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Passing on gang culture in the theatre of the streets: “They’ll grow out of it, then our age will grow into it and then we’ll grow out of it”

Gang members and membership are oft displayed as fixed and stable entities that are only understood in the context of the gang. This paper purports that membership is a role learned through the process of street socialisation and that gangs should be understood as fluid entities situated within the larger context of street culture. Through member’s perspectives, it reveals the main cultural transmitters which facilitated membership in Glasgow, Scotland as: street socialisation, territorial othering and storytelling. In discussing the role of these transmitters the journey into gang membership in Glasgow is told. Exploring the transmitters of membership allowed the meaning making process that members engaged in to emerge which allows gang membership to be understood as a meaningful social activity.

Keywords: gang culture, street culture, street socialisation, storytelling, territorialism

Introduction

Gangs have their own culture, meanings and ways of interpreting, understanding and operating within the world (Etter, 1998). Gang culture and customs are typically passed on generationally (Kirk and Papachristos, 2011, Vigil, 1988) through formal and informal learning, ensuring the continuity of the gang. Yet there are few contemporary studies concerned with the cultural process and transmissions facilitating membership at members’ levels (Lauger, 2014). To its detriment, gang research has tended to focus on the administrative side of criminology which can be damaging (Hallsworth and Young, 2008, Katz and Jackson-Jacobs, 2004) as the centrality of meaning and the foreground of experience (Ferrell, 2013) becomes lost within positivist entreaties. This creates a tendency for the behaviour of members to be understood via the gang concept, rendering all activity as gang activity and representing gangs and their members as inherently criminal and static entities.

In contrast, this paper contextualises the gang concept within the wider context of street culture (Hallsworth and Young, 2008). This position is argued on the premise that gangs are social institutions (Vigil, 1988) situated within street culture (Hallsworth, 2013). Members construct their social identity on the constant interplay between self and society (Goffman, 1956) which occurs in the social arena of the street. Conversely, a deeper understanding of gangs and their members can be achieved if an approach is taken which incorporates the structural, cultural and environmental conditions that create and maintain gangs. Understanding can then emerge of the group as a social entity with more functions than just criminality and that its members are not fixed, stable entities but individuals creating their identities in different contexts and situations.

Aligning with cultural criminology's approach (Ferrell, 2013) I demonstrate that becoming a gang member is a meaningful social activity for the young people in this study. Within this paper I explore the three transmitters of gang culture within Glasgow; street socialisation, territorialisation and storytelling. I then relate insights emerging from the data to wider literature on gang and street culture. Firstly, the concept of gangs within street culture is contextualised.

Gangs and Street Culture

Subcultural theorists explain the origins of street culture through the shared experiences of those who live, and spend a large amount of their time in the streets of typically deprived, high crime areas (Kirk and Papachristos, 2011). Gangs are a micro subculture (Vigil, 2003) situated within the streets where the majority of member's time is spent

(Klein, 1995, Vigil and Conchas, 2010), and where they learn to become a member and act out their roles:

The gang norms, its functions and its roles help shape what a person thinks about himself and others, and the gang provides models for how to look and act under various circumstances.” (Vigil 1988: 421).

Gangs and street cultures are distinct but not separate (Mitchell et al., 2017). Street culture provides an overarching system of social beliefs which is symbiotic with gang culture, providing more formalised rules and codes of conduct (Mitchell et al., 2017). Anderson’s (1999) seminal study proposed a code of the street as a means of passing on culture, appropriate behaviour and survival techniques in areas characterised by high levels of crime, deprivation and violence. The typical norms and values identified within street cultural studies are respect/status (Cohen, 1955, Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, Miller, 1958), violence (Anderson, 1999, Hallsworth, 2013, Miller, 1958), toughness (Miller, 1958), fear and fun (Miller, 1958, Vigil, 1988), and money (Hallsworth, 2013). Underlining the majority of street cultural studies are how deviant norms and values transmit criminal behaviours (Anderson 1999; Hallsworth 2013; Vigil 1988), with a tendency to focus upon hyper masculine, criminal, or violent subcultures within the street (Anderson, 1999, Lauger, 2014, Oliver, 1994). This is problematic as by only focusing on the cultural transmissions of deviant norms we can miss other important cultural norms and values. This results in criminalising those within street subcultures.

In attempts to move beyond this focus on deviancy transmission and similar to contemporary street cultural theorists (Garot, 2007, Kirk and Papachristos, 2011,

Lauger, 2014) this article situates gang and street culture as a collection of cultural frames (Goffman, 1974). Corsaro (1992) explains frames as the working hypotheses learned in order to understand ongoing events, they represent the basic cultural mechanisms of social organisation. A cultural frame is how we understand and situate experiences, objects, events, interactions and actions (Goffman, 1974, Snow and Byrd, 2007).

