Turning a back on violence: Storying anti-violence with young men in schools

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Abstract

What are some of the effects of inviting young men troubled by violence to take up non-violent identity claims? This article describes narrative therapy practices in re-authoring stories of violence with one of two young men in a New Zealand secondary school[i]. The core outcome of this article is displayed through seven therapeutic "movements" within counselling conversations with Carl, one of the participants. The approaches demonstrated offer possibilities for the development of anti-violence practices within schools that deconstruct notions of masculinity. A scaffolded therapeutic conversation towards alternative understandings of masculinity is presented that produces more hopeful and respectful ways of being as men.

Keywords: school counselling, anti-violence, narrative therapy, masculinities, gender

Within this article I present conversational moments undertaken with Carl[ii], a 15-year-old Pākehā (New Zealand European) secondary school student. Using a discursive analysis methodology (Burr, 2015; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), the counselling conversations with Carl were examined to draw implications for counselling practice in schools, and for ideas in developing anti-violence counselling with young men. The transcripts of this work were analysed using social constructionist (Burr, 2015) and poststructural theories (Davies, 1991, 1994, 2005; Drewery, 2005).

Within the social constructionist and poststructural literature reviewed for this study there is an overarching critique of men being conceptualised as violent from within mainstream theoretical understandings. These understandings form a perspective of violence from predominantly pathological and internalised points of view. A key alternative theoretical position drawn from the literature is that violence is "only possible because preferences for more peaceful relationships are sufficiently restrained by internalised cultural forces" (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 161). The theoretical and ethical positions expressed in this article, therefore, contradict these explanations of men's violence (Connell, 2014). In this sense, rather than asking, "What caused a man to abuse?" the therapist is positioned to invite the man to consider "what is stopping him from taking responsibility to relate respectfully" (Jenkins, 1990, p. 32). Through invitational practices "the therapist invites the man to discover and challenge restraining attitudes and habits, in order to free himself to develop the relationship he really wants" (Jenkins, 1990, p. 80).

In addition to this, Connell's (2014) description of hegemonic masculinity provides an important conceptual framework for this work: "Hegemonic masculinity means the pattern of masculinity, which is most honoured, which occupies the position of centrality in a structure of gender relations …" (p. 8). Concepts of these central structures of gender relations are explored in the work with Carl below.

While this article does not provide detailed definitions of these theoretical positions, it refers to specific material that readers can access. The focus of our study is how the counselling

practice took shape in relation to these theories. The conversations between Carl and me, therefore, take centre stage. These conversations are interspersed with the theory that is woven into its practice, and this demonstration is followed by a discussion on some of the key elements of this practice that includes a section on the implications for future research.

Storying Anti-violence with Carl

In terms of a therapeutic journey, this work over five counselling sessions took Carl and me across a vast terrain, but the main focus was on the storying of anti-violence identities. Using social constructionist theory (Burr, 2015), a person has multiple identities that are produced within the multiple discourses in which they live. Across some years, Carl and his family had been assisted by at least three different support agencies regarding various problems that focused on the use of violence by Carl. Within these previous interventions Carl sensed he did not have much authority or agency. He had used violence upon his family members, and it appears that no one had stopped to ask him if he preferred the outcomes that this violence was bringing, or whether he preferred something different altogether for his life. Winslade and Williams (2012) provide a useful relational perspective on the ways that violence can have effects in the lives of young men and their families: "Violence tears at the fabric of relationship in very powerful ways. It establishes uneven and unjust power relations and interrupts loyalties, friendships, family connections, and personal commitments" (p. 168). The significant effects of this violence in and around Carl's life started to become more apparent, affecting his mother and siblings, but clearly also Carl himself.

