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THE STREETS ARE COLD, THE GANGS ARE WARM: AN INTERROGATION OF WHY PEOPLE JOIN GANGS

Sanna Strand
SIT Study Abroad

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THE STREETS ARE COLD, THE GANGS ARE WARM:
AN INTERROGATION OF WHY PEOPLE JOIN GANGS

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In partial fulfillment for the requirements for: South Africa: Multicultural and Human Rights

SIT Study Abroad, a Program for World Learning

Cape Town

Fall 2014

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Abstract

This project is looking to examine and understand the reasons why some people join gangs while others avoid involvement with gangsterism. Gangsterism in Cape Town today is an extremely current topic due to the large numbers of gangs and gang members in the region and the violence that is connected to it. The study sought to look into the multiple and possible reasons why a life of gangsterism seem to be so attractive to many young people. To understand the other side of the issue, a second objective was to understand why other people stay away from gangsterism, which include successful prevention methods. The study was carried out by interviewing people that work with gang activity and with youth in or at risk of gangsterism. People growing up surrounded by gangs but that did not join one was also interviewed about their experiences. To further the source of information, a questionnaire was also used. To create a wider background and understanding of the topic, secondary sources were also used in the research. The findings of the study shows that there are numerous reasons that might cause a person to join a gang or to stay away from gangsterism. Some of the most discussed reasons include: sense of belonging, family situation, poverty, peer pressure, protection, and lack of social structures and support. For prevention methods, or reasons why people avoid gangs, the most commonly mentioned reasons include education, alternative activities, and social and community support. The paper then will discuss these reasons in more detail to better understand them. The paper concludes that it is impossible to name one reason that causes people to join gangs. Rather, it is a combination of multiple different reasons that differ depending on region, culture, and the individual. Because of this, it is also impossible to name one prevention method that is universal, since the prevention too will differ depending on the same reasons as to why people do join gangs.

Introduction

Cape Town today has reached a stage where you can barely open up a newspaper anymore without reading about acts of violence that has taken place somewhere around the city, and that is related to gangsterism. It is estimated that as much as 60-70% of serious violent crimes in and around Cape Town might be gang related (Dziewanski, 2014). In relation to that, authorities estimate that there are approximately 100 to 120 gangs active in the Western Cape, and that there are between 80,000 to 100,000 gang members or gangsters in the same area (Dziewanski, 2014). The South African Police Service reported that in 2012, 12% of all murders in the Western Cape were gang related, which is an increase 86% from the year before (Swingler, 2014). This shows a dramatic increase in the violence that follows gangsterism.

The dangers and violence of the gangs affect and involve entire communities, not just the members of the different gangs. In March of 2014, Jason Felix from IOL News reported that 12 year old Jucinta Matroos, a 15 year old boy, and 40 year old Farida April, mother of four, was were killed in a shooting in Mitchells Plain. A local policeman, Tembinkosi Kinana, said that it was believed that the three people had been killed when gangsters were firing at random (Felix, 2014). Most of the discussion about gangs is about how dangerous they are and how much violence they are causing, and how they need to be prevented or suppressed. But the first step to successful prevention and intervention in gangsterism is to find out and understand why so many young people join gangs. Without understanding this, it will be hard to know how to work against gangsterism.

The objectives of this study, then, are twofold; first of all it looks into the reasons why people decide to get involved with gangs and live a life in the dangerous world of gangsterism. The second objective, to understand even better why people go this way, is to look into why

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some people decide not to join gangs. This can explain some prevention methods that have been successful, and in many ways it can also explain what is lacking for the people that do join gangs. The paper consists of several sections that seeks to create an understanding for the issue at hand and the argument that will be presented in this paper. In the first section the literature on the topic is being discussed. This section examines the literature from different perspectives, gangsterism from a historical and contemporary viewpoint, and gangsterism locally in Cape Town as well as globally. The next section expands on the methodology that was used when this study was conducted. The third section looks into the findings of the research and the interviews, and analyzes these findings in the context of the argument of the paper. This section will consider both the reasons to why people join gangs, and the reasons to why other people stay away from gangs. To create a better understandings for the many different reasons at play, the main reasons will be discussed separately and then analyzed to see how they overlap. Following this will be a conclusion that binds together everything that has been discussed in this paper and summarizes the outcomes of the study. As a last section, some recommendations for further study will be discussed to explain what more could be done on this general topic to create even better and wider understanding.

Through the paper a combination of firsthand and secondary sources will be used. In the literature review the focus will be on what the secondary material has to say, while in the findings and analysis section, a greater focus will be put on the primary sources and the information gained from interviews and questionnaires. The primary sources will, however, be backed up and explained with some further secondary sources and literature. The secondary information that is used come from an array of sources, from scholarly journal articles to online newspaper articles.

Limitations

Even though a lot has been done in order to complete this study, there were also a few limitations that helped form the final result of this paper. First of all, the limited amount of time available to perform this study limited how much could be done. With the time frame being only four weeks, there are certain points of the study that were affected by this. The main thing that was limited by the time frame is the number of interviews that was conducted. Had there been more time, it would have been beneficial for the study to perform more interviews with people from a wider array of backgrounds. The time frame for the study in some cases meant that a possible interviewee were not available in the given time, and therefore an interview could not be done. But even with the time frame in existence, four extensive interviews were conducted with people from different parts of the greater Cape Town area.

Another limitation that affected the study was the areas where the study could be performed. The fact that I am a foreigner and a white woman limited my interactions in terms of where I could go and who I could speak to. I did not feel completely safe going to certain areas of Cape Town on my own after some initial research of secondary sources. In an attempt to find an appropriate alternative by instead of looking for gang members or ex-gangsters to interview, NGOs working in this field were contacted. The purpose of this was to talk to people that work in the field of gangsterism, or to see if they could help me with contacts for interviews. A limitation connected to both the time frame and the NGOs that were contacted was the question of explaining how little time was available for the interviews to be done. Several NGOs showed interest when told about the topic of the research, but not enough time was available to find the right person within the NGO and set up an interview.

Literature Review: Gangsterism; Then and Now, Locally and Globally

These days gang violence is worse in some parts of the city than others, and some places have a long and notorious history of gang structures (Swingler, 2014). But the gang structures are also spreading, and townships with previous little history with gangs now see more gang formation (Swingler, 2014). When doing research about gangs, gang membership, and gang related violence in Cape Town today, a lot of information can be found. Most of this information, however, focuses on how gangs can be suppressed, worked against, and eliminated, or reasons why gangs are so prevalent and popular among young men and women in the townships. Many of these include socio-economic factors, both as reasons why gangs develop and keep growing, but also in terms of what needs to be done to suppress gangs by preventing young people from joining them. A common theme in the discussions of gangs is poverty and social and economic class, and a reoccurring idea is that by eliminating poverty, gangs will automatically diminish (Pillay, 2002). It is also important to understand if and how the gangs in Cape Town relates or differs from gang activity on a global scale. Therefor this literature review will look into the discussed reasons to why people join gangs from a historical and more contemporary perspective and contrast it to views from around the world.