Understanding how to behave and interpret street culture implies navigating a range of social interactions based on understandings of the self within a specific context. Goffman (1956) argues that performance of self is through a multiplicity of social environments, roles are performed and impressions of the self-managed and adapted to the environment the individual is situated in. This can explain the relationship members have with gangs, as the gang role is created and acted out in the street. For the participants in this study, that role had specific expectations for any that adopted it – regardless of other factors such as gender. For those who symbolically constructed or internalised the gang role it became their main identity creating stronger links of loyalty to the gang. Describing members/membership as a role infers that the individual has multiple roles - they switch between dependent on the environment.

The collective and personal-in terms of identities and wellbeing – are fused in the praxis of group formation and group dynamics (White 2008:151).

The gang is a social group with its own culture that exists outwith the individuals, but the culture is interpreted and negotiated by the collective of individuals that constitute the group, changing the culture as they occupy it and pass on its meaning to others. Gang members are understood as fluid entities within this research. The

members in them are going through a state of flux, constantly making and remaking their identities dependent on the level of identification with the gang role.

This paper demonstrates that gangs and street cultures do more than pass on deviant attributes – street and gang culture teaches individuals how to interpret, frame and behave in social situations within different environments (Garot, 2007).

Methodology

This research showcases a small part of a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) conducted from 2010-2015 within the city of Glasgow, Scotland. CGT is a systematically applied methodology which follows a method of concurrently gathering data and analysing it with the purpose of generating a middle range theory of a limited social system (Charmaz, 2006), in this case gangs. The majority of participants were recruited from gang intervention programmes but to ensure different points of membership and differing levels of identification were captured, recruitment also occurred via youth work organisations and street based youth work. As a youth worker at that time in the city, my dichotomous role of insider and outsider helped offset many of the challenges gang researchers face such as building trust (Klein, 1995), and hostility due to class positioning (Bursik and Grasmick, 2001). Similar to Aldridge et al. (2008) approach, trust was built by engaging in activities and being introduced as ‘sound’ by valued gatekeepers.

Six weeks in total was spent with each participant, two days per week. The first two weeks consisted of participant observation and getting to know the participants. Week three, participants took part in a modified version of the Eurogang Survey

Instrument (see Weerman et al. (2009) for survey) which determined membership and gathered structural characteristics of the gangs they were involved in. Weeks four and five, participants took part in two art-based focus groups and in the sixth week, in-depth individual interviews. I knew that those attending organisations had high drop off rates so incorporated into the design a reducing sample for each stage of the research. The numbers of those which participated in each stage were as follows:

60 surveyed representing 21 gangs across the city,
8 focus groups, 35 participants,
20 in-depth semi structured individual interviews.

Seven of the participants were Scottish white female, three were Eastern European male and the rest were Scottish white males. Participants came from all areas of the city and represented different stages of membership: becoming gang members, current (self-associating for two years or more) and former members. Analysis was carried out using Nvivo in line with Charmaz's (2006) approach of concurrent data collection and analysis, staged coding, concept generation, memo writing and creation of grounded theory. All data was anonymised and pseudonyms given.

The following definition of a gang was generated which is applied throughout this article:

A regenerating, self-aware group of young people (majority male) aged 10-30 that emerge from play groups, are socialised via the streets and engage in territorial violence. The groups originate in low income, urbanised areas. They have attachment to territory; the area will historically be involved in territorial violence and have a name and area associated with it. (Miller, 2015).

A detailed discussion of the ongoing debate surrounding definitions and the full process of the CGT is beyond the scope of this article (see Miller, (2017) for a discussion of the definition generated). The generated theory understood membership as a three-staged process with members growing into, being part of, and growing out of the gang - mirroring their fluid and changing identities with gang membership. Although CGT allowed for entry and re-entry to the field there were some limitations to the strategy employed. Firstly, I only worked with a gang/gang member for six weeks before engaging a different group which did not allow me a longitudinal understanding of the participants. Also, I only worked with gang members which did not allow for a comparative approach with non-gang members. This can be considered a critique of much gang research (Hughes, 2005) and was especially pertinent to this research which sought to show similarities between members and young people. This is an area that would benefit from further research.

This article concentrates on the growing into the gang stage, detailing the journey of how participants became involved in gangs by describing transmitters of culture which facilitated membership. The following three transmitters will now be discussed: street socialisation, territorialism and territorial othering and storytelling.

Findings

Street Socialisation

The working class scheme (council estate), in particular the few streets the participants grew up in was the stage for gang members to grow. It was where they could learn their roles and it was the stage in which they could play-out these roles and interact with other actors. Participants discussed how as children they were encouraged to play in the

streets close to their home; making friends and forming alliances which created street-based play-groups. The majority of participants leisure time was reportedly spent in the streets (on average 4-6 hours every day, from as early as four or five). This section discusses how young people developed their gang identities in the context of the street with membership being passed on cyclically via street encounters.

Street culture was disseminated in many ways: observing and emulating the elders (the generation of members 2-4 years older than them), peers and relatives resulting in social learning (Akers et al., 1979). Histories, traditions and cultural frames were passed on through social relationships such as parents, relatives, peers (Kirk and Papachristos, 2011) and street characters. Through daily social routines, activities, interactions and conversations (Corsaro, 1992) they learned the cultural script of the street. Initially this was by observing, listening and interacting with elders in the street.