When Carl and I first met we initially considered how stress and frustrations relating to school were affecting him. However, we soon began talking about the violence that sometimes followed him home from school, inserting itself into his family relationships. Through a therapeutic stance of genuine curiosity (McKenzie & Monk, 1997) I wondered with Carl whether this might also be a useful focus for our work. We talked about addressing the violence but with the intention of seeking to build an argument for anti-violence, something that he might claim for himself with the assistance of those around him. This approach was based on the assumption that Carl had alternative personal commitments for his life compared to the way the acts of violence were storying him. Carl was intrigued by this proposition from the outset and, with his mother's consent, decided he would like to participate in this research.

This article presents the counsellor in a unique position to assist young men to claim their preferred identity (White, 2005) in place of violence. The ethical position that influences this work is in line with McMenamin's (2014a) view that "when young people are identified by others and identify themselves within descriptions of what they care about … their subsequent actions often become more agreeable to the school communities of which they are a part" (p. 69). Carl had not yet been asked to consider how he might take responsibility for the violence he used. Nor had he been invited to imagine pathways towards new and preferred identity stories. This is the deliberate and intentional curiosity that underpinned all of the counselling conversations that I had with Carl. Carl's preferences for anti-violence, and thus, for alternative ways of producing himself in the world, come more clearly into focus as each of the conversations unfold.

A series of "movements" that scaffold an anti-violence story

Using small and specific conversational moments, the presentation that follows comprises seven different "movements" that took place within the counselling conversations between Carl and myself. Here, I define "movements" as the therapeutic shifts that took place within the context of scaffolded conversations (White, 2007). The practice draws significantly from Michael White's (2007) scaffolding conversations map and demonstrates how these movements can be woven together by considering them as narratives that work towards a preferred, anti-violence identity story. This scaffolding practice demonstrates small, incremental movements that took place towards this preferred story. It also represents the social collaboration that White (2007) reflects on between counsellor and client. Through this therapeutic collaboration Carl begins to experience a sense of personal agency as described by White (2007):

> a sense of being able to regulate one's own life, to intervene in one's life to affect its course according to one's intentions, and to do this in ways that are shaped by one's knowledge of life and skills of living (p. 263–264).

Each movement is initially titled with Carl's words and then connected to certain theoretical ideas. These ideas are explored for the purposes of theorising a practice of storying anti-violence.

Movement 1: "*Asking for help*" Thickening descriptions of different strengths in masculinity

Within this first movement I demonstrate how Carl is invited to define some of the ways he is storied by social and cultural discourses of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2014). By offering Carl an agentic speaking position (Davies, 1991), a preferred masculinity story begins to be carved out. Within the position calls (see Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999; Drewery, 2005) available to men to take up dominant versions of masculinity, this segment gives an example of Carl's resistance to and rejection of these positions (Burr, 2015; Winslade, 2005). Carl's preference for other positions is achieved through the invitation to speak to the social construction of men's anger. The transcribed dialogue that follows demonstrates movement between multiple subject positions (Burr, 2015). It shows that within the discourses Carl is located, how preferred versions of strength in masculinity can be thickened.

Researcher: What do you think might be in our training as men, to respond with anger? How are real men meant to deal with anger?

Carl: *Well, I reckon that guys are brought up to be the tough person. The common belief is that men have to be strong, and that they don't talk about feelings as such, as women do. They don't talk about things and generally deal with things themselves. They think it makes them look stronger. They don't wanna look weak by asking for help. But over the last few weeks I've [Carl's emphasis] really realised that asking for help is actually the stronger thing to do, 'cause it takes a lot of courage to do that. I've realised that to get things sorted you need to talk about it. And again, that takes a lot more courage than you might think. And in the end, you come out stronger than you were before.*

Researcher: Yeah, and is that strength displayed in a different way than what we would commonly perceive as strength?