First, let us look at what a “gang” actually entails. Ailsa Winton (2014), from the research and post-graduate teaching center El Colegio de la Frontera Sur in Mexico, points out that “gangs ought not to be viewed in isolation but, rather, in terms of their relationships with state and society; nor should they be understood as ‘aberrations’ but, rather, as coherent, logical and functional groups immersed in local institutional landscapes and responding to structural disadvantage at different scales” (p. 403). With this she explains how gangs emerged as a response to different aspects of society that the people in the gangs did not agree with, and in a

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way wanted to protest. Defining the meaning of what a gang is and means is not an easy task, and it is especially tricky to find a definition that works in a global sense. Winton (2014) does, however, say that

It is generally accepted in the literature that what distinguishes gangs from other groups of young people, and other delinquent groups, is the use of *systematic* (rather than sporadic) and *socially meaningful* (rather than instrumental) violence. Distinguishing youth gangs from other groups engaged in organized violence, while also recognizing their fluidity and the connections between them, is a difficult balance to reach. (pp. 404-405)

As can be seen here, defining what a gang actually is or means is not easy, and the definition must be considered and thought of for each instance. What is classified as a gang in Cape Town, might not be classified as a gang in a different city in the world. The most important thing to remember when talking about, and trying to define, what a gang is on a global scale, however, is to not narrow it down too much. Winton (2014) uses a quote from Hagedorn (2007) that explains about gangs that "...they are simply alienated groups socialized by the streets or prison, not conventional institutions" (p. 405). This definition can be more or less accurate depending on where in the world the focus lies, but it works as a good, inclusive, working definition of gangs from a global perspective.

Gangsterism from a Historical Perspective

Gangs, and all it entails with membership and violence, is not something that can be considered as a new or recent occurrence. The presence of gangs around the world, and

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especially in larger cities, has a long history. Cape Town is no different and gangs has had a prominent role in the city for many years.

Short history of gangsterism in South Africa.

Through the history of the literature of gangs in Cape Town, but also South Africa as a whole, Apartheid holds an important place. Clive Glaser (1998), from the University of Witwatersrand, writes about the history of gangs, but with a focus on Soweto, a township in Johannesburg. He writes that there has been a constant existence of gangs in the area of Witwatersrand since the mid-1930s. Glaser (1998) also notes that throughout the history of gangs, poverty, limited opportunity for employment, and lack of adequate housing, schooling, and recreation facilities, has always been important factors when it comes to gang activity and involvement.

The housing, and the territorial side of a permanent home, comes into play when the Group Areas Act of the Apartheid regime is considered. When the Group Areas Act was put into effect, families, communities, friendships, and the sense of belonging was ripped up from the roots and torn apart. According to Glaser (1998) this relocation had a disruptive effect on the formation of gangs. He explains that gangs had a tendency of forming in cohesive neighborhoods where young men had created a bond with their environment and the people around them. The implementation of the Group Areas Act during the 1960s therefore created a sort of pause in gang formations. The organizations of gangs only fully came back to life towards the end of the 1960s when neighborhood networks once again began to take place (Glaser, 1998).

Don Pinnock, on the other hand, as referenced by Suren Pillay (2002) gives more importance to the Group Areas Act for the importance of gangs in townships. Pinnock explains that gangsterism first and foremost is a survival technique. With this, he clarifies, follows that

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when families and communities were ripped apart by the relocation caused by the Group Areas Act young people got drawn into gangs and gang activity as a sort of coping and adjustment to their new and unfamiliar situation. Pillay (2002) also brings up Pinnock's argument that if gangsterism simply was the result of the social and economic class and the culture in the areas where it is most prevalent, gangs would have existed since long before they did. As it happened, gang activity grew significantly after the relocations caused by the Group Areas Act, which therefore shows the great effect the relocations had on the formations of gangs in the townships (Pillay, 2002). The importance and contribution of the relocations during apartheid in the development of gangs is also mentioned by Catherine L. Ward and Karlijn Bakhuis (2010) in their research. They performed a research where they talked to young people about their opinions about reasons for children's involvement in gangs and their ideas for preventions. The young people that participated in the study mentioned how the disruptions in communities during apartheid led to the development of gangs.

Steffen Jensen (2010), from the Research Center for Torture Victims, gives even more specific details about the history of gangs in Cape Town. He explains how the first recorded formation of a gang was in the 1940s' District 6. The gang was called the Globe Gang, and ironically enough, it was created as an anti-crime initiative. Jensen (2010) further describes how the economic needs of the area and the pressure from the state-police on the colored neighborhoods eventually turned it into a criminal gang when they stood up against the police.

Short history of gangsterism on a global scale.

When looking at the history of gangs and gangsterism on a global scale Winton (2014) reminds us that "Although urban gangs are found across the world, it is true that US-style gangs and gang research have for a long time defined thinking" (p. 402). She also explains that apart

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from the studies on gangs from the United States (US), the research is mostly concentrated to Central America, Brazil, and South Africa (Winton, 2001). With this in mind, most of the research on gangsterism is focused around the US, and this becomes even clearer when it comes to researching the history of gangsterism.

Different forms of gangs have been present in the world for a very long time. According to Allender (2001) the literature makes frequent references to groups throughout history that engaged in criminal activities. In places from China, to India, to Ancient Egypt has there been literature on criminal groups performing robberies, murders, and kidnappings (Allender, 2001).

In the United States the first gang was identified in the 1820s (Allender, 2001). They were called the Forty Thieves and resided in New York City and were made up of recently arrived Irish immigrants (Allender, 2001). In the 1920s, however, the gangs started to resemble the gang formations of today. Many of the gangs were formed or joined by people who felt disconnected from the society and like they did not belong, which is very similar to the gangs of today (Allender, 2001). Anderson, Dyson, and Lee (1996), says that gangs have been present in US cities since the 1920s, which shows that they use the modern way of thinking of gangs and look back at when the gangs that resembles today's gangs started to appear. Later in the 20th century, during the 1940s, the US started to see formations of gangs based on ethnicity. Ethnic groups, such as Latinos, Asians, Jews, Italians, and Jamaicans, formed groups after they were united more and more because of prejudices and discrimination that set them apart from mainstream society (Allender, 2001).

In Japan, the gangs of today have connections and traces back to at least the 17th century (Adelstein, 2010). The gangs as they look today, however, came to be after World War II. In Japan, the gangs tend to have a slightly different focus than gangs in many other parts of the

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world. The gangs in Japan are noticeably more involved in the politics of the country, and for a long time the gangs and gangsters have supported parties and politicians financially in order to help them. In exchange they often were rewarded with public works projects, political favors, and other deals that would ensure the safety of the gangs, called yakuza in Japan (Adelstein, 2010).

Gangsterism from a Contemporary Perspective

A lot has happened in the development of gangs, both locally in Cape Town and South Africa, and globally around the world. Even though many of the reasons why people become involved in gangs are very much the same as they were half a century ago, they also develop with society and adjust to the general struggles in communities.

Gangsterism today in Cape Town.

One of the most commonly mentioned reasons for youths to become involved in gang activity, both historically and in more recent research, is poverty or economic class. The participants in Ward and Bakhuis's (2010) study gave the most direct explanation on the relationship between money, or lack thereof, and gang membership. One participant is quoted in their article as saying "The small children who grow up in poor circumstances, when they see what the gangsters have, then they say, I also want lots of money" (p. 54). It is understandable that a child that grows up in poverty, where the only people with material wealth are the gang members, that that child would be affected by this and develop a certain level of respect for the gang members, or a desire to be like them.

