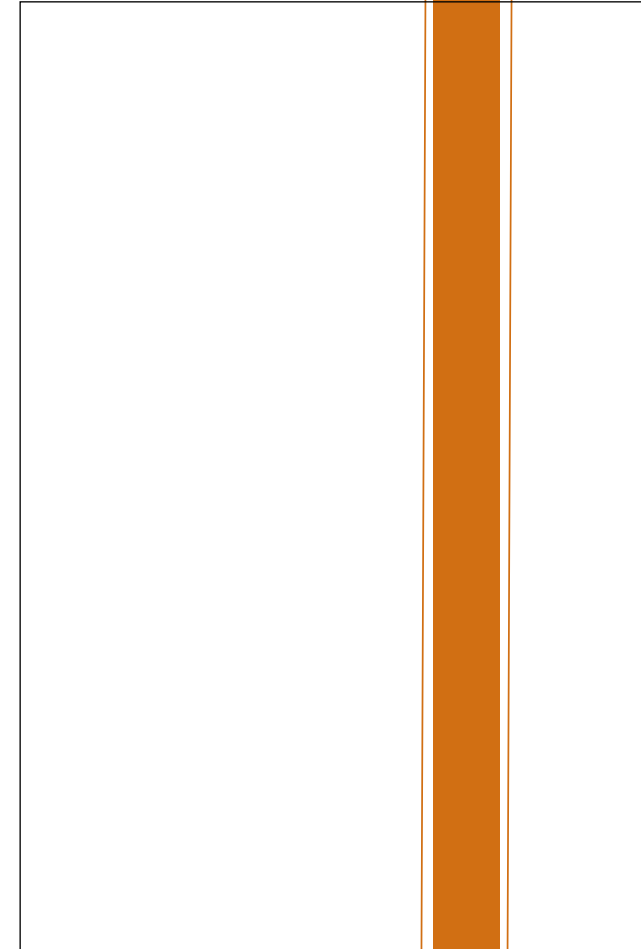

Religion & Spirituality



A system of transcendent beliefs which has been manifested in diverse practices, customs, denominational and institutional formations (Whitehead, 2013, p.1); a 'system of worship and doctrine that is shared within a group' (Schroeder and Frana, 2009, p.720).

A transcendent experience (Hall et al., 2011), concerned with 'addressing ultimate questions about life's meaning' (Fetzer Institute [1999] 2003, p.2; see also Thomas and Zaitzow 2006); focused on notions of deeper meaning, purpose and connections to others (Albuquerque et al., 2014).

Any subjective experience that 'results in greater knowledge and love' or 'precipitates comprehension of new meanings in life which enhances growth.' (Hall et al., 2011)



Case Study : Homeboy Industries



'Gangs are bastions of conditional love – one false move, and you find yourself outside. Slightings are remembered, errors in judgment held against you forever. If a *homie* doesn't step up to the plate, perform the required duty, he can be relegated to a "no good" status. This is a state from which it is hard to recover. Homeboy Industries seeks to be a community of unconditional love. Community will always trump gang any day.'

(Father Gregory Boyle)



Research Methods



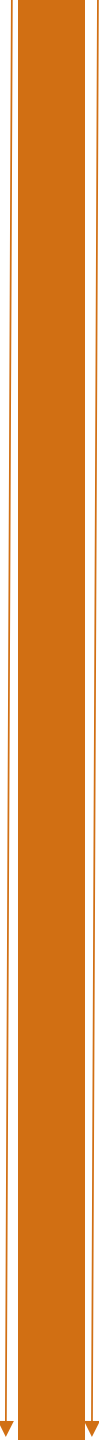
- Life history & follow-up semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with 11 reformed/reforming male offenders (ages 23-39) (all Latino) in *Homeboy Industries* premises.
- Semi-structured interviews with 6 staff (including Directors, mentors, coaches and trainers).
- Participant observation of interventions and support programme.