Carl: *Yeah, it's a very different sort of strength. And you learn to deal with things in a better way. And because men are brought up to believe that having muscle is strength, they deal with things typically with violence, especially towards women actually.*
Researcher: So, particularly towards women this violence gets displayed?
Carl: *Yeah, towards younger people as well. And to other men. Like, they get in fights and all of that stuff, they get angry 'cause there's something that is bothering them. And I've noticed that since I've started talking about things [in counselling] I've become a lot less angry, less wound up, less anxious as such.*

I acknowledge that my initial question is borrowed directly from Trudinger's (2000, p. 49) anti-violence work alongside young men in the prison system. In this, our second session, my particular use of this question is based on an intention to expand the repertoire of language (Davis & Crocket, 2010) used in the session to thicken descriptions (White, 1997a) of alternative strengths in masculinity. This intention sits alongside Davis and Crocket's (2010) group work with men when they suggest that in "shaping the possibilities of the masculinities we get to perform as men in Aotearoa New Zealand" (p. 17). In this light, Carl and I are enacting "*a very different sort of strength*". Through the phrase, "*I've really realised that asking for help is actually the stronger thing to do*", Carl re-describes a version of masculinity, which has an effect of further cementing this developing storyline. In this way, Carl is invited to story the beginnings of a preferred identity story and he uses this moment to speak in support of taking up an identity of a young man who has taken a stand in "*talking about things*". This description is then further storied as being significantly effective as he has become "*a lot less angry, less wound up, less anxious*". These effects do not haphazardly appear but are the work of the social collaboration occurring between Carl and myself. This collaboration fosters the scaffolding process towards the making of alternative meaning among the dominant ideas of masculinity that are at work in our conversation. Within this first movement we have begun re-authoring masculinity stories, which in turn opens the possibilities of asking for help as a young man and serves as an alternative form of strength rather than a weakness.

Through our scaffolding conversations, the next movement demonstrates a further incremental step from what White (2007) has referred to as the known and familiar, to what might be possible for Carl to know as a young man.

Movement 2: "*I like helping people*" Troubling and fracturing hegemonic masculinity discourses

The discovery of alternative meaning in the life of Carl is represented within this next movement. There are multiple stories, and versions of stories, by which young men are described in their masculinities (Connell, 1995, 2014). Here, an opening-up of alternative positions (Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999) takes place through the work of making visible those dominant social ideas regarding gender. This is the necessary work of fracturing discourse (Davies, 2005) and is a form of deconstruction. In Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) words, this is a "process of deconstruction" which "results in a destabilising of that which we have unproblematically come to accept" (p. 17). Carl and I question notions of a hegemonic masculinity. In this sequence I highlight a process of deconstructing dominant gender discourses.

Carl: *… but I don't see why a man can't be what would these days be classed as feminine.*
Researcher: I guess it troubles me because if we just [my emphasis] clumped it into either masculine or feminine, then you've only got two categories. I think there's a lot that we could miss …
Carl: *There's more of the in between things. Because, I like helping people—it's something that apparently, I'm good at. I wouldn't have said so, but other people have. Like, I'm [Carl's emphasis] the person who enjoys seeing other people happy …*

This section displays a small, yet meaningful deconstructive inquiry. This conversational moment permits the opening up of alternative meaning in relation to Carl's life and the gendered discourses through which he is constituted. As opposed to essentialised versions of masculinity, Connell (2002) theorises a fluid and conflictual gender relations, which forms a helpful context from which to question the rigidity of the masculine/feminine gender binary. I was purposeful in inquiring from this position as a way of unsettling these ideas to the point where new meanings might surface. Again, the relational context is a collaborative one that opens the possibility for "*the in between things*" to develop. Here, I take "*the in between things*" to be a deconstruction of stereotypical terms often used to describe men/women within the rigid binary of what is considered either masculine or feminine. Carl collaborates on the idea I offer, that "*there's a lot that we could miss*". By using the words "*the in between things*", Carl speaks a different masculinity into existence (Davies, 1994), one that allows us to traverse new ground in the conversation. This is an example of how "stereotyped descriptions of experience become less fixed and influential when methods of therapy assist these stereotyped descriptions to be more *complete*" (Payne, 2006, p. 7, emphasis in original). It demonstrates how this practice of scaffolding is in movement and development. Step by step, Carl and I are storying his preferred version of what it means to be a man.