Along the lines of poverty and economic class, unemployment follows naturally. Through the history of gangs, gangsterism have a tendency of being the most prevalent where unemployment levels are high, especially among young people. Catherine Ward and Adam

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Cooper (n.d.) mentions poverty and high levels of youth unemployment as risk factors in society when it comes to gang activity. Pillay (2002) even goes so far as saying “Give people jobs, and they won’t rob and steal and they won’t sell drugs” (p. 46). But Pillay (2002) also questions the argument that poverty and unemployment are causes for high levels of gang activity, or at least how important these factors are. He argues that if these factors are as important as some people claim, then why are gangs in Cape Town so much more common in the Cape Flats, which is generally populated by so called colored communities, then they are in majorly black townships. This is an interesting question that he poses that clearly shows that there is no single reason for gang activity that can be pin pointed. But to still point at the important effect unemployment and poverty has in the formation of gangs, Pillay (2002), once again, quotes Pinnock that says that the solution to the issue of gangs lies in the “elimination of poverty and the redistribution of wealth” (p. 45). Even though Pillay (2002) does not agree that this is the complete solution to the issue, he agrees that poverty is an important factor, and therefore the elimination of poverty will be important in the prevention of gang activity.

Another extremely important factor among causes for gang activity, by some considered maybe the most important factor, is the state of the social structure in the society or community. If there is no societal or community support for young people, for some youth it unfortunately means that they will get involved with the gangs in the area because there is no alternative. Among the literature that discusses this topic, it is an often reoccurring idea that a lack of social structures is a central cause for high levels of gang activity. These social structures involve both the schools and activities that take place outside school hours. The participants in Ward and Bakhuis’s (2010) study explains this further; they say that when they are in school they have no support by their teachers, some teachers do not even show up to class and does obviously not

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care about what happens to their students. Others blame lack of equipment and technology to be able to do well in school in order to succeed later in life. Also mentioned is the lack of activities to get involved in after school is over for the day. When there is no activities, such as sports, many children turn to the gangs instead. Another participant says that even when parks exist in the community, these have been taken over by gangs and drug dealers and are therefore unsafe and unusable for recreational purposes. All these reasons are given by young people that has experienced the situations, and it is easy to hear the despair in their situations. For some students or other young people, it turns into a question of either sitting inside in your home all day after school, or get involved with the gangs in the community (Ward & Bakhuis, 2010).

Winton (2014) also notes an interesting point from a study performed by the Children and Youth in Organized Crime (CHOV). Of the people that took part in this study, all of who are gang members, almost all the participants that expressed a will to leave the gang said that “they would do so only on the condition that something else took its place, for example if they got a job or if the state/society/community offered support and alternatives” (p. 412). This study took place in ten different cities in the world, Cape Town included, and does therefor not speak to Cape Town in particular. But it does, however, speak to how important social structures can be in the prevention of gang activity, or in young peoples’ decision to join gangs (Winton, 2014).

On a level closer to home, often pointed out as a reason for why some young people get involved with gangs is family structure. In Ward and Bakhuis’s (2010) study the participants mentions risk factors such as role modelling of substance abuse and criminality, and being surrounded by older family members that are or have been gang members. The participants talk about these factors in a way that describes them as being so unpleasant that the children seek a better environment and affirmation, and that it is easy to find this in the gangs (Ward & Bakhuis,

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2010). Pinnock (1997) also discusses another home-related issue that in many cases work as a cause for a boy or young man to join a gang. He talks about the effects the lack of a father-figure can have on a young boy growing up in a rough environment in a poverty stricken and tough township. He claims that “The search for ‘respect’ in the crossing to adulthood takes on larger-than-life proportions” (p. 8). When a boy then grows up without a good role model that can guide him through his youth and, as Pinnock (1997) calls it, his “crossing to adulthood” (p. 8), he might struggle with what to do, how to behave, and where to turn to. For some boys, the only people they have to turn to in this situation or time of their lives, are the gangs.

Another argument that is brought up by Pillay (2002) and that is worth mentioning is the “culture industry” (p. 49). He says that we need to take into consideration how newspapers, movies, television shows, and music are sold to different audiences. By looking at what cinemas in different areas show, Pillay (2002) claims that we can see a difference in how people in different areas are perceived and targeted. Cinemas in working class areas of Cape Town in general show movies that are focused around a lot of violence, while other cinemas in more upper-class areas tend to show a wider variety of movies with less focus on violence. But, he also points out, the violent movies only sell where they have an audience. The participants in Ward and Bakhuis’s (2010) study also touches upon this subject briefly. They say that even when they try to stay away from the gangs on the street by staying inside a lot, they are surrounded by violent role models as soon as they turn on the television. This shows that some of the young people that took part in the study had consciously tried to stay away from the gangs and their activities, but still felt that they were exposed to violence in other ways that were hard to stay away from completely.

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Gangsterism today in the world.

Gangs around the world tend to often have similar reasons to why they were formed, or why people join them. In the section that focuses on Cape Town, poverty in exclusion from society are mentioned as major reasons, and this is in many cases true for gangs around the world as well. Winton argues that “although gangs do not correlate to poverty per se, they tend to emerge more in contexts of (multiple) marginalization” (p. 407).

In Cairo a new occurrence have been seen in the last decade (Lewis, 2007). In 2005 self-declared gangs were formed in the Sudanese refugee community which reshaped existing concepts of social systems and challenged refugee advocates and assistance providers. The gangs were in large formed by young people to unite refugees in a new country that in some ways had a hard time to find their way between different cultures, of old and new (Lewis, 2007). The gangs have since turned more violent, but the violence is still dominantly kept between gangs, and these gangs still make up a very small portion of the Sudanese refugee population in Cairo (Lewis, 2007).

The yakuza, the gangs in Japan, operate in a very different way than that of many gangs in other nations. They tend to be very much politically active and involved in local and national politics (Adelstein, 2010). They work in broad daylight in a way that is not seen in many other places, they have office buildings, business cards, and sometimes even fan magazines. They are not involved in street crimes in the same way as South African gangs tend to be, they resemble the Italian mafia more than a gang in many ways, but they are also a lot less violent (Adelstein, 2010). Their standing has changed slightly since the early 1990s when the police started to work against the yakuza more, but they still hold an important role in Japan (Adelstein, 2007).

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In the US, we can read about Gato and Alex, who both came from El Salvador to the US and in different ways ended up as members of gangs in Los Angeles (Hayden, 2000). When they were sentenced for various crimes, they both choose to take the alternative of being deported back to El Salvador rather than receive harsher sentences (Hayden, 2000). When Alex got back he turned his life around for the better, and eventually he returned to the US illegally to be with his newborn son. Back in the US he started to volunteer for an organization that helped youth at risk and prevented gangsterism. But when he was found out to be in the country illegally he was deported again, no matter the good work he did for the youth of the country (Hayden, 2000).

Methodology

This study uses a combination of different methods in order to try and get as close as possible to a full and wide understanding of the topic. The primary source of information is a number of personal interviews with people with different experiences and types of expertise in the field of gangsterism in Cape Town. To try and collect as much information as possible from as many people as possible during this limited time period, a questionnaire has also been written and then filled out by several people. As a third level of data collection, a research of secondary sources has also been performed to gather data from different perspectives and to widen the field and see what has been said on this topic by others previous to this study.

The main source of information in this study was several personal interviews performed by the author of this paper. The people that were interviewed were all found via NGOs that work in their field, or because of their affiliation with SIT. All the people that were interviewed because of their work with NGOs in the field were found via the NGO. The first step taken was to do a basic internet search to find NGOs active in the area of Cape Town that in some way work in the field of gangsterism. After that the NGO was contacted to explain the study and its purpose and to ask if there was anyone in the organization that would be available for an interview about their work and their experiences. In one case the person first contacted was the one that was interviewed, and in the other two cases, the person or persons interviewed was found or contacted by a chain of referrals within or from people affiliated with the NGO that was contacted.

