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**How young people peacefully challenge community norms embedded with violence in a Brazilian *favela***

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Abstract

*Drawing on social disorganisation theories this paper considers what type of voluntary organisation might mediate community social norms in localities with low income where violence is embedded in social institutions and residents appear unable to informally regulate violent crimes. This study describes how the situated logic of one organisation, located in a favela in Brazil, transcends personal ties to the organisation and illustrates how community-based organisations have potential to influence community norms with the expectation that rates of violence will decline. This organisation has made it possible for young people to publically disrupt the symbolic order that maintains divisive social rules and has started to alter gendered norms that contribute to high levels of neighbourhood violence.*

Key words: violence, *favela*, community-based organisations, young people

*Introduction*

With the revival of interest in research within the social disorganisation tradition particular attention has been given to exploring links between neighbourhood structures and variations in rates of crime (Morenoff *et al.* 2001; Sampson *et al.* 2002; Sutherland *et al.* 2013). These relationships are recognised as being indirect, creating spaces within which social processes can modify violent behaviours (Muggah 2012; Sampson 2013). Analyses of these processes have focussed on the differential ability of neighbourhoods to self-regulate and studies have found that collective efficacy, defined as ‘the linkage of cohesion and mutual trust among residents with shared expectations for intervening in support of neighborhood social control’, has the potential to modify rates of violence in some neighbourhoods (Sampson 2013:127). Using survey methods and econometric modelling collective

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efficacy has been found to be a predictor of violence in North American, Western European, and Australian cities (Morenoff *et al.* 2001; Sampson *et al.* 2002; Mazerolle *et al.* 2010; Sampson 2013), but weakly related to violent crime rates in London (Sutherland *et al.* 2013) and with no apparent association to violence in Latin American cities.

A study conducted in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, found poor neighbourhoods had high levels of social cohesion and the highest rates of violence (Villarreal and Silva 2006) and in Medellín, Colombia, more disadvantaged neighbourhoods had higher levels of collective efficacy and violence (Cerdà *et al.* 2008). Findings from this research suggests that certain structural features limit the effectiveness of residents to regulate rates of violent crime even where there are high levels of trust and solidarity (Cerdà *et al.* 2008). Whilst historical and cultural factors may shape collective efficacy where institutions coercively use violence to impose 'order' such as organised drug trafficking then collective efficacy takes on different meanings (Villarreal and Silva 2006; Cerdà *et al.* 2008). Further, when violence is embedded in the norms of neighbourhood structures then doubts are raised about an underpinning presumption upon which collective efficacy rests, namely that up holding community norms contributes to a common good (Sampson *et al.* 1997), and calls into question interventions designed to increase collective efficacy in some localities. Similarly, studies about negotiating personal safety in public spaces typically describe how people learn self-protection, avoidance strategies and how to conform to social norms, and those who disrupt the re-production of these norms are identified as 'hicks' or 'eccentrics' who 'appear to have no conception about how they are supposed to act' (Lofland 1973: 137). But in some public spaces everyday safety may be achieved by risk-taking and breaking established norms.

How best to intervene in neighbourhoods where social norms are reproduced by the use of violence and residents find it difficult to achieve a safe social order presents many challenges. One shortfall in our knowledge is about what types of institutions can mediate violence associated with structural characteristics (Muggah 2012; Sutherland *et al.* 2013). To consider this issue findings from an account of one young person's community-based organisation situated in a Brazilian *favela* or shanty town are discussed. Luta pela Paz (LPP) aims to '*overcome division and violence and promote the potential of young people in disadvantaged communities*'. To achieve its goals LPP uses a Five Pillars model underpinned by a set of clearly articulated values to provide a holistic set of services that offers opportunities for young people to choose a different life course. Boxing and martial arts, education, youth leadership, youth support, and access to work constitute the Five Pillars.

LPP is located in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro where deep-seated societal inequalities and intense violence provide a 'best test' for exploring how 'in contexts of violence, people can and do begin processes of social action aimed at diminishing violence and building citizenship' (Pearce *et al.* 2011:10). Processes that explain how young people attending LPP are beginning to alter community norms by challenging the structural logic of the neighbourhoods are described and illustrate how young people can facilitate these processes. Although the specificity of a *favela* may appear to limit generalisations, extreme poverty, frequent gun battles and high levels of interpersonal violence gives social processes a high profile, making it easier for research participants to articulate processes that maintain violence and for researchers to elicit complex realities associated with violence.

This paper is structured as follows: following a brief discussion about doubts ascribed to the ability of voluntary organisations using sport to have a 'neighbourhood effect', the empirical data is described.

Accounts of the *favela's* neighbourhood characteristics and the organisational arrangements of LPP follow. Young people crossing '*the lines*' between warring drug factions and explanations for these bold actions are discussed in the remainder of the paper.

### *Community-based voluntary organisations for young people*

Findings from selected studies are discussed to consider what type of young person's organisation may influence community social norms. A key consideration is research that demonstrates how community-level characteristics have durable properties with their own logic and causality, implying that reducing interventions to individual-level determinants and 'fixing' individuals will be partially successful (Sampson 2002; Griggs *et al.* 2008). Further, evaluation studies have queried the use of sports to 'correct' individuals including the existence of causal links between doing sport and reducing criminality and anti-social behaviour (Long and Sanderson 2001; Smith and Waddington 2004; Nichols 2007; Cox 2012).