Name	Age	Neighbourhood	Criminal activity
Emilio	23	Long Beach	Drug dealing, street violence, gang shootings, prison gang leader; anger issues, son taken into care.
Dylan	27	South Los Angeles	Drug dealing, car theft, gang shootings, attempted murder, prison gang member; shot and unable to have children, anger issues, drug addiction.
Lucas	33	Northeast Los Angeles	Gang shootings, drug dealing; disability from shooting in leg.
Bruno	29	Boyle Heights	Drug dealing, drive-by shootings, knife crime; drug addiction, anger issues.
Marcos	36	Long Beach	Drug dealing, gang leadership, armed robbery, shot rival member in head, murder, prison gang leader; drug addiction, mental health issues, life sentence in Pelican Bay Supermax Prison.
Francisco	39	East Los Angeles	Gang shootings, armed robbery, attempted murder, prison gang leader; anger issues, drug addiction.
Diego	28	North Hollywood	Drug dealing, gang shootings, prison gang member; drug addiction, anger issues.
Sergio	28	Boyle Heights	Drug dealing, violence; mental health issues; drug addiction, daughter taken into care.
Benjamin	32	Lincoln Heights	Drug dealing, armed robbery, drive-by shootings; drug addiction
Juan	25	Lincoln Heights	Gang shootings, attempted murder; anger issues, kids taken into care.
Daniel	29	El Sereno	Violence, gang shootings; anger issues, alcohol dependency.

Community-building and Public Celebrations



All the groups we go to, it gives me the chance to ... like I used to be a real personal person. I didn't wanna talk to no one, or express myself. I didn't want anyone to know nothin' about my life ... now all these groups are helping me, you know, like open up, talk about my story. We are similar, you know we all have similar stories so I'm glad I'm here and able to bond with other people that have been through and feel the same stuff I have ... the way I see it is we all help each other, whether we know it or not. *(Benjamin)*



Compassion and Endless Acceptance



One of the things I love about this place is that, you know, we're not judged ... and the reasons they let you express yourself, this is what I think, is because how can you give a person feedback if you're not real with yourself? If I go on an anger management class and say 'yeah, I was gonna kick this dude's ass' ... they start breaking it down, and they let you analyse it, let you think it out ... in most classes you gotta say what they want to hear ... right here you can be you, you know?


(Franciso)



Meditation and Healing



As the class begins a young white woman in her early forties begins to speak as if it's something separate from what just happened right now. It's really about the whole thing is soaked in spirit, you know, this is a place of discovery where people discover the truth of who they are without trying to change what is in front of her. If you don't welcome your own wounds, then you're going to despise the woundedness in others. *(Researcher's field notes)*
(Father Greg Boyle)



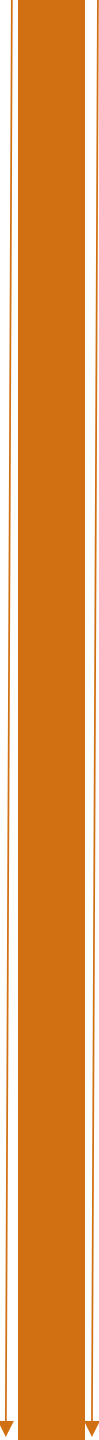
Dismantling Gang Masculinity



Before ... guns gave me the power. Now my kids give me the power. *(Juan)*

(Now) I can sit down and be calm and humble and wait for those little pay cheques and actually live day by day ... it's just tryin' to be a man and fight for like what's right for like kids. *(Diego)*

I guess you could say ... it's time to be a man now ... to me, being a man is being responsible ... taking care of your family ... I'm taking a decision to man up to my s***. ... I'm about to start solar panel training that they offered me ... I really wanna make that a career ... that's gonna help me get myself an apartment and provide more for my daughter. *(Benjamin)*



Sergio's Journey

Age 27-28

Sergio is released from jail again.

He is determined to change his lifestyle and try to get his daughter back.

He had heard about Homeboy Industries from other guys, and goes to visit Father G. to ask for help.

He becomes enrolled in the 18 month programme, begins maintenance work and an education programme to study towards his High School Diploma.