The method of personal interviews was chosen because it seemed to be the best means possible in order to find answers to the questions posed by the performer of the study. With the purpose of the study being to find out and understand why people join, or become involved with,

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gangs, asking direct questions to people working in this field appears to be the best option present. Each interview was entered into with a fairly open and flexible set of questions. The main difference in the interviews happened between the interviews with people working in the field of gangsterism, and the interview with a person with personal experiences from growing up in an area with a high prevalence of gangs and gang violence. For the people that were interviewed because of their work, the goal was to find out about what they have learned about how gangs work and what they experience are the reasons for why some people join gangs and some do not. The interviews were started by asking the interviewee to talk a little bit about their organization and the work they are doing there. After that it was quite open, each interview was adjusted to what the interviewee was saying and talking about. There was, however, a few questions that were raised in each interview. These questions dealt with the interviewee's thoughts and opinions about what draws people to join gangs, or what keeps them from joining gangs. These questions were also the main thing that was a common presence even in the interview with a person growing up in an area with many gangs, but that did not become a gangster. Other than that, that interview was more focused on talking about personal experiences with gangsterism from growing up as a child and teenager surrounded by gangs.

All these interviews were performed with people that participated voluntarily. The project and its purpose was explained in order for the participants to know what they were contributing to. Before the interview each participant was given a consent form to read and sign, and it was also signed by the interviewer. The consent form clarified the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality questions of the interview and how the information would be used for the study. In order to protect the interviewees and their identity, the names have been changed, unless the participant agreed to have their real name and identity in the paper. Where the participant wanted

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to be truly anonymous the name of the organization or NGO they were affiliated with has also been left out of the paper so that no conclusions can be made to who the person is without knowing the name of the person.

The other method used to gather primary data was a questionnaire form that was answered and filled out by a number of people. A sample of this questionnaire can be found at the end of this paper. The purpose of the questionnaire was to try and be able to reach out and gather information from more people than would have been possible if only personal interviews were used. Another purpose of the questionnaire was the idea that people might be more comfortable with speaking honestly about their experiences when there is no possible way of identifying the person that answered the questions. The questionnaire was completely anonymous, the respondent never had to put their name anywhere on the form. Consent for this form was given by the respondent by reading the short text before the question where it states that by filling out the questionnaire they gave their consent for the information to be used in this study. The questionnaire raises questions about peoples' experiences from their lives in terms of gangs, whether they have been involved in gangs themselves, know people that are or has been, or has just seen gangsterism somewhere sometime in their life. The questionnaire also makes clear that the respondents only should answer the questions they feel comfortable answering. This was to avoid any answers that were not completely honest due to an uncomfortable feeling by the person answering.

As a last source of information, a research of secondary sources were performed before, during, and after the interviews took place. The purpose of the secondary source research was to create a wider understanding for what the literature has said on the subject previous to the carrying out of this study. The research was also made to see the topic of study from a historical

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and global perspective. Have the reasons for gangsterism seemed to have changed a lot through the years? And where does Cape Town gangsterism place in relation to gangsterism in other countries and cities around the world? All of this has been done to try and create a wider understanding for the reasons for gangsterism and why it is so prevalent in Cape Town today.

Interviewees

1. Andrew (name changed to protect the interviewee) – Youth development worker that works for an NGO located in a suburb east of Cape Town. The NGO works with prevention and intervention for young people at risk. Andrew works with the school-based prevention program and because of this work he has valuable experiences and information for this study from working in areas where gangs are prevalent and from working with youth at risk of being involved in gangs. Was interviewed together with Christian.
2. Christian (name changed to protect the interviewee) – Youth development worker that works for the same NGO as Andrew. Christian works with youth that has already been involved in some kind of petty crime, and in some cases are involved with a gang, or are at risk of being involved with gangs. Was interviewed together with Andrew.
3. Ryland Fisher – Editor, journalist, columnist, author, senior manager, and executive with extensive experiences in the media industry. Interviewed for this study about his experiences of growing up in the coloured township of Hanover Park, but without joining a gang.
4. Isaac (name changed to protect the interviewee) – Graduate student interning with an NGO in one of the coloured townships in Cape Town as the Youth Development Coordinator. Works with young people in a youth group and provides positive activities

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for these youth instead of being on the streets. Isaac was interviewed about his experiences of working with young people in this area and what he has learned about gangsterism through his work.

5. Siphon (name changed to protect the interviewee) – Works for the 18 Gangster Museum in Khayelitsha. The museum is at the moment a mobile museum that sets up exhibitions in schools. During the exhibitions the visitors can interact with ex-gang members. The museum focuses primarily on prevention. Siphon was interviewed to talk about his experiences with the 18 Gangster Museum and of working both with ex-gangsters and with youth at risk in an area with gangs.

Ethical Reflexivity

To do research in the field of gangs in a city like Cape Town must be considered a sensitive topic. There were several instances during the project where the purpose and the methodology had to be carefully considered. Ideally, for this project, gangsters and ex-gangsters would be interviewed about their experiences, but it is not always easy to find and approach a gang member as an outsider. The topic that have been researched and analyzed in this project involved many sensitive questions and the possibility to interview many people at risk, or that could be put at risk by talking about their experiences. Several measures have been taken in order to make this study ethically responsible, and the goals reachable in an ethically correct manner.

First of all, as mentioned earlier, a conscious decision was taken about how contacts for interviews would be found, and who to contact. In order to find people suitable to interview, NGOs that work in the field of gangsterism in Cape Town in any way was contacted. When these people then were interviewed it was always pointed out, both via the consent form and vocally,

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that they never were under any obligation to answer anything that they did not feel comfortable with. Because some of the information in this field can be very sensitive, it was also always pointed out that anonymity and confidentiality was of great importance and that pseudonyms would be used, which they were for all interviewees that did not wish otherwise.

Another part of the ethical part of the study that had to be considered was my role as the interviewer, as a white female from Sweden, but often assumed to be American because of my position in South Africa as a study abroad student from the United States of America. My role was something that I was conscious about during this process of performing this study, but I have also come to certain conclusions about how it can have affected the study. In many ways I believe that the fact that I am a white female researcher on a topic like gangsterism might have meant that I was seen as less dangerous, or less like a threat, as a local male researcher might have been. The fact that I am a white foreigner from a country like Sweden, where gangsterism is not very prevalent, I think might also have helped me keep an open mind about the topic I am researching. I think that I entered the study fairly free of perceptions and bias, simply because I have no personal experience of gangsterism. But from a different perspective, this might also mean that the perceptions and biases that I did have were solely based on the secondary sources I had read during my research up to that point. Typically these sources paint an extremely negative picture of gangs in Cape Town and its dangers and these were the ideas I had in my mind entering the project.

Overall I think that the way I went about finding interviewees combined with my identity and role as a researcher ended up giving me, though few in number, honest thoughts and opinions on why people are drawn towards gang life or not.

Findings and Analysis

Through this research, both primary and secondary, the research has identified several reasons why so many young people are drawn towards a life in the gang world. It is safe to say that there is no one reason that explains all people's decision to join gangs, rather, it is a question of several different reasons that have various levels of impact from person to person. The same goes with why other people stay away from involvement with gangs. Two young people can grow up in extremely similar conditions and situations, but only one of them ends up as a gangster, and it can be very hard to pin point exactly why this happened.