The next movement demonstrates how more specificity and richness is developed regarding the terms Carl uses to story himself, building on the narrative of an anti-violence stance.

Movement 3: "*Being a nice person*" Using the absent but implicit to story identity
Using an absent but implicit (Carey, Walther & Russell, 2009; White, 2000) line of inquiry, I invite Carl to consider what he might be standing *for* as a counter to the stories of violence, anger and aggression. This allows us to create some distance from identity stories of violence and, as a result, opens space for more of the "*in between things*". I note that this distance from stories of violence does not negate the crucial relational practice of inviting men to take responsibility for their use of violence (Jenkins, 1990, 2009). Rather, I have chosen here to highlight a movement from one identity that has been laden with anger and violence, towards one that is more akin to values of care and respect.

Researcher: And this identity of being nicer, is it one that you hope to grow even more, or for it to be part of you even more?
Carl: *Yeah, I quite like being the nice person. The mean person I don't really like—or the annoying person and stuff. Yeah, I enjoy being nice to people.*
Researcher: So, if you enjoy being the nice person, what would that suggest about what you don't enjoy?

Carl: *Well, I don't like getting angry. And I've tried really hard recently to step away from all of that and just try to become a nicer person.*
Researcher: So, in that are you choosing a position here, are you choosing to be nice, even though the temptation of other responses could be there?
Carl: *Yeah, I think so.*
Researcher: Quick question. Is it all right if we notice some of the ways that you've tried really hard to step away from getting angry? What do you think?
Carl: *Well, as I said, I started taking the medication again. Not necessarily to stop me from getting angry but sort of the anxiety stuff. And recently mum noticed, last night in fact. She was just like "wow, you've been a lot nicer lately". And some of it for me is the fact that I don't necessarily worry. But another part of it is, well, I'm fed up with people looking down on me, as someone who's not a nice person*.
Researcher: Okay, so you got fed up with that position?
Carl: *Yeah, I got annoyed with it. It got overwhelming at times, which is one of the things that could make me angry.*
Researcher: So, people looking down on you as the person who is grumpy, angry, moody or …?
Carl: *Yeah, all of those. Maybe the person who's not very tolerable to be around. Yeah, I'll admit to that.*
Researcher: So then, I take it that that fed up-ness was enough to take action from? What has it started to offer you, or what has it opened up, that maybe wasn't a possibility before when things like anger and all that got in the way?
Carl: *Some of it has opened up into friendships with people that I wouldn't have thought would ever be my friend.*

Through listening to and inquiring about what was not overtly spoken of, but was, however, implied by Carl, a new identity claim begins to be storied. "*Being the nice person*" is an expression of one of Carl's preferred ways of being known in the world, and thus he begins to escape the descriptions of the mean, angry and violent person. This inquiry is made more robust through asking Carl to take a position in relation to the unique outcome (see White, 2007, "Statement of Position Map, Version 2", pp. 233–249) of "*being nice*", and then also by asking him to make meaning from this chosen position.

Movement 4: "*Turning my back on anger*" Storying agency and identity

On several occasions Carl stated that "*it just sort of happened over time*" in terms of changes that had occurred in his life. Sparked by the initial absent but implicit inquiry, I invited Carl to take a position in relation to this emerging identity story. This was further supplemented by my continuous pursuit of the idea that Carl had already been working to position himself differently within the contexts he inhabits. Through a "stance of persistence and genuine curiosity" (McKenzie & Monk, 1997, pp. 87–88) I hoped Carl might begin to take up an active authoring position in shaping this identity. To achieve this, I took up a relational stance that was decentred and, at the same time, influential (White, 2005, 2007). Through this stance, the possibilities for Carl to see himself as an active author were produced. From this position, Carl and I are more clearly able to scaffold towards preferred identity stories and gain further distance from violence.