For some, sports-based initiatives replicate social and economic inequalities and marginalisation by reproducing established social relations that perpetuate the oppression of girls and young women and promote masculinity and the dominance of men (Endressen and Olweus 2005; Saavedra 2009; Darnell 2010; Hartmann and Kwauk 2011; Kay 2012). Sports 'plus' programmes are designed to provide an opportunity for young people to critically engage in debates about how they may actively transform oppressive institutions that maintain marginalised communities (Hartmann and Kwauk 2011:294-297), although what actions they may take are not specified. Sports-based organisations that aim to educate and empower young people such as the Veneer programme in Brazil (Spaaiji 2012) and GOAL in India to inspire young women to become leaders (Kay 2009) also provide little evidence that 'empowered' young people bring about changes in community norms, although community-level attitudes may change too slowly to be captured by these short-term studies. 'Empowered' young people may find, however, that their attempt to disrupt normative behaviours meets with resistance and places them in a vulnerable position and subjected to violence. Thus, what types of organisations are able to generate 'neighbourhood effects' and protect young people from harm invites further enquiry.

### *Research*

Our realist problem-solving approach 'tests' and refutes theories embedded in the LPP programme to ascertain if the problems the programme sets out to address have been modified and informs our data collection and analysis (Popper 1968, 1969; Sayer 1992; Weiss 1995, 1997; Pawson and Tilley 1997; Sampson 2007). We consider organisations as social contexts and mechanisms that explain changes in the lives of young people and the communities within which they are situated and tentative solutions to redress perceived problems (Popper 1969: 80; Burgess 2002). By recognising that people join or participate in social situations which already exist and which embody institutional rules and norms, organisations have a situated logic and it is possible to anticipate the responsiveness of organisations to problem situations (Chisholm 1995; Bichbauer 1998; Burgess 2002). We also recognise that where change occurs community-based organisations may be one contributing factor, in some circumstances counter factors can mask positive effects making their influence difficult to identify, and reductions in rates of violence can occur independently of grassroots organisations

(Hardie and Cartwright 2013). Similarly it is unlikely that all participants will benefit from participating in a programme, but the focus of this study is on understanding how attending LPP can work for some.

To refute hypotheses our interview style was open and conversational and encouraged young people to be reflective. This approach moderates tendencies of young people to uncritically attribute positive changes in their lives to their attendance at LPP, rather than to other events or experiences. As the interviews with staff and partners progressed they became ‘free flowing’ and researchers questioned the responses of interviewees to gain a better understanding of how living in the *favela* affects young people and their work with them. Information about everyday life in Maré was supplemented with contemporaneous notes made from our own observations. We used our knowledge from our ongoing association with LPP since 2007 to interpret the data and where data best fit particular hypotheses these were selected to explain how LPP works (Sampson 2007). Quotes are used for evidence and illustrative purposes.

#### *Data collection*

The data collected are summarised in table 1 below.

TABLE 1 *Data*

<i>Data collection</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
2012 attendance monitoring data	1,594
Young people’s self-completion questionnaires	169
Staff self-completion questionnaires	37
Face-to-face interviews with young people	21
Face-to-face interviews with partner agencies	13
Interviews with staff	4
Interviews with founder and director	3 (in 2007,2008, 2012)
Observations of sports sessions and fieldwork	May 2009 & June 2012

Ethnographic research that informed the origins of LPP was drawn on (Dowdney 2003, 2005) and monitoring data, strategic plans, organisational charts, grant submissions, newsletters, and publicity materials analysed.

Young people’s self-completion questionnaires were administered to those attending LPP during a two week period in September 2012. Thought to be a ‘typical’ period, staff reported that the overwhelming majority of young people completed a questionnaire for the ‘census.’ Questionnaires were completed by 86 open access programme attendees of whom 69% were male and 29% women, and mostly 16 years and over (55%) and by 83 young people attending an intensive post-compulsory education programme of whom 68% were women and 31% men. Just under half of these 169 young people were Pardo or dual heritage (48%), and just over a quarter White Brazilian (28%) and just under a quarter (23%) Black Brazilian. This is broadly representative of all attendees, except men were under-represented by 15% and those 16 years and under by 14%, and Pardo were overrepresented by 11%.

Completed each year since 2009 the questionnaires have a proven track record of clear questions comprehensible to a range of ages and abilities. A bias towards positive responses can be expected as the questionnaires were administered by staff and respondents aware that their responses have

implications for decisions made by funders. Some caution is therefore advised when interpreting percentages too literally, rather they are better understood as indicators of the presence, or otherwise, of social processes. Each question embodied a theory about how participation in the LPP programme may, or may not, have influenced a young person's feelings, attitudes or behaviour. Data were entered onto the statistical package SPSS and analysed and, unless specified, responses from the intensive programme are used as the questionnaire is more detailed and yields richer information.