More than just individual differences, Siphon also mentions different cultural contexts depending on where you grow up (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). He talks about how the gang culture is different between the townships. In Khayelitsha, which is a dominantly black township, the gang culture is fairly new, and most gangs are only a few years old (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). In coloured townships on the other hand, he goes on to explain, they tend to have a longer, deeper, and stronger culture of gangsterism. Many of the gangs there stem from the 1940s and 50s and during this time they have built up a stronger and more solid gang structure than the newer gangs in Khayelitsha have had time to do (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). This section of the paper will look into and discuss some of the most commonly mentioned reasons for gangsterism, and briefly compare and contrast these opinions to what has been said in the media and literature. Similarly, the same will be done for the most commonly mentioned prevention methods, or reasons to why people avoid gangsterism.

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Reasons why People Join Gangs

Presented and discussed in this section are some of the most commonly mentioned and talked about reasons why people are drawn to and join gangs. Most often it is not a single reason that makes someone become involved with gangsterism, rather, it is a combination of two or more of these reasons. Many of the discussed reasons also weave into each other, and it is not always easy to know what is what, because they relate to each other so tightly. But on a general basis, these reasons tend to be involved in many young people's decision to join a gang.

Sense of belonging.

Through the information gathered in this study, the need for a sense of belonging was over and over mentioned as a major reason why young people join gangs. Ryland Fisher argues that "All of us want to be with people that look like us, speak like us, and make us feel comfortable, and think like us" (Personal communication, 13 November, 2014). Andrew explains the importance of a sense of belonging by telling how when the NGO he works for was started, the thought was that it would be a kind of good gang, a place and a group where young people could feel like they belong, where they had their "brothers" (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). Similarly, Isaac also introduces the idea of a sense of belonging (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). He explains that many of the youth that get involved in gangs are looking for a sense of belonging, and that they find it in the gangs when they feel like they do not belong anywhere else (Isaac, November 18, 2014). Along the lines of what Andrew said about the idea behind the NGO he works for, Isaac says that the campaign he is working for is also trying to create a feeling of "team", so that the youth can feel like they belong to a group (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). The importance of creating this sense of belonging for youth in a different place than in gangs is also explained by Winton (2014).

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Winton (2014) presents information from a study with armed groups, which includes gangs, that states that one of the most commonly mentioned reasons why members of these groups do not want to leave the group is the sense of belonging that they find in that group.

The sense, or the feeling, of belonging is mentioned as a prominent reason for gangsterism in many different types of gangs. GroundUp (2014) writes about the rise of female gangs in townships around Cape Town. In the article GroundUp (2014) presents the views and thoughts of Nokwakha Nomvete, an elder from Langa township. Nomvete talks about how she believes that many of the girls that join gangs in the townships come from backgrounds that lack emotional support, and that they because of this turn to the gangs to find a place where they feel like they belong (GroundUp, 2014).

Christian, however, warns that the sense of belonging that young people find in gangs most often turns out to be fake (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). He explains how

Gangs sometimes promise us a fake sense of belonging, they promise us fake brotherhood, they want to use you, they will tell you ‘you are my brother, you are my sister’, only to use you at a certain level, and when they are done with you, you don’t matter anymore (Personal communication, November 19, 2014).

To clarify this fake sense of belonging he explains how the gangs make you feel like you belong as long as they can use you in some way. If you get caught by the police for any gang related crime it will not be your “brother” standing next to you in court, it will be your mother. The “brothers” from the gang will be out on the streets looking for a person to replace you (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). With this in mind, the importance of creating a

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place for youth to belong becomes even more obvious. Young people need to have a place where they feel like they are being part of a group and that they belong before they go out on the streets to look for this place in a gang. Siphso, from the 18 Gangster Museum, explains how he realized the need for this place of belonging, and how he is working to create this, by saying

What I've found out is that they do not have people who they can share their pain with, who can share their joys with them, their dreams, their aspirations...so in a way I become that... they can talk to me about anything, about a girl they want to date, a girl that has broken their heart, the fact that they want to open a business, they want to go back to school...when they are around us they are in a space where they become themselves, not what society has labeled them or what society would like them to be, they just become themselves. (Siphso, personal communication, November 21, 2014).

As GroundUp (2014) touched upon in their article, there is always a background and a history to why these young people are in such a great need for a place where they belong. Nomvete introduced the thought that it is possible that many of the young people in gangs do not have satisfactory emotional support behind them (GroundUp, 2014). The lack of this support is often times connected to the situation at home for many young people, and the need for a sense of belonging is often discussed together with family structure.

Family situation.

The family structure and situation of young people is closely related to the need for a sense of belonging that is so often discussed when it comes to reasons why people join gangs.

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The situation in someone's home is often talked about as a back lying cause for a desperate need of belonging from somewhere outside the home. Christian shares his experience and says that from what he has seen, most gangsters grew up in one parent households, and most often with a single mother (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). Isaac also talks about the impact of single parent households, and he even mentions family structure and family planning as the main reason why people join gangs (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). Siphon talks about the importance of family structure and support in more detail. He explains how a mother that has to provide for an entire family on her own might not have enough time outside work to spend with her children, no matter how much she wants to (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). This leaves the children on their own a lot when the single parent has to work long hours and spend time traveling to and from work, and Siphon argues that when the parent is physically absent a lot it is easy for the children to be influenced and affected by the outside world (Personal communication, November 21, 2014).

The most important part of growing up in a single parent household, however, is the lack of guidance and support that often follows when a single parent is absent a lot due to work (Siphon, personal communication, November 21, 2014). Isaac also argues that it is vital for children and youth to have an adult in their life that plays an active role (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). He debates how the children need a good adult role model that is involved in their lives to keep track of them and to provide guidance and even punishment when they do something wrong (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). In more detail, he says

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But mainly...when you lack someone who is going to guide you, lack someone who is going to give you what is right or what is wrong, when you lack somebody who is involved in your life, it really is going to throw you off and you're going to hang out with the wrong crowd, and somehow what is wrong could be acceptable.

(Isaac, personal communication, November 18, 2014)

Sipho also talks about the importance of a good role model, and he explains that young people might not yet have the right mindset to analyze things the experience properly, and without a role model to guide them, wrong might suddenly become right, and they do not think about the consequences of what they do (Personal communication, November 21, 2014).

More specifically when growing up in a single mother household, the lack of a father figure for young boys is mentioned as a reason why these young boys look for a male role model in a different place outside their homes. Don Pinnock (1997) has discussed the lack of a father figure in a way where he examines the impacts on young boys in growing up to be men without a father figure, or a good male role model, to guide them. Along these lines Sipho talks about how mothers cannot always fulfil the role of a missing father. He says that "As good as mothers are, how can a woman turn a boy into a man?" (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). Isaac also talks about how in his work he can see the need some of the young boys have of a good role model, and how some of the boys he is working with have come to see him as a brother, or even a father figure (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). This, he said, happened when the youth realized that he is someone that they can talk to, to guide them, and to provide moral support; they realized that they have someone that cares for them (Isaac, personal communication, November 18, 2014).

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Another point that is important to discuss when it comes to family situation as a reason for gangsterism is the background families have in gang life. Many young boys and girls that end up in gangs come from families where gangsterism and gang life has become something that resembles a tradition (Sipho, personal communication, November 21, 2014). Sipho explains that some young people come from families where gang membership has played a prominent role in the family for several generations (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). Ryland Fisher, who grew up in Hanover Park, talks about his experiences of living in an area with many gangs and says that in his experience almost every family had a member that ended up in a gang (Personal communication, November 13, 2014). He goes on to say that there were gangs in almost every block of flats or on every street, and that the gangs were so prominent and big part of everyday life that it reached a state where it was almost accepted that an older brother, a cousin, or another member of the family would become a gangster (Personal communication, November 13, 2014). Isaac has also seen that pattern of gangsterism in families in how work and he says that among the boys that he work with “Most of them, one or more of their family members are affiliated with gangs” (Personal communication, November 18, 2014).