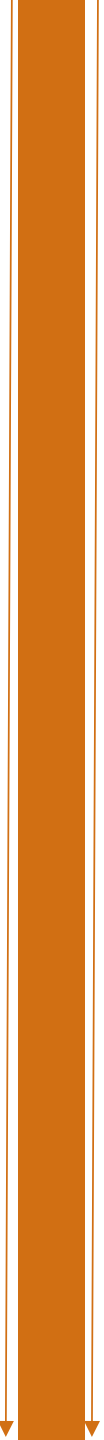
He saves up enough money to rent an apartment.

He stays clean, and takes AA and NA classes. He engages in counselling to begin to deal with the issues from his childhood, while also practicing mindfulness.

He begins to feel supported by his Navigators and the other trainees. When he feels tempted to take drugs at the weekend, he calls them for support. They begin to feel like his family. Because of the strong feeling of love and kinship in Homeboy Industries, he feels secure and appreciated for the first time.

Sergio has ambitions to go to college, to get a career and to be a good father to his daughter.

Case Study: Breathe Smart (Denmark)



Sudarshan Kriya Yoga



- A breathing process consisting of slow, medium and fast cycles of breathing practiced for a total duration of around 30 minutes combined with yoga postures and meditation (Vedamurthachar *et al.*, 2006).
- Based on the teachings of Sri Sri Ravi Shandkar; promoted globally by *Art of Living Foundation*.
- Clinical trials illustrate that Sudarshan Kriya Yoga can be a potential yet safe antidepressant therapy (Muthy *et al.*, 1998; Janakiramaiah *et al.*, 2000; Vedamurthachar *et al.*, 2006).

Research Methods



- Life history & follow-up semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with **20 reformed/reforming male offenders** (ages 23-49) (some indigenous Danes, others first generation immigrants) in open/closed prisons & in *Breathe Smart* studio.
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers/coaches, including the Coordinator, Jakob Lund.
- Participant observation during 5-day *Breathe Smart* Introductory programme.

Name	Age	Country of origin	Prison/released	Criminal activity, addictions and health issues
Abbad	37	Saudi Arabia	released	Biker gang member; drug dealing; gun distribution; armed robbery; debt collection; drug/gambling addictions; depression and prescribed medication.
Jesper	42	Denmark	released	Senior biker gang member; violent offences; attempted murder; murder; bodybuilding and steroid addiction.
Ivan	47	Macedonia	open prison	Drug dealing; robbery; bodybuilding and steroid addiction.
Hans	49	Denmark	released	Biker gang member; drug dealing; depression and prescribed medication.
Lasse	37	Denmark	released	Robbery, including bank robbery; weapon possession; bodybuilding and steroid addiction.
Lucas	43	Denmark	released	Biker gang member; drug dealing; torture for drug debts; marijuana addiction.
Damon	34	Denmark	closed prison	Senior biker gang member; double murder; shot rival gang member 5 times; drug addict; depression and prescribed medication.
Cumar	23	Somalia	open prison	Street gang member; violence; gang shootings; drug dealing.
Jamaal	32	Uganda	released	Biker gang member; drug dealing; armed robbery.
Haggi	58	Denmark	released [Breathe Smart coach]	Drug dealing; steroid and cocaine addiction.
Christoffer	38	Denmark	Released [Breathe Smart coach]	Drug dealing; car theft; violence; cannabis and cocaine addiction.

Name	Age	Country of origin	Prison/released	Criminal activity, addictions and health issues
Oscar	40	Denmark	released	Biker gang member; robbery; drug dealing; tax fraud; weapon possession; murder.
Felix	31	Denmark	released	Biker gang member; violence; drug dealing; manslaughter; drug addiction.
Alfred	39	Denmark	released	Biker gang member; violence; drug dealing; bodybuilding and steroid addict; PTSD.
Anton	48	Denmark	Closed prison	Senior biker gang member; double murder; drug dealing; PTSD.
Mathias	47	Denmark	released	Biker gang member; drug dealing; violence.
William	42	Denmark	released	Drug dealing for biker gangs; drug addiction; depression and prescribed medication.
Sebastian	34	Denmark	released	Biker gang member; weapon possession; attempted murder.
Marcos	29	Denmark	released	Biker gang member; violence and torture; drug collection and trafficking; attempted murder; PTSD.