To improve our understandings of causal connections between experiences of attending and changes in attitudes and behaviour 21 face-to-face interviews with young people were conducted by Maria Rita Villela in Brazilian Portuguese. A broad range of young people were selected with the assistance of staff and selection criteria included a spread of ages, academic and sporting abilities, participation in martial arts and boxing, gender, personal circumstances, and length of time attended. Of the interviewees, 71% were male and 29% young women, and were aged between 12 and 25 years old. The majority were teenagers, 13 young people (62%), reflecting the typical LPP participant, and seven young people were in their twenties. Seven young people had attended for a year or less, seven between a year and four years, and seven who had attended between 5 and 8 years.

Almost two-thirds of the 58 staff (64%) completed an annual questionnaire. Questions included their understandings of, and commitment to the Five Pillar's model, how they affect change in the behaviour of young people, and partnership working.

Four members of staff were interviewed face-to-face; two youth workers, one manager, and one community outreach worker. Two were women and two were men. These staff were purposively chosen for their in-depth knowledge of the area, three lived in Maré. We interviewed a longstanding manager and included information from three interviews with the founder/director spanning five years. These interviews gave us insights into Maré, working with partners, and the development of LPP since its inception.

Partner agencies were purposefully selected to ensure that a spread of opinions and experiences were gathered. They included five voluntary organisations in Maré; a primary and secondary school, two community neighbourhood associations, and four social services or criminal justice organisations. The police declined to be interviewed and one Community Association manager was unable to keep the appointment, giving a total of 13 interviews. The interview schedules were compiled prior to the interviews, sent to the interviewees using email, and included questions on working relationships and the influence, if any, of LPP on local communities. The majority of interviewees were women (77%), took place with more than one representative of the organisation, lasted between thirty minutes and almost two hours, were taped and transcribed into English for analysis.

#### *Missing data*

Data on young people 'crossing the lines' between warring drug factions were not collected for ethical reasons. We felt that a formal data collection exercise may have made young people who do not 'cross the line' feel inadequate or feel that they 'ought' to, and such actions are personally risky and entirely voluntary. Further, it is not the number of young people crossing the lines that matters but rather the frequency as the repetition of these actions sustains shifts in perceptions and attitudes (Lederach 2005: 89). We observed young people 'crossing the line' and young people, staff, and partners talked about these actions spontaneously during interviews.

Information about drug traffickers was gained from LPP staff, teachers, and young people, some of whom were drug runners. Although our information was second-hand, it is likely to be reliable as staff are closely connected to the drug trafficking factions. Official recorded incidents of violent crimes for Maré were not collected; they are likely to be a significant underestimate due to underreporting, but are periphery to identifying social processes that may or may not account for a voluntary organisation's ability to affect community norms embedded with violence.

### *Complexo da Maré*

#### *Neighbourhood characteristics*

Situated between two busy highways with marshland in one corner and a main road at the other edge, Complexo da Maré is a *favela* with distinct boundaries that separates it from its surrounding area. It is a 'contained' complex of communities for other reasons, the labelling of *favelas* as dangerous places and a fear that violence in *favelas* will spread to more respectable areas of Rio de Janeiro further marginalises *favela* dwellers politically and socially (Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Perlman 2010). Just as those who live outside *favelas* find it dangerous to visit, those who are born in Maré consider it dangerous to leave and this creates a strong symbolic division between different parts of the city. According to a psychoanalyst we interviewed, a closure and a '*fantasy of scission*' from the city negatively effects the development of the young people's personalities.

Complexo da Maré is composed of 16 communities with over 74,000 inhabitants and typifies a pattern of economic exclusionary processes found in many Latin American *favelas* (Wheeler 2003, 2005; Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Muggah 2012). The failure of state schools to function is illustrated by high drop-out rates, exclusions, and poor examination results which limits access to the job market (Leeds 2007). In our study interviewees explained how schooling is often interrupted by shootings between drug traffickers and that this violence badly affects children's emotional development and ability to learn, contributing further to poor levels of educational attainment and fewer employment opportunities. One young man explained:

I used to study in [name of school] and there was a shooting and the teacher told everyone to squat down and I was the only one who got up and when I did, I saw a very horrible scene and I started to cry and panic. I spent two years out of school because of this (Male, 18)

Studies have found that lack of access to formal employment leads to survival in an informal economy and the absence or failure of state governance creates spaces for alternative economic activities, typically drug trafficking (Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Leeds 2007; Perlman 2010). In an ethnographic study Dowdney found that due to these exclusionary processes young people seeking work become angry and turn to a life of drug trafficking as the only option left to them (Dowdney 2003). Thus, drug trafficking becomes deeply entrenched in the economic and social life of *favelas* and the availability of drugs and guns through organised international networks sustains these processes (Dowdney 2003, 2005).

#### *Violence*

Three drug factions dominate the *favela* and fiercely protect and defend 'their' territory with military-style planning, patrols, guards who are 'watchers', with a clear hierarchy and a system of patronage and favours (Dowdney 2003, 2005). AK47s and handguns are used day and night to protect territory

and drugs on sale. Cocaine, marijuana and more recently crack cocaine, are typically laid out on tables at crossroads, and protected by armed guards who have a highly visible presence in everyday street life. Increasing levels of violence and homicides associated with trafficking has been well-documented, by Perlman, for example, who revisited the same *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro 30 years after her initial ethnographic research (Perlman 2010).