In Swingler’s (2014) article on gang violence in Cape Town, the impact of family members in gangs is also pointed out by Major Jeremy Vearey, Provincial Commander of Operation Combat, a specialized anti-gang structure from the police in the Western Cape. Vearey argues that “children often look to emulate their fathers or uncles when joining gangs” (Swingler, 2014). Similarly, in the same article Rodney Amanshure, ex-leader of the Naughty Boys gang in Parkwood, says that he left his life in the gang because he feared that his son would follow in his footsteps otherwise (Swingler, 2014). Tacky, a 16 year old boy and member of the Thug Life gang is quoted by IRIN (2007) as saying

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Gang life is like a religion to my family...my father and grandfather were in gangs and they have done time in jail – I will probably end up there as well. It is the way of life here; it is where you learn about respect and get status. (IRIN, 2007)

Along similar lines, a 16 year old girl from Langa called Neli is quoted by GroundUp (2014) when she says that she joined the gang Vura Babes because her boyfriend is a member of the Vuras.

Poverty.

A factor that is closely related to family situation and single parent households are poverty. As mentioned, a single parent providing for an entire family often has to work long hours and be gone for much of the day in order to feed and take care of the family (Sipho, personal communication, November 21, 2014). With a parent that is absent a lot because they are out trying to work up enough money to take care of the family, the material benefits of joining a gang might not appear to be so bad. Christian explains that there are certain materialistic benefits for the children when they join a gang (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). Andrew further develops this and explains how gangs can provide instant gratification and material wants for impatient children (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). He also describes how the material wants of children and young people are being used by the gangs to recruit new members. The gangs give things to young people, such as a pair of sneakers or a nice watch, and when they use it or wear it the gang forces the youth to do something for them to give back for what they got, such as sell drugs for them, and so the youth gets pulled in to the gang (Andrew,

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personal communication, November 19, 2014). The impact of a good role model also comes into play here when it comes to the effect people and wealth can have on someone's choices in life. Siphon explains how money in many cases weigh more than knowledge (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). If they see someone that went to school and got a good education but that still only has knowledge, why would they choose him as a role model when they then see the gangster that dropped out of school but still has everything he ever wanted? (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). For a young person that only has enough to get by, it can be hard to focus on the long term benefits that could come from a good education, when the gangs can provide you with so much wealth and status right now.

The poverty factor as a reason to join gangs is also closely related to the high levels of unemployment in Cape Town and the townships. As one young person in Ward and Bakhuis's (2010) study explains "Because if you drop out of school you have nothing else to do but to join a gang. There is no other job without education, so they join a gang to have a source of money" (p. 54). The issue of money and unemployment is brought up by many other young respondents in Ward and Bakhuis's (2010) study, both as reasons for gangsterism and as possible solutions to the problems caused by gangsterism. It is brought up that many people join gangs because of money, and that work opportunities and the elimination of poverty would help get rid of many of the gangs (Ward & Bakhuis, 2010). Ryland Fisher also talks about the impact of poverty and high unemployment by saying that when there are high levels of unemployment there is a lot of people just hanging around in the neighborhood on the street corners (Personal communication, November 13, 2014). From there, according to Fisher, it is an easy step to become involved in a gang; the gangs can often offer a source of income, even though it more often than not is through some kind of illegal work or activity (Fisher, personal communication, November 13, 2014).

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Peer pressure.

One reason for gangsterism, which is mentioned by Siphon to be of big influence in Khayelitsha, is peer pressure (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). The people that the youth are hanging out with and spend most of their time with are also likely to affect the choices they make. If many of the youth's friends are involved with gangs and the youth see the benefits that come out of it, they will be more likely to join a gang too (Siphon, personal communication, November 21, 2014). When a young person sees that their friends that are in gangs have a lot of material things, or they do well with girls, they will want to be like that friend (Siphon, personal communication, November 21, 2014). Siphon also argues that the gangs are seen as something desirable for many young people, "Everybody loves the gangs, respect them, the girls love them, you know" (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). Peer pressure is also mentioned by one of the respondents of the questionnaire. The respondent grew up in Gugulethu and has a cousin that is a member of a gang, and as the reason why the cousin joined the gang the respondent said they think it was nothing else than peer pressure. One of the young people that participated in Ward and Bakhuis's (2010) study put emphasis on how much someone's friendships can affect your path in life by saying "I choose the way I want to live because I choose the right friends" (p. 55).

Peer pressure is also discussed by many young people written about in different articles about gangs in Cape Town (GroundUp, 2014; Sefali, 2014). Neli says in GroundUp's (2014) article that when people at school know she is a member of a gang they respect you and you are cool. A gang member interviewed by Sefali (2014) also claims that "If you hang around a certain crew, you're bound to copy their habits" (p. 4). The same gang member also goes on to say that being a member of a gang was a voluntary decision, but that he or she saw their friends being in

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gangs and wanted to “be cool just like them” (Sefali, 2014, p. 4). Another gang member interviewed by Sefali (2014) talks about how being a gang member is a way of gaining respect, especially at school, because in high school there is so much pressure on being seen as cool, which you are as a gang member.

The issue of peer pressure also correlates with the influence of gangsterism as a family tradition that has been mentioned earlier. Peer pressure does not only have to come from friends and other people that young people spend time with, it can also come from a closer range, such as family members. For example, Tacky that was mentioned earlier talked about how his father and his grandfather before him had been gangsters, and that how it is all he knows (IRIN, 2007). In some families it has become accepted, and almost expected, that the young people will become gangsters because that is their way of life (Fisher, personal communication, November 13, 2014).

Protection.

“In all coloured areas, or black areas, there is always a gang, because the youth are scared to walk alone...they always walk in groups...they do everything in groups” (Christian, personal communication, November 19, 2014). This was said by Christian to explain how young people see gangs as a kind of protection mechanism (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). Siphso discusses how being in a gang can help protect you by explaining that if you walk in an area that you are not from, or where you do not know many people, it is accepted that you will most likely get robbed, and it is not always certain that people will stand up for you because they fear the gangs (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). A gang can then provide a protection mechanism because you are less likely to be alone, and you have a sort of security net. Connected to the issue of security, both Siphso and Andrew brings up that fear has a great impact

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on peoples' decision to join gangs (Personal communication, November 21, 2014; Personal communication, November 19, 2014). Siphon says that it is more likely that you will get robbed if you are not part of a gang, and because the young people are afraid of this, they join a gang in order to protect themselves (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). Christian further expands on the idea of being protected by being in a gang by saying

Being in a gang, or working with a gang, there is freedom for you to walk anywhere you like, so it's much easier for protection, and you also look cool, everybody is scared of you, no one wants to mess with you, the younger boys...are looking up to you. (Personal communication, November 19, 2014)

Andrew talks about the protection of gang life from a different perspective (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). He explains that to youth that are already at risk or involved in different kinds of criminal activities, the gangs give them false promises of protection and safety (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). Gangs have members and connections both on the streets and in the prisons, and by joining a gang they give the youth false promises of protection, safety, and control if, or when, they end up in jail (Andrew, personal communication, November 19, 2014). In Andrew's opinion these are all false promises because they gangs do not tell the full truth about what life in prison really looks like, but they do exaggerate on how "good" life can be inside prison walls if they are members of a gang (Personal communication, November 19, 2014).

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Lack of social structures and support.