Emotional Release and Empathy



The day came we had to do the Sudarshan Kriya for the first time, the breathing ... and when I get home and I get inside the door, you know, I sat in my kitchen for a while and I then just crying ... it was really looking into myself for the first time in my life, and see all the f*****-up things I've been doing. (*Lucas*)

Some people cry but I get gladness in me, you know, it's a good feeling. So when I get out of there I'm positive, you know, I'm on like drugs but in a good way and I'm pumped up ... I get this, you know, strong energy, yeah a lot of energy. (*Jamaal*)

I had a problem with one person, and then he wrote something very bad to me. And normally I would just go out and I would just totally destroy him. But for the first time I could see how the other one feels, so I wrote it as a message. It was more like 'what's wrong with you? You must feel bad or something, you know?' I start to be able to sit in another person's place. (*Abbad*)

Masculinizing the Practices and Role Models



Of course I don't wanna be like the 'weak' guy, but I don't feel like weak ... you only see [meditation] in the *Sex in the City* movie ... then it's ... just feminine, but actually it's really tough. (*Damon*)

I think when they see something they recognise and they recognise the tattoos and the baldness ... (*William*)

It was actually the guy in the TV show who got me, he had tattoos all over his neck and face ... and he started [Breathe Smart] and he said 'this works' ... he was my inspiration. (*Alfred*)

Re-conceptualising Masculinity



I want to ... be a good man for my wife and a good son for my parents and a good brother for my brothers and sisters, and good friend and ... just do the right thing. *(Cumar)*

I'm a family man, I have a daughter now who's two and a half, I have a beautiful wife ... my new definition of masculinity is 'the dad'. *(Felix)*

To be macho doesn't necessarily involve hitting other people or walking around with a knife ... it means taking care if your family, make sure nothing harms them. *(Sebastian)*

I can tell you, when I go into a room before I'm scanning the room, I watch everybody ... I could tell you when I come into the bar, 'those two guys over there' ... I could look into their eyes and tell their attitude ... I could stand in the room and see who's who in five seconds ... I have this animal instinct ... [now] my way of going into a room is totally different, even I'm the same eyes ... when I go into a room I expect this room to be peaceful, I don't expect to come into any trouble. *(Jesper)*

Addiction and Mental Health Issues



In Denmark we call it happy pills, but these pills don't bring you any happiness, they just make you a walking zombie. So I used that for half a year and then I said to my doctor, 'I don't wanna do this anymore ... I got [therapy] from healing myself ... It's like putting on new glasses ... you see the world differently. Before I was aggressive of course, but I've been a pretty calm guy. *(Damon)*

It was like a miracle ... it's like I was dead but I became alive again ... I stopped taking depressive medicine after six years ... I was so much influenced by the drugs that I was just going round like a zombie ... when I started the course, I stopped during the programme. *(Abbad)*

I did not know I had the PTSD. They told me like two years ago ... I went to a psychologist. I told him there's something wrong, I see pictures in my brain everytime I go to sleep ... they wanted to give me some pills ... but I don't take the pills ... I just keep on meditation, talking with Jakob ... working with myself ... and now, sometimes I have good days ... sometimes I do sleep. *(Marcos)*

From Warriors to Peacemakers & Wounded Healers

A thick orange horizontal bar with a double-lined arrow pointing left on the left side and a double-lined arrow pointing right on the right side.

You are not born a tough guy ... you are not born with status as a criminal or money-maker. We were born like a creature who was open and full of love and creativity ...

(Hans, Denmark)

A thick orange vertical bar with a double-lined arrow pointing down on the right side.

Loving our Way to Healing and Change



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<http://rossdeuchar.me.uk>



https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC02q04IKhqD_BaBH2ZbyGpw