Drug trafficking is attractive to young boys and their identity becomes inextricably linked with the social organisation of drugs. Known as “*entrar pra vida*”, (entering the life), indicating the strength of the organisation, regular meals, money, and status contribute to young people defining themselves as a drug trafficker. However, as soon as they “*entram pra vida*” the movement of these young people is restricted to the territory of their faction.

Community justice is administered by traffickers and is integral to maintaining their business. Severe and sometimes brutal punishments – referred to as ‘medieval’ by one of our interviewees - are used against those who violate the rules of the trafficking faction, and their bodies left in public places to act as a warning and deterrent to others. Drug factions extend their control to whole communities by using community punishments; one young person talked about how these divisions are described in street language as ‘*neurosis*’ to portray a deep sense of fear that exists.

Violence is used by powerful Comandos to impose a social order despite often devastating effects on the development of children and young people, including their own. Exposure to the brutality of some community punishments has increased with the arrival of the internet and 3G mobiles. Teachers described how children take gruesome photographs of dismembered bodies and show them to classmates. Subsequent ‘acting out’ of violence as well as fighting for real pervades the primary school culture, according to teachers. In the playground children ‘join’ one faction or another and fight. Staff at a secondary school spoke about how young men are traumatised by their experience of being the ‘son of a trafficker’ and typically have neurological problems, short attention spans, and mental health difficulties, all typical characteristics of the long term harm caused by exposure to violence (Dubow *et al.* 2009).

Mothers live in fear that their children will “*entrar pra vida*” which, from their perspective, leads to a life of violence, intimidation and coercion. Driven by this fear mothers use violence against their son(s) as an expression of resistance against a social order enforced by drug traffickers. Stories of mothers’ locking children in rooms, tying them to furniture, and having fierce arguments with their children were told during our interviews. Interviewees explained that mothers also instigate violence against their children when they truant from school in case their welfare payments are withdrawn and they slide further into poverty. Whilst interviewees said that traditional community support systems have begun to weaken, those who are ‘*desperate*’ continue to ask drug traffickers for financial support and this practice leaves them ‘*indebted*’ to the traffickers. In their position of comparative wealth, the Comandos acquire a socio-political role in the community which is extended to influence community associations and the police, according to several interviewees.

Our findings echo research reviews that evidence how emotional consequences of domestic violence are particularly acute for children living with intimate partner and family violence in stressed communities, and that exposure to both domestic and community violence leads to later behavioural problems (Haight *et al.* 2007; Herrenkohl *et al.* 2008; Holt *et al.* 2008). A teacher from a primary school situated close to LPP explained:

90% of the children in this school have exposure to members of family involved in drug use and abuse and/or domestic violence. The children reproduce this violence against people, their classmates, but also against the physical structures of the school that are constantly depredated by them. They remove the water taps, break the doors, the glass windows. Throwing rocks is practically a sport here... they aim at people, cars...

The military police are responsible for homicides in Maré and during our research period they killed two teenagers, one of whom had attended LPP. Their previous victim was a three year old girl. During 2014 at least 563 people were killed by the police in Rio state, a 35% increase on the previous year (FBSP 2014). The military police are universally hated according to interviewees, and one young woman summed up the views of others when she asked in an interview: *'if policemen and criminals kill and steal alike, what is the difference between them?'* (Female, 13). The people of Maré unite against the military police and several times during our fieldwork we observed firecrackers being let off to warn people of their presence and felt the palpable tensions when the police rode around the *favela* in open trucks with their guns ready to use. The usually vibrant streets emptied and the police watched intensely. Small incidents can spark a 'fight back' that is an expression of resistance and protest in situations where militarised public security policies legitimise state sponsored violence. In these situations community violence arises from a common desire to protect their community from a common enemy, the state.

Whilst it is apparent that violence is deeply embedded in Maré's structural characteristics and the typical response to violence is violence which serves to maintain a violent culture, the findings above show a plethora of motives for, and responses to using violence. As an organisation LPP situates itself as a mediating influence by understanding these complex reasons and reactions to multiple forms of violence and this knowledge is used to inform its approach. Using ethnographic information (Dowdney 2003, 2005) LPP intervenes at sites of violence where harm and resistance are both present, offering possibilities for change. LPP's strategy of intervention does not include, however, directly confronting drug trafficking or state sponsored violence, perceived as problems for which there is no obvious practical solution locally.

### *Luta pela Paz*

Founded in 2000 LPP uses boxing and martial arts combined with education and personal development to realise the potential of young people living in communities that suffer from crime and violence. To achieve these aims LPP has a clear set of values, principles and a holistic Five Pillars model of intervention.

At the heart of LPP are five values which express the organisation's commitment to young people, inform how they work, and embody an alternative code of conduct for everyday living and life trajectory. They are summarised in table 2 below.