Carl: *It sort of just happened over time. Just one day I started to be nicer, and from there it sort of just built in myself if that makes sense. Like, it wasn't something I actively chose as such, but I started re-wiring my brain, thinking of more positive ways.*
Researcher: And as a young man, what does that sort of say about who you want to be and continue becoming? Like, as opposed to things like violent or angry?
Carl: *Well, I know from the bad experiences I've had with it [violence and anger—both coming from myself and directed at me—I didn't like it. So I chose to almost turn my back on it. And there have been a number of times where I've got wound up about something, but it hasn't led to violent acts or anything like that. It's almost like someone's tapping your shoulder behind you as you're walking along, and you've just gotta brush it off and keep walking.*

This piece fascinated me. I was encouraged to think more about storying anti-violence identities for two reasons. Firstly, Carl was taking up an active position, "*I chose to turn my back on it*", despite having just stated, "*it wasn't something I actively chose*". By inquiring about Carl's actions of starting to "*be nicer*", and what this might suggest about who he wants to be and become, I am making the assumption that his actions have purpose (McMenamin, 2018) and thus might be storied agentively. Secondly, Carl's description stands out to me as a re-positioning statement that is a counter to the overbearing dominant masculinity discourses that constitute men as violent. This is a re-negotiation of an identity story that has plagued him for some time. When Carl states "*it's almost like someone's tapping your shoulder behind you as you're walking along, and you've just gotta brush it off and keep walking*", I link back to our storying of the idea of restraints (Jenkins, 1990) from an earlier conversation. Although the discursively produced restraining forces of violence are still ever-present, there has been a re-storying, a re-authoring event that has taken place in our counselling conversation. Carl depicts this re-positioning manoeuvre in relationship to violence by stating "*I chose to almost turn my back on it*". Thus, within the discourses available to Carl, this manoeuvre positions him more agentively than before and is another scaffolding step towards the taking up of a preferred, anti-violence identity.

Movement 5: "*I sorta just decided to talk*" Noticing less-noticed stories
The following excerpt demonstrates a further unfolding of an identity story in motion. It appears within the same conversational line of inquiry as movement 4 and works to highlight stories that often go unnoticed. It also demonstrates how the work of the previous movements provided the necessary scaffolding for Carl to take up an active position within his own story, and thus a co-authoring position in the counselling session. I argue that an active positioning is crucial in producing anti-violence stories and identities.

I inquired whether Carl might be able to tell me of any recent stories involving him disabling or defusing anger. Essentially, I was hoping Carl might begin to bring forward a story where he used non-violent means to approach a situation that might have otherwise eventuated in violence. He proceeded to tell me about his experience after one of his school exams.

Carl: *During that week, I'd done my maths one [exam] and I'd walked out just after the hour. I looked at it and I didn't know how to start to answer most of the questions. It wasn't stuff that we had really covered much in class, so I was getting a bit fed up with my teacher and I walked out. I got really fed up with my teacher, and it was cold, it was raining outside and I was*

waiting for my friend to finish. But yeah, I sorta decided just to talk to people about the exam, other people that were in my class who were in the same situation.
Researcher: Okay, so you talked it through with some of them? Is that what you're meaning?
Carl: *I sorta talked it through with some of them and we were all annoyed at the teacher and stuff, but there was no reason to get angry or anything. I found talking with other people was helpful for me. To help sort of defuse, or like just get some things off my chest.*
Researcher: And then what happened after that? What did you notice after you talked it through with some of these people?
Carl: *Most of us were all on the same page about what we thought. Nothing really got to any point of anger.*
Researcher: So, say this was last year and you were faced with this situation?
Carl: *I probably would have gone home and broken something.*
Researcher: Yeah?
Carl: *Yeah, that would have been likely. I would have complained to mum about it and got myself wound up, and all of that sort of stuff would have escalated quickly.*
Researcher: Something might have been broken or someone might have got …?
Carl: *Hurt or something like that. But glad to say, that didn't happen!*