There are, however, other reasons for gangsterism that are not necessarily connected to family life or the people that closely surround young people. These reasons include the social structures and the support that is available in the society and the local community. Out of all the people that were interviewed for this study, everyone said that there was no, or very little, social support for young people in the communities (Andrew, personal communication, November 19, 2014; Christian, personal communication, November 19, 2014; Fisher, personal communication, November 13, 2014; Isaac, personal communication, November 18, 2014; Siphso, personal communication, November 21, 2014). Siphso explained an important part of the support system for youth that wants to stay away from gangsterism (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). He said that the support is there on paper, but it does not work well enough in real life. Some NGOs come in to the communities and help the youth for a little while, but a few months down the line they are not there anymore. This kind of work is not sustainable and they young people do not get the long term and satisfactory support that they need (Siphso, personal communication, November 21, 2014). Ryland Fisher also gives some perspective to this issue by clarifying how the support simply has never really been there (Personal communication, November 13, 2014). When he grew up during the apartheid era, the areas where gangsterism was the most prevalent, such as black and coloured townships, were simply not seen as important. They people there were used for cheap labor, and what was going on in the communities was not really important (Personal communication, November 13, 2014).

The lack of social structures as a reason why people join gangs was also suggested by two of the respondents to the questionnaire. Both of the respondents grew up in Khayelitsha. One respondent says that there are not enough activities and places in the community to go to keep

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young people busy, so they get bored, and from there it is easy to become involved in a gang. The other respondent also says that the people have nothing to do so they join gangs, but also suggests that the boredom in many cases could be connected to unemployment or failed school careers, and so people take out their frustrations over this on other people to make themselves feel better. The issue of boredom following the lack of after-school activities was also brought up by one of the respondents in the study performed by Ward and Bakhuis (2010). The respondent stated that “They do it because they find life boring...build like a center and make exciting things” (p. 57).

The issue of not having enough activities for young people to engage with is a commonly reoccurring topic. Isaac brought up and discussed how even though there are sports fields and such for youth to use in the communities, these communal spaces almost always become gang turfs (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). Because of this the youth that do not belong to a gang, and specifically not to the gang that territorialized the area, do not feel safe to use these premises, and so they end up with nothing to do even though there are sports fields in the communities.

Andrew also introduces an interesting point that concerns the lack of social structure and support (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). He explains that for children that grow up surrounded by crime, or that has been the victim for some sort of crime, there is a lack of support for them to learn how to deal with what they have been through. In some cases then, the young people end up doing the same thing that they were a victim for to other people. They do not do it because they like it, but rather, because it is all they know, and they have not learned how to deal with it in any other way (Personal communication, November 19, 2014).

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On a similar note, when children grow up in a community where they do not feel safe and where they do not feel like they get any support, it might be harder for them to connect to and feel at home in their community. Christian explains that in their program they work with teaching the youth accountability, and the importance of restitution (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). He says that

You are staying in the same community that you are destroying, so what are you doing to heal the community? By staying in the community you are labeled all the time, when they see you they close the doors because they know you are going to steal. (Personal communication, November 19, 2014)

What they are trying to do is to teach the youth to give back to the community in order to heal it, so that when they stay in the area they can hopefully feel that they are a part of the community and that they belong there (Personal communication, November 19, 2014).

Isaac also brings up the fact that there are young people that actively say that they do not want to become involved with gangs (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). He states that some youth even say that they want to leave the community because they know that if they stay, there are no option for them, one way or another they will end up being involved with a gang (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). For these youth, Isaac explains further, there are no options. They do not get enough help and support to get away from the influence of gangs, even when they want to. The society provides no option for these youth in terms of boarding schools or something of the likes, and the youth end up staying in their community

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surrounded by the influence of gangs because they have nowhere else to go or to turn to (Personal communication, November 18, 2014).

Prevention/Reasons for People to Avoid Gangsterism

Similar to the issue with the reasons why people choose to join gangs, there is not a single reason to why other people avoid involvement with gangsterism that can be pin pointed. Discussed in this section of the paper are the major reasons why people do not join gangs. In many cases these reasons are prevention methods that exist in the communities that have been successful.

Education.

To have an education have long been seen as vital, and as an important part of creating a successful life. Similarly, it is often seen as a way out of a bad life. Siphon argues that education is the ideal form of prevention (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). To put further emphasis on the importance of education, he says that all prevention methods fall under the big umbrella of education since all prevention aims to teach the participants something (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). He also specifies that the kind of education he is talking about does not only include the classroom, the source of education can be school, church, home, or another place, the most important part is that children receive a good education that will help them in their life (Siphon, personal communication, November 21, 2014).

Andrew, who works with a school based prevention program explains how they are working to keep the youth in school until they finish their education (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). He says that there is an on-going discussion about what ages they should work with in school, but at the moment they start their program in grade 9. The reason for this, Andrew explains, is that grade 9 tends to be the standard grade where many students drop out of

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school. They are in their second year of high school and start to feel grown up and that they can get by better on their own, without school. Because of this, the school based prevention program starts in this grade with the purpose of trying to get to the youth before they drop out and to encourage them to stay in school until they graduate (Andrew, personal communication, November 19, 2014).

Another part of education during prevention is informing youth about gangsterism in order for them to understand why it is not a good way to go. Siphon talks about how the 18 Gangster Museum works to do this in the best way. They have ex-gangsters talk to youth about what they can expect if they choose to join a gang. He says that it has a stronger impact on the youth if they hear this information from someone with personal experiences, rather than if they hear it from someone that simply talks about the dangers of gangsterism, but that does not really know anything about it (Siphon, personal communication, November 21, 2014). A participant in Ward and Bakhuis's (2010) confirms this idea by saying "Prisoners who have been sentenced must be taken to visit the schools... Try to show that the prison life is not good for human beings" (p. 57).

Alternative activities.

One of the most important objectives of prevention methods and that help youth stay away from gangsterism is to create alternative activities. Youth needs to have things to do to avoid the boredom that was previously discussed as a contributing reason to gangsterism. These activities can include sports, drama, music, arts, and politics, the most important thing is that they have something to do and somewhere to be. Ryland Fisher tells about how he, when he was young, spent a lot of time playing his guitar, and that he did it outside, sometimes in company of gangsters (Personal communication, November 13, 2014). He says that the gangsters respected

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him because of his talent, and that gangsters usually respect people that they can see have talent, whether it be music, sports, or academics (Fisher, personal communication, November 13, 2014).

Isaac also emphasizes the point that some youth needs help to find something that they are good at (Personal communication, November 18, 2014). The youth needs to experience that they can contribute and that they are talented and good at something, and he says that at the moment his group is working on a play where some of the youth can discover their talents (Isaac, personal communication, November 18, 2014). Andrew and Christian also talks about the impact of activating the youth (Personal communication, November 19, 2014). In the work in their organization they take the participants out on hikes, to the beach, or to play sports. They say that many of the youth have never been on a hike or to the ocean, even though they live in Cape Town which is close to these kinds of activities. They also argue that an important part of their program is that they provide transportation and snacks for their participants, which they say in some cases is what determines if the youth can participate or not, and is a great reason why their program is so popular and successful (Andrew & Christian, personal communication, November 19, 2014).

Sipho, however, argues that it is also important to not focus too much on recreational activities, but that education and life skills should always be first priority (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). He says that only playing soccer as an alternative activity will not help most of the youth in the long run. Focus must also be put on teaching them life skills. They need to learn how to take care of themselves, to feed themselves, and to become employable. The most important thing is that the youth needs to be motivated to help themselves, but with the help from an NGO or something similar. The NGO or other help workers need to

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help the youth help themselves in order for the development and skills they learn to be long lasting (Sipho, personal communication, November 21, 2014).