TABLE 2 *LPP values*

<i>Value</i>	<i>Value in practice</i>
Embracing	To accept everyone without judgement
Solidarity	Mutual support between staff and young people
Champion	Aim to be the best in all we do
Inspiring	Aim to inspire and to be inspired
Fearless	Stand up for peace

These values are well-publicised within the organisation and they are integrated into each of the Five Pillars to create a holistic response to young people’s situation. Each of the Five Pillars, boxing and martial arts, education, access to work, support services, and youth leadership is integrated through cross-referrals and integral to the Five Pillars model are compulsory personal development classes. When young people join LPP they are classified according to their needs. The most vulnerable receive intensive support and weekly meetings are held to discuss those who are a ‘*cause for concern*’. During 2012 staff made 622 home visits and 97 young people received intensive attention. They are given access to a multi-agency team of professionals: psychologists, counsellors, social workers, and youth workers, as well as a lawyer. During this period 334 young people were mentored.

Our research shows that strong staff commitment to the Five Pillars model explains its robust implementation and gives us confidence that LPP contributes to the processes and outcomes discussed in the following sections. The overwhelming majority of staff were supportive of the Five Pillars model (92%), felt confident in their work (86%) and almost two thirds often felt valued (65%). Staff were clear about what changes in young people LPP aims to achieve (97%) and low staff turnover gives continuity to young people, builds an in-depth knowledge of Maré and partner agencies, and indicates high levels of staff satisfaction.

*Young people ‘crossing the lines’*

To explore how community norms are shifting through the work of LPP the example of young people ‘crossing the line’ is used. Children and young people who live in an area controlled by a drug faction are severely punished if they are caught ‘*on the other side*.’ This ‘line’ is agreed though an alliance between the drug factions, and stories of these punishments are part of the social fabric and serve to remind young people of the dangers of frequenting communities controlled by other drug factions.

In conversations with LPP staff they talked about how young people wearing distinctive white cotton LPP t-shirts with large LPP logos have started crossing ‘lines’ into other communities without being punished. We too observed courageous young people crossing ‘the line’ into areas that are patrolled by different drug factions. These young people are likely to be natural thrill-seekers and risk-takers (Sharland 2006) and act without encouragement from LPP staff who are well aware of the dangers. In interviews with young people they described wearing the LPP t-shirt, as a ‘*free-pass*’ and ‘*holy shirt*’ which ‘*serves as a bullet-proof vest*.’ At the time of writing, no one has been intimidated, injured, or killed crossing ‘the line’ wearing a LPP t-shirt.

That any young person chooses to take these risks is remarkable, and as may be expected not everyone is a risk-taker and many prefer not cross ‘*the lines*’. Compatible with the organizational

fearless value that encourages young people to 'stand up for peace', these routine actions have become an accepted pattern of behaviour. Their high visibility makes these actions apparent to all those living in Maré and as repeated symbolic actions communicates a shift in perceptions about acceptable social practices and social rules that affect the social order (Schirch 2005).

The extent to which these community norms are challenged should not, however, be over-stated. In interviews young people talked about continuing divisions imposed by drug factions and explained that at school evidence of divided communities still existed. This young man explained:

LPP tries to end, to break these barriers to unite. But it's more about being united in school, because in fact there are people who don't unite, don't accept. Some take this lesson outside school, but for others the division prevails. (Male, 17)

Although deep divisions remain the public and symbolic journey by young people who safely cross '*the lines*' wearing LPP t-shirts is the most visible sign of change. But why would young people risk their lives? Why are drug traffickers tolerant of young people wearing LPP t-shirts walking across drug faction '*lines*'? Young people who live in all corners of Maré can take longer and safer routes to and from LPP without crossing any '*line*' but some choose not to. The rest of this paper identifies the processes that account for their courage.

#### *Explaining 'crossing the lines'*

Two sequentially related processes underpin the beginnings of these risk taking actions. Firstly, LPP staff work hard to acquire and maintain a reputation of neutrality amongst warring drug factions and violent state institutions, and, secondly, LPP is attractive to young people. These factors enables all young people living in Maré to attend. As a consequence LPP provides an opportunity for young people to make friends across divided communities.

#### *Reputation*

Located between a church and the police department, LPP's façade differentiates itself for two reasons: on the one hand, its bright blue distinguishes it from the old, greyish and brownish colours of the surrounding buildings; on the other hand, while most of the external walls in the *favela* are covered with graffiti, LPP's remains clean. Interviewees commented that this physical appearance reflects the community's esteem for LPP; it is respected by those who have no associations with drug trafficking and by those who are directly involved, has an ability to bridge the gap between Maré's communities, and works with organisations unwilling to co-operate with each other for the benefit of those living in the *favela*. Through its leadership and collaborative working partner agencies felt that LPP inspired other organisations to work more closely with local communities and they spoke highly of their responsiveness to the needs of young people in a manner that contrasted to their experiences of state agencies which are compartmentalised, lack co-ordination and have long waiting times. Their flexible and transparent manner that is respectful to young people and their families and their engagement with the most vulnerable members of the community are further reasons why partner voluntary agencies recognized caring as one of LPP's main attributes and held LPP in high esteem. Young people themselves contribute to the high reputation of LPP; for example, 70% of the questionnaire respondents stated that they were proud of LPP and talked positively about their experiences.