Yuen (2011) proposes that "in the shadows of dominant masculinity stories are often stories of caring, humility, compassion, and a sense of justice" (p. 11). It is with this ethic that this section speaks to ways that Carl's "less noticed stories coexist" (McMenamin, 2014a, p. 76) together with the troubled stories of violence. Carl's words allude to the ways that dominant masculinity stories can have effects specifically regarding actions such as aggression, anger or violence. However, Carl is invited to envisage what might have been (e.g., people getting hurt, things being broken) and compare this to the reality of what actually happened in his actions. He chose to stand up to violence through talking to those around him[iii]. The words "*I sorta decided just to talk to people*" might on the surface be considered as mundane or ordinary. However, in the context of a narrative practice that links themes and values across time, this seemingly insignificant statement is perceived as being important and is somewhat exoticised (White, 2004) in our conversation. White's use of Bordieu's concept (1988, as cited in White, 2004) provides a theoretical map to question further the nuanced and minute moments within counselling conversations that can be taken for granted. Through rich description (White, 1997a) of this event, and through Carl being positioned as an active subject within this story, he is therefore re-describing the masculinities he gets to perform. This description produces Carl as someone who is actually *already* practising anti-violence.

By storying Carl's peaceful means of conversing with others around him, we are thus storying his anti-violent, preferred ways of operating and being known. These moments are not insignificant. They shape the preferred identities that Carl might then more fully inhabit in his own life.

Movement 6: "*Not going back*" A statement of intentions

In the following transcript of dialogue, Carl makes a statement of his intention not to return to those past identities that have heavily hindered him. This segment also reiterates the position I take up as a counsellor—decentred and influential—and demonstrates how this provides the positioning possibilities for Carl to define his own terms. Together, Carl and I started to imagine the possibility that he might be making a voyage across identities in the form of a

migration (White, 1995, 1997b; McMenamin, 2018). Carl takes up my invitation to think of it as a migration of identity but adds his own take on it, defining it in his own terms. This inquiry then thickens the description about Carl as a young man who prefers to speak himself into being via non-violent descriptions.

Carl: *Yeah, that's a good analogy. But that's not the one I would have used.*
Researcher: Oh, well tell me the one you would use.
Carl: *I would have said it's like a transition or a fade. Yeah, 'cause when you say migrating it's almost as if you're gonna go back.*
Researcher: You're not planning to go back?
Carl: *Oh, god no.*
Researcher: So, you haven't planned to, you're not planning on fading back into it?
Carl: *No. I don't ever want to return if that makes sense.*

Firstly, I highlight the distance that is visibly between where Carl was and where he now positions himself within this identity story. The known and familiar storylines now carry less momentum, and the new possibilities of knowing and identity are more readily available to him. I offered the metaphor of a migration of identity (McMenamin, 2018), however, Carl determinedly states his own version of the story. This not only speaks to the position of agency that he has more fully taken up, but clearly also the strength of the alternative storyline that was being developed across our meetings. I liken this to how Duvall and Béres (2011) position narrative practices in this context as being "committed to helping men uncover this knowledge through self-reflection" (p. 210). Carl took a position in relation to the violence in his life, which was then justified within the context of his thorough self-reflection. In this way, new knowledge was uncovered that thickened his personal story of new intentions and actions regarding violence stories.

Movement 7: "*Perseverance is the key*" Speaking one's self into preferred masculine identity

In this final movement, Carl makes a claim about what he is turning away *from* and, in this sense, is also stating what he is preferring to turn *towards*. Following on from the movement above, Carl and I move forward in describing some of the values that will support him in his transitional journey from one identity to another. The value of perseverance stands out clearly as something that Carl holds precious. I demonstrate particularly how my practice brings careful attention to language, just as Burr (2015) argues: "it is language that brings the person into being" (p. 53).