Social and community support.

Another important factor in preventing gangsterism and helping youth avoid involvement with gangs is social and community support. It is important for youth and other members of the community to feel safe in their own neighborhoods. Tamia de Louw, in an article by Underhill (2013), explains how she does not feel safe in her own community. The only place she feel safe is when she is studying in school because she says that even though there are gangsters in school, they respect the students that take school seriously and leave them alone (Underhill, 2013). She says that while she feels safe in school now that there are police vans there, she still worries about the walk she has to take to get home (Underhill, 2013). The gang violence in the area around the school, which is in Manenberg, at times get so bad that the school has to close down for a few days. The police are also trying to create “safe corridors” around the school for when students and teacher walk to and from school so that they can feel safe (Underhill, 2013). More actions like these have to be taken to make the community members feel safe in their communities. Ideally in the future, students will not have to be protected by police when walking to and from school, but until then, students should be able to feel safe in school to encourage as many students as possible to continue their education.

Sipho also talk about how some people in the community views gangsterism (Personal communication, November 21, 2014). He says that the people do see gangsterism as a problem but that many have become numb. Gang violence has become so bad that it has reached a state where the people simply accept what is going on. While some people might stand up when they see gang related things happening, most people do not get involved. Many people, however, does

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not stand aside because they do not care, but because they fear the gangs and are scared of them.

The gangs come in large numbers and are armed, and therefore people fear for their own sake

before getting involved when it does not necessarily concern them (Sipho, personal

communication, November 21, 2014). This is a case where the community needs support in

order for them to support the youth and other people in the community. One participant in Ward

and Bakhuis's (2010) study says

It must come from ourselves...We should be proud of our community and report

the gangsters to the police...Because if you don't do that, then more and more

people get involved in these things and we all suffer at the end of the day (p. 57)

Conclusion

Through this project the reasons why people do or do not join gangs has been researched. The main source of information has come from interviews with people that either grew up surrounded by gangs, or people that work in areas with high levels of gang activity and with youth in or at risk of gangsterism. The paper presents the major reasons that were found through the research to why people join gangs, and the main reasons and prevention methods that cause other people to stay away from gangs. It can be concluded with the information in the study that it is impossible to identify one reason that apply to more people or that is more important than any other reason. It is also impossible to say that in a specific area one reason is more prevalent than in other areas. The reasons that decide what way a person will go in life when it comes to gangsterism is highly individual. In some cases culture or place of residence can be part of the reasons to a person's decision, but in the end the path towards becoming a gang member look different from person to person.

It is, however, possible to extinguish a few reasons that tend to play an important part in many peoples' choices and decisions. But even with the narrowing down of reasons, there is never a single reason that is at play. There is always the influence of two or more reasons that affect a person, but what reasons are involved and how much impact they have, greatly differ from individual to individual. This study has highlighted a few of the most commonly discussed reasons, but there are several other possible reasons that affect peoples' lives that have not been included here. The reasons for people to join gangs presented in this paper include sense of belonging, family situation, poverty, peer pressure, protection, and lack of social structures and support.

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The successful prevention methods and reasons why people avoid gangsterism very much resembles the reasons why people do join gangs. They work in a very similar way where it is highly individual and impossible to pin point one universal method that will prevent most youth from joining gangs. It is, however, important to understand the relationship between why or why not people join gangs. In order to create more successful prevention methods and programs it is vital to understand as much as possible about why people join gangs. Without understanding the attractions of gang life, it will be hard to know how to create more attractive alternatives to prevent youth from joining gangs.

Gangs bring many different kinds of dangers to a community and its inhabitants. But no matter this, they still seem to be very attractive to many young people. Even worse, some young people even join gangs to protect themselves because their community is so dangerous to a person that is not a member of a gang. With the gangs come dangers and unsafe communities for all people of the communities where they are present, but even so they will bring an unsafe childhood for the children that will grow up in this environment. The way towards a safer community is to start at the roots. It is easier to prevent new children and youths from joining gangs than it is to intervene with youth that are already in gangs. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, it is important to understand the reasons for gangsterism in order to create successful prevention methods that in the future can help decrease the numbers of gangs and gangsters, not only in Cape Town, but in all of South Africa and even the world.

Recommendations for Further Study

The topic of gangsterism in Cape Town is a wide and deep topic. There are many different branches that can be looked into with more depth from this general topic. During this study and the findings that followed the research, many possible topics for future studies were encountered, but that could not be included in this study due to limited time that was available. One area of study that was encountered several times, but that is only briefly mentioned in this study, is the field of female roles in gangs and fully female gangs. There is definitely less studies done on this topic, and it would be interesting to see if the findings would be similar to those of this study if the focus of research was to be why females specifically join gangs or stay away from involvement in gangs.

While the primary focus for this study developed to be slightly more towards why people join gangs rather than why they do not, further studies can put focus from a different perspective. From the findings in this study, reason why people do not join gangs are closely related to successful prevention methods. Further studies, therefore, can focus more on different prevention methods to see how they can be developed and expanded to be even more successful and include more young people and youth at risk.

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Appendix A: Consent Form Sample

SIT Study Abroad
a program of World Learning



CONSENT FORM

1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to investigate and create an understanding for the causes to why some people become gang members, or in any other way become involved in gang activity, and why some people decide to avoid involvement in any type of gang activity. It will explain some of the reasons that people give to why they feel, or felt, that involvement in a gang was the right decision for them, and in this way it will also explain some of the reasons for the high level of gang activity in Cape Town.

2. Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

- a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
- b. **Anonymity** - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
- c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

Participant's name printed

Participant's signature and date

Interviewer's name printed

Interviewer's signature and date



Appendix B: Questionnaire Sample

Questionnaire

The purpose of this study is to investigate and create an understanding of the reasons why some people become gang members, or in any other way become involved in gang activities, and why some people decide to avoid involvement in any type of gang activities. It will explain some of the reasons that people give to why they feel, or felt, that involvement in a gang was the right decision for them, and in this way it will also explain some of the reasons for the high level of gang activity in Cape Town.

By answering the questions in this questionnaire and turning the form in, you give your consent to the answers' being used in the the study. You will remain anonymous in the study by not putting your name anywhere on this questionnaire. You are encouraged to answer as many questions as you can, but you do not have to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering.

The person performing this study is Sanna Strand, and you can contact me for further information or with questions about the study.

Sanna.strand@live.se

Your contributions are greatly appreciated.

Please feel free to write on the back of this form if the space under the question is not enough for your answer.

1. Are you, or have you ever been, a member of, or in any other way been involved with, a gang in Cape Town?

2. If yes, what is or was the name of the gang? Can you describe it?

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3. Do you know anyone around you that is or has been involved with a gang in Cape Town?
If so, what is your relationship to the person?

4. Where did you grow up?

5. How would you describe the area where you grew up?

6. How would you describe the situation with gangs in the area where you grew up?

7. What was the situation like in your home where you grew up?

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8. What would you say were the major reasons or contributing factors that made you get involved with a gang?

9. If you have never been a member of, or involved with, a gang, what would you say were the major reasons or contributing factors that made you stay away from gangs?

10. If you have never personally been involved with a gang, but know someone that has, what do you believe were the major reasons or contributing factors that made them become involved with a gang?

11. Do you regret joining or not joining a gang, as the case may be?

12. If so, why do you regret it?

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