The voluntary attendance policy and flexibility of LPP contributes to its good reputation, and contrasts with the strict and mandatory programmes in schools and colleges. The comments of the young woman below refer to the sensitivity of LPP to young people's situation and their flexible practices:

LPP is a place that allows for change... Here people can chose. The young people come by their own will. No one is obliged to come. If they dropout, their registration can always be reactivated. (Female, 16)

The above findings illustrate how LPP's reputation is rooted in an understanding of the culture of the *favela*, a daily knowledge of what is happening, is respected for the 'even-handed' relations it maintains with the three drug trafficking factions and occupies a position that is different to, and contrasts with poor practices of other agencies. Maintaining such a reputation requires ongoing negotiation and relies on retaining positive attitudes.

As a result of its reputation, LPP is frequently contacted by community organizations regarding the state of conflict in Maré to find out if it is safe to enter or leave the *favela*. This position enables LPP staff to remain well-informed and in regular contact with other agencies. Staff use the knowledge gained from LPP's position of leadership in their work with young people and their families.

Partner interviewees commented with approval on changes they noticed in young people, on the happiness they saw in their eyes, and how their comments have shifted from saying '*I am from this or that faction,*' to '*I am from Luta,*' indicating a change in their sense of belonging. Through the 'youth leadership' pillar young people are given responsibilities and their achievements celebrated which challenges commonly held beliefs in the wider community. At a primary school teachers expressed the view that children under 12 years are already difficult and poor learners and if they can change one child out of a class of 30 children they are '*pleased.*' Staff at the local youth court also held strong negative stereotypes of young people.

#### *Friendships across divided communities*

LPP values of embracing and solidarity underpin the offer of free activities to all young people wherever they live in Maré and everyone is welcomed into a supportive and safe place. Drug faction leaders' perceptions of LPP as a neutral organisation enables all young people to attend, opening up possibilities for young people across fractured communities to make friends. With over 1,500 participants during 2012, and 75% of the questionnaire respondents saying that it is easier to make friends since joining LPP, these possibilities are increased.

With its strong ethos of inclusivity and equal treatment there is an expectation that young people 'look out for each other' even if they live in areas divided by drug factions. One young man reflects on these opportunities:

LPP enables me to meet people from different parts of the community that I would not meet if it weren't for the project, for it is dangerous to go to other areas. (Male, 22)

The organisational values also unassumingly challenge some community norms such as gendered violence by influencing the nature of friendships. Respectful relationships and equality between women and men are promoted and practiced by example. Of the 58 staff, 33 were male and 25 female. LPP has a woman manager, women sports coaches, and women lawyers and psychologists attend LPP. Young women are youth council members, volunteers, and assistant sports coaches, all of which

reinforces the equal status accorded to women. Young men experience an environment where women have responsibilities and leadership roles and with whom they make decisions as equal partners. Training with women boxers can challenge young men's perceptions of women; their role and the macho image of boxing and its reputation for aggressiveness further challenges traditional gender roles and changes how the role of women is perceived by men, and how women perceive their own position.

Building positive relations is part of 'humanising' the 'Other' (Lederach 1997, 2005) and young people learn and practice skills to improve their ability to form positive social relationships and to negotiate and diffuse tensions without resorting to aggressive and confrontational behaviour. Responses to the questionnaire indicated an improvement in the quality of their relationships; young people said that they were more likely to listen to others (86%), felt more able to say how they feel (69%), more able to cooperate with others (89%), and felt better understood (75%). Many successfully used these skills in other settings and the overwhelming majority said that their relationships with their families had improved (71%) and just over half (51%) said that their families were more supportive since they joined LPP.

Young people's friendships at school also cross divided communities, but young people described friendships at LPP as stronger, more fun, as a source of affirmation and different to others. One young man described some of these characteristics:

Over here it's more connectivity, like very strong friends, close friends like strong, you have a good relationship, but in school yeah I have friends there but they're not like <pause> it's different, I don't know how to explain this. (Male, 18)

Through these friendships young people begun to question a deeply held community practice that those belonging to different drug factions should remain hostile to each other and this challenges some deeply entrenched community taboos that contribute to the violence. One young man reflected:

You begin to realize that only because he lives in a place that has a different drug faction does not mean that you can't become friends. (Male, 15)

Whilst these friendships signify shifting attitudes and the beginnings of a less divisive social order, they are not, of themselves, sufficient to explain why young people are prepared to take risks to 'cross the lines'. Additional factors related to how staff work with young people to make such risk-taking behaviour possible are described below.

Other contextual factors also serve to bring divided communities together; protests against the violence of the military police, for example, indicating that LPP is one contributing factor to changes that occur.

### *Engaging with young people*

We found that staff integrated LPP's values and ethos into their relationships with young people and that the dynamic interactions of three practices explained young people's changed perceptions of, and attitudes towards violence. This is achieved by creating a safe environment where young people are able to question the use of violence as a solution to conflict, by engaging meaningfully with their uncertainties and insecurities to reduce their need to resort to violence, and by building on young

people's attachment to their community and enabling them to represent alternative life-styles for all those living in Maré. Each are discussed in turn and illustrates how LPP, as an organisation, remains understanding of, and sensitive to young people's situation.