Carl: *Perseverance is the key.*
Researcher: So, what are you persevering for [my emphasis] if you were to sum that up?
Carl: *I would say I'm persevering to get away or turn a back on violent ways or aggression. I'm trying to be a more positive person. And as difficult as that may be at times, I'm never gonna give up. You don't ever want to give up. 'Cause as soon as you give up, you'll start going backwards.*

Carl highlights the value of perseverance within this conversational movement as playing a crucial role in supporting him to maintain a stance of anti-violence. Within the overall context

of the preferred narratives we have been storying, the perseverance Carl speaks of is significant. It demonstrates the vantage point from which Carl can now view his life and the surrounding stories that speak him into being, but that he also speaks into being. Dominant stories of masculinity are fraught with restraints that steer men away from things like taking responsibility for their actions (Jenkins, 1990). However, I argue that the perseverance Carl speaks of, acts as a "friend of responsibility" that assists Carl "to become more responsible and caring" (Wirtz & Schweitzer, 2003, p. 195). The versions of masculinity that Carl is speaking into being line up with his preferred values and intentions for life. These versions not only allow him to make new identity claims as a young man, but also to more readily take responsibility for violence.

In summary, the movements represented in this article are counter stories (Epston, cited in Ingamells, 2016, p. 58). They are stories of and towards preferred identity claims in the wake of violence. I emphasise again the purposeful use of scaffolding conversations as a framework to story these preferred self-identities. I have demonstrated how a social collaboration in my counselling practice with Carl had significant impact in bringing these identity stories to life. By inviting young men into positions where they might be considered active co-authors in the process of re-authoring stories of violence, new possibilities and hopes may be generated within school communities.

I now turn to some brief discussion points regarding some of the key propositions and ethics of an anti-violence practice.

Deconstruction of dominant masculinity discourses

Overall, the invitational practices (Jenkins, 1990, 2009) used in this research support the fracturing of discourses (Davies, 2005) in relation to dominant and hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995, 2014). As is consistent within poststructural (Davies, 1991, 1994, 2005), social constructionist (Burr, 2015), narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990; White, 2007), and invitational practice (Jenkins, 1990, 2009) literature, practices that work to deconstruct dominant cultural ideas are crucial in the work of storying anti-violence identities alongside young men. I emphasise that this process is important in setting the scene for working towards non-violent identity claims that are *for* preferred values and hopes. For example, Carl at times spoke about the way that anger and violence were present in his life. This highlights the widespread presence of the constitutive forces of discourse and their shaping effects for young men in schools. These effects are felt and described in internalised ways and manifest within the actions of young men. It can be a slippery slope towards claiming that things simply happen because "men get angry sometimes" and therefore "can't control it". Within the movement that occurs when practices of deconstruction are enacted, these turns of phrase become less valid and less fixed. This kind of deconstructive work brings forward wider possibilities for more beneficial identity stories to be shaped.

Storying anti-violence as a reflexive process

I assert that this process of storying anti-violence is not sequential or predictable. It is not a linear process whereby one line of inquiry simply leads to another. In this article I have presented examples of how I have taken up reflexive practices as a school counsellor, maintaining a fluid process rather than a set structure. As Jenkins (1990) describes it, restraints to taking responsibility are constantly circling and influencing the position calls (Drewery, 2005) within such counselling conversations. Therefore, an awareness of these restraints is

significantly beneficial. I have identified in my own practice that a purposeful ethical positioning is useful. This position hears the influence of violence and works to fracture the restraints on men taking responsibility. Furthermore, this can have the significant effect of positioning the young men as being *most likely* to take up positions of responsibility. This proposes an ethic that men are not only capable of these positions, but also works to place them as *likely* to take up these positions of responsibility when invited through relational and invitational practices (Jenkins, 2009). This is consistent with Jenkins' view that men do indeed have preferred ways of relating, such as love, care, and respect. It's about questioning how violence successfully restrains men from seeing this in their own lives, just as we have witnessed in the movements with Carl.

Overall, I see this work in a similar light to Parker (1999), who describes a practice in deconstruction "that is always *in process* rather than something fixed, a movement of reflexive critique rather than a stable set of techniques" (p. 2, emphasis in original).