### *Creating new understandings*

The embracing and solidarity organisational values encourage staff and young people to form positive relationships, which, in turn, encourages young people to disclose distressing personal experiences and enable staff to support traumatised young people. Just under three quarters of those who completed a questionnaire said that they could talk to staff about their problems all or some of the time (72%), indicating trusting relationships. One young man conveyed strong levels of trust by suggesting that young people felt able to discuss intimate issues:

The mentors and the social staff is what the young people need the most: someone to talk to, to check if everything is alright. The staff here does what mothers and fathers cannot. (Male, 18)

During mentoring sessions and citizenship classes staff offer alternative perspectives about violence and sessions include; violence and its effects, intimate relationships, sexuality, illicit drug-taking, citizenship and how to contribute to society. In these ways staff work with young people at a juncture where their experiences of violence as a perpetrator, victim, and bystander are brought together. Where this occurs contradictions, uncertainties, and insecurities surrounding violence are surfaced, discussed, and debated. During these discussions young people question social relations defined by violence and the comments by this young man indicate a deeper understanding of how violence at home influenced his decision-making and how he has come to doubt the value of a culture that responds to violence with further violence:

Having faced many fights between my mom, my father-in-law and my father, due to my family background revolt I did think about entering the life of crime because I used to think that it would be a way of solving things. But the project, and not only the project itself, but the people here, helped me think differently about all of this. That this was not the best way to solve things at home. Violence is never good. (Male, 18)

Young people also explained how discussions have changed their attitudes and how they have become more understanding and tolerant of 'difference'. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of respondents said that they are more able to accept those who are different (87%). One boy explained these changes:

Before, I did not use to care for others, today I have become more of a humanist. The PD [personal development] classes are good for they stimulate conversation about drugs, about life, about homophobia. They help understand the differences and not have prejudice. (Male, 13)

LPP's value of embracing further reinforces these attitudinal changes; some young people described LPP as '*family*' and 86% said that they felt better about themselves since joining LPP.

### *Working with uncertainties and insecurities*

Many uncertainties experienced by young people during their adolescence are associated with their transition from childhood into adulthood, are shaped by their neighbourhood, and include negotiating the formation of new identities (Jones 2005; MacDonald et al. 2005; Roberts 2009). We found that

LPP staff engaged constructively with young people's insecurities and offered support that influenced their socialisation and enabled them to grow in confidence.

Consistent with other research we found that young people who live in poverty and with adversity place a high premium on being treated with respect (Anderson 1999; Dowdney 2003) and young women as well as men 'stand up' for themselves and resort to fighting if they feel disrespected (Phillips 2003; Batchelor 2011). Sexual relations can be coercive and exploitative and young women talked about how men are just interested in sex and think that they can '*get whatever they want*' (Female, 15). Young men who live in Maré acquire social recognition as a fighter in a drug faction, and with their status enhanced by '*easy sex*' they felt '*untouchable*'. The use of violence to create a 'macho' and 'cocky' persona has been described as a struggle for dignity, a strategy to manage fear and to compensate for feelings of inadequacy (Bourgois 1996). Thus, on the one hand young people attach great importance to being treated with respect, and on the other, they are disrespectful and exploitative in their own social and sexual relationships, and these contradictions provide LPP staff an opportunity for engagement.

By recognising young people's worries about their physical attractiveness participation in exercise and boxing addresses body image concerns. Intense training at LPP typically changes young people's body definition in a short period of time and demonstrates to young people that they can make a difference to how they look when they make an effort. Since society places a high value on physical appearance young people soon felt more attractive and this was often confirmed by peer approval which they found encouraging and motivating. In interviews young women and men also emphasized their pride in being physically stronger. This sense of achievement starts a process of self-acceptance and behaviours arising from feelings of inadequacy begin to diminish (Fox 2000). One young woman explained:

When I started boxing, they gave us discipline, fitness, determination, they inspired us to do well, so that really had an impact on me, so I know that I can be someone who I really want to be, not because my friends want to do something. So they made me more powerful. Before I used to get bullied, I used to think, 'I'm not strong,' ... it's not only about your physical strength, it's your mental strength as well, because they strengthen that as well as your actual body strength. (Female, 15)

A strong association between learning how to control anger and the discipline of boxing was apparent in interviews with young people. Coaches emphasized how feelings of revenge, hatred, and anger, all typical emotional components of violence and unbounded confrontations, contribute to losing a fight and prevent a young person from learning to become a good boxer. Our observations and interviews reflect findings in Wacquant's study; he described how learning to box requires trainees to control their anger and conceal their emotions, to think strategically as well as react quickly and purposively to win a fight in an effective manner, and to minimise pain (Wacquant 2004). Informed by the solidarity value, young people learnt about trusting and reciprocal respectful relationships with adults through the training, and they explained that the professional standard of coaching made them feel valued, giving them a sense of agency that enabled them to construct their social identities from their strengths (Schoon and Bynner 2003; Jones 2005). One young man described how boxers need to control their anger:

It makes you disciplined because it makes you control your anger ... you can't just lash out and be angry and then throw random punches because the fighter you're fighting, he could just move out of the way and just

punch you, and that's you gone in the fight. So that helps you control your anger, the training, just how hard it is, it just makes you feel more disciplined ... your anger just needs to get under control. (Male, 15)

Self-control arising from the 'discipline' and taking greater responsibility for oneself by learning to maintain and protect one's body can include sexual responsibility. For young women these skills enable them to protect their own boundaries and space on their terms (Kidd 2008), although the extent to which these young women can protect themselves from predatory male sexuality was not explored in this study. Nevertheless, the research findings suggest that young people formed mutually respectful relationships; the overwhelming majority said that they respected others more (87%) and the majority felt that others treated them with respect (59%). These positive social relations also imply less need to use defensive and protective strategies that define fractious and conflictual interpersonal relationships identified by interviewees as curtailing the emotional development of young people.