Restoring relationship by re-storying relationship

I emphasise here the usefulness of conceptualising the storying of anti-violence as an identity project. Through the explorations in this single case study I have come to the further proposition that re-storying and re-describing one's self-story is an act that can bring about effects of *restoring* relationships. This took place, for example, between Carl and his mother as a process of him re-storying his self-story. The relationship with one's self can be restored (and re-storied) through exploring preferred ways of being, seeing actions as purposeful moments that can be about standing up for injustices, and seeking exceptions to the problem stories in men's violence.

Implications for future research

In terms of this research and beyond, the carefully crafted and skilful practice of Paré, Bondy and Malhotra (2006) offers a unique and productive way forward. They espouse that "the *expression of non-violent intent* and the *practice of a non-violent exchange with one's partner* are two different performances of meaning" (p. 66, emphasis in original). This research with men who have abused applies a similar ethic in the context of working alongside young men in schools. There is potential for significant benefit in pursuing the development of these anti-violence practices within schools that more fully support the performance of non-violent exchanges. Schools are uniquely positioned communities that provide opportunities for practical benefits to be fostered. I link these benefits to practices that enact peaceful ways of being within the community of a school (Winslade & Williams, 2012), to *perform respect* (Paré et al., 2006), and for these identities to be authenticated by this community of supporters (Davis & Crocket, 2010). In this sense, previous stories of violence, which have effects on a young man's reputation in a school (rippling out into wider communities also), are revised, re-thought, re-enacted, and hopefully re-performed in thoughtful and meaningful ways.

I argue that the context of a school provides a significant opportunity to assist young men (and young people in general) to go beyond simply expressing *intentions* to change violent pathways. Given that this is a smaller study, I have demonstrated only beginning features of *performing* respect. Subsequently, I see this as an area for further development, and in asking the following questions I present some implications for this:

- How might school counsellors assist young people in performing respect?
- What would it mean to have young men who have been caught up in violence work towards the performance of respect?
- How might this change the stories of violence that often have a restraining effect on young people due to the reputations they carry?
- What restorative practices might support this process?

Another area for further inquiry could be the development of school-wide understandings and initiatives of anti-violence. McMenamin (2014b) proposes that there are wider implications outside of the one-to-one counsellor-client therapeutic relationship to be considered:
"When teachers and young people take up these ideas, and their actions are shaped by these ideas, they shape prevailing educational discourse, and make alternative actions more available for future shaping of teacher and young person identity claims" (p. 319).

Although the focus of this research did not specifically cover teacher-student relations, or the wider surrounding educational discourses, I make a link here to the importance of identity shaping within the community of a school as a whole. One such direction that might support the taking up of anti-violence stories in a wider sense is the further development of McMenamin's (2018) migration of identity work. New and creative practices could be developed within schools which might facilitate new practice inquiries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research featured in this article has explored in meaningful ways practices that contribute to masculine subjectivities that "already exist and are already present in the lives of many men" but "do not at present hold a hegemonic position" (Connell, 2014, pp. 9–10). Carl's story in counselling has demonstrated that storying non-violent, peaceful, respectful, and caring identity stories becomes possible within a stance that seeks to make the existence of a hegemonic position visible. In this way, this study has actively contributed to fracturing the (in)visibility of dominant masculinity discourses and "in those spaces of fracture, speak[s] new discourses, new subject positions, into existence" (Davies, 2005, p. 1).

When young men are invited and begin to consider themselves as active authors in the storying of anti-violence identities, there is a vivid possibility of the re-authoring of dominant masculinities in their lives and of those around them.

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[i] This study was completed in partial fulfilment of a Master of Counselling degree at the University of Waikato and was approved by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. Paul was the research supervisor. The research is told in Matt's voice, and the article is authored by us both.

[ii] "Carl" selected this name as a pseudonym.

[iii] I note here that, in our subsequent work together, 'those around him' was storied as a supportive community. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to develop this thread further.