### *Connecting with Maré's communities*

Finally, we found that LPP values and its reputation reinforced the hopes and dreams of young people to remain living in the *favela*. LPP's respected status enables the organisation to negotiate additional possibilities for all young people to realise their aspirations and for residents to envisage a better life. By using public spaces in ways that portray young people as symbols of hope and their actions as representative of a better future their impact reaches out beyond LPP participants.

LPP is able to build on existing attachments to Maré and, albeit from a small sample, we found strong commitments to remain living in the *favela*. Almost all of those interviewed said that the only aspect of life in Maré that they do not like is the violence and 17 of the 21 young interviewees said that they would like to stay and wish to raise their families '*free from violence*'. Other studies have found that young people are motivated to take action when they feel attached to their community (see MacDonald et al. 2005). Young people described how they felt safer since attending LPP and those who felt 'a lot fitter' were most likely to say they felt safer in their own community (71%) and 79% said that they felt safer in other communities. These improved feelings of safety can make it easier to walk across divided communities and these actions convey an image of confidence and self-assurance to all residents that symbolizes hope for a better future (Schirch 2005).

Through the 'inspired' and 'fearless' LPP values young people learn to take responsibilities and stand up for peace. The symbiosis between body and mind that young people can achieve through high quality coaching (Wacquant 2004) enables them to aspire to an 'improved life' and their fit and strong physic represents a better life for others. One young man, like others, connected symbiosis to an improved life:

A better body image, a better thinking image, a better life. (Male, 20)

Families and local people from across the *favela* watch young people train, boxing competitions are held in public places and these events bring factions together. Young people have been selected to participate in national and international boxing competitions and these achievements present a positive image of young people. According to some interviewees, even some drug traffickers would like to '*find a way out*', and in particular they would like their children to '*occupy a different social world*' as they have seen, through what happens at LPP, that their children can have a better life than a '*life of crime*.'

### *Future directions*

Our findings, in one locality, suggest that a greater focus on understanding how to alter community norms embedded with violence to maintain social order may be beneficial for those living in particular conflict-ridden neighbourhoods. This perspective, suited to places with intense intra-community violence, invites an exploration of social processes other than those integral to collective efficacy to inform policy and practice. Our study, like others, questions aspiring to create cohesion to motivate residents to intervene to support neighbourhood social control as a strategy to reduce violence (Shirlow and Murtagh 2004). However, just as studies have drawn on cultural factors as mediating factors to explain differential rates of collective efficacy, they may be mechanisms that contribute to disrupting violent norms (Kubrin and Weizer 2003; Kirk and Matsuda 2011).

Our findings suggest potential for researching the situated logic of community-based organisations, their negotiated position with respect to malfunctioning state agencies and other community-based organisations, and obtaining and retaining an excellent reputation. We found that the provision of socially responsive and culturally sensitive activities attractive to young people are integral to reputation building. These findings suggest that it is possible to learn through community-based organisations how neighbourhood level changes can occur. Thus, developing strong institutional theories may be informative for developing strategies to reduce structural violence, rather than recording the density of community organisations in an area, a tendency found in other studies (Gardner and Brooks-Gunn 2009; Mazerolle et al 2010).

Young people 'crossing the line' were risk takers and social rule-breakers and reactions to rule-breaking can be finely balanced between being perceived as problematic behaviour worthy of punishment or a welcome deviation from the norm that represents progress (Cohen 1971). In our study several factors converged to explain the latter responses by residents of Maré that are shared by other communities across the world: a recognition that young people living in economically disadvantaged conflict areas share the same aspirations and hopes of living ordinary everyday lives as those residing in more affluent and peaceful environments (Hannerz 1969; Nguyen-Gillham et al 2008); and, residents are motivated to influence changes in their neighbourhood where they are committed to live (Small 2002). In our study, the institutional arrangements of LPP surfaced these underlying factors and made social action a possibility. A deeper understanding of the interactions between the cultural adaptations made by young people to LPP's organisational values and their newly acquired relational perspective transmitted collectively and shaped through social interactions within LPP may offer some insights into how to develop institutional perspectives (Hannerz 1969; Kirk and Papachristos 2011).

Finally, our study emphasises the significance of addressing gendered violence and recognises the significance of its connections to other criminal acts and contribution to long term neighbourhood harm. The findings presented illustrate how gender assigned roles can be



challenged within a community-based organisation enabling young people to shed some defensive and destructive everyday coping strategies that contribute to fractured personal relationships and limiting life chances. The extent to which more equal and respectful social relations are continued in the years beyond attending a supportive organisation was beyond the scope of this study but worthy of further exploration.

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