I was in primary school and that I was just a basic young boy. Like going out and playing football and playing wrestling and things like that. And then by the time I got to first year, that's when I started to; I started to think about myself being part of a gang. And basically since then, I just started hanging with other members of the gang, and ended up becoming one of them. I already knew all the boys anyway, it wasn't like I had to try and make an impression on them. I always knew them.
(Alex)

Alex's quote embodies how participants in this research coherently structured the normalisation of gangs as a part of socialisation into the community within their neighbourhood. Alex highlights how the social organisation of the street was a catalyst for gang membership in Glasgow echoing other research in Britain showing that becoming a member can emerge through friendship (Ralphs et al., 2009) and

recreational neighbourhood (Densley, 2012) groups as a normal part of growing up. This aligns with classical North American studies in which gangs emerged from play-groups (Thrasher, 1927) or were socialised into membership (Whyte, 1943). Maxson and Klein (2002) argue this is no longer a part of contemporary gang initiation in North America with contemporary literature depicting membership as a choice, with initiation rites such as ‘jumping in’ (Vigil, 2004) or street baptisms (Lopez, 2006, Vigil, 2004).

62.5% of participants stated their gang had existed more than twenty years, beyond most participant’s lifespans. All the participants grew up in areas with historical gang attachments; membership was a process of socialisation due to the institutionalised nature of gangs in their area. Learning first from ‘the olders’ these playgroups eventually took up the gang mantel, sometimes adding new rules or systems but mostly regenerating the same ones.

How did you join? What made you join? I just hung about with them, when I was a wee boy. Seeing the older ones fighting, when I was a wee boy. And I thought, oh that looks cool” because I was a wee boy at the time. (Jason)

The growing up of gang members together is a common occurrence (Esbensen et al., 2001, Moore, 1991, Short, 1996, Vigil and Conchas, 2010, Vigil, 1988). Emerging from a play-group created shared histories and loyalty to each other, creating an ‘us and them’ mentality that differentiated the members from other groups. The grouping of the gang tended to be based on age graded cliques (Moore et al., 1983, Moore, 1991) Four core members of one gang described bonds arising from nicknames and shared histories.

Have you all grown up with each other?

J: Aye

Like from kids?

J: Since we were wee bairns

M: We were heavy kids, except for I knew Buggy from the sad tale gang.

C: I knew Buggy before everyone

B: Aye I knew Cando back in the day but he was a wee chubby thing.

Membership was an expected part of street culture but did not necessarily mean participants had to break the law or engage in fighting: rather, they had to grow up in the scheme, occupy the street and adopt the gang name. Therefore for participants in this research they did not need to engage in criminal behaviour to be in the gang they just had to grow up in the street. Typically the transition from primary to secondary school was the age their gang identity crystallised. As they grew older and their identities developed their relationship with the street changed from observing and interacting with the gang to actively participating. This was a natural progression, there was no moment of decision where their life would take a different pathway, no question asked: Do you want to join the gang?

Some folk (people) say, “You need to do this, or you’re not blah, blah, blah.” But it doesn’t really work like that. In films its different, aye, “If you do this, then you’ll get in.” But if you’re just in the team, then you’re in automatically, and if you fight, you fight. If you run, then they’ll lunge, or hit you. I’ve seen that happen to a few of them – a few of the boys. If you’re going to choose to write that name... They don’t say to you, “Write that name.” (Susie)

Susie discusses how members identified with the scheme’s gang name, internalising the gang as part of their identity and then externally showing that membership through symbols and writing the gang name on walls, school jotters,

signing up to online social media etc. Unlike their North American counterparts they did not have specific colours, speech patterns, hand signs (Phillips, 1999) or highly developed graffiti skills but the motivation behind writing the gang name was similar. They used it to distinguish their gang and their territories from others and to define and develop their gang identity. This was an important part of becoming a member, internalising and externalising their gang role as part of their identity. They learned the gang symbol from seeing it about the scheme and watching older ones writing it. Consequently, they too adopted the name and the culture externally symbolising their membership through signs.

As they matured into high school they occasionally hung about with the olders who currently occupied the street and protected it, adopting their beliefs and copying behaviours such as drinking, smoking (hash/weed) and fighting. Participants discussed how the olders introduced them to drink or drugs to watch them for entertainment and how these were steps towards becoming entrenched in gang and street culture.

Aye it was them that got all the young ones smoking it and all that. Smoking weed?
Aye and then they just pure laugh at you because you're pure stoned. (Danny).

This was one of the main ways they learned the norms of the street and the gang by observing and then interacting with the older ones. It is how the Glasgow gang regenerates its members through street socialisation:

They'll grow out of it then our age will grow into it and then we'll grow out of it...**And the younger ones?** The younger ones will just grow into it. It's just the street life of Girn isn't it? That's the way it is. (Jordon)

And do they try and hang about with you? (The youngers) Aye they do sometimes at the weekends and that. They're all right aye. **Do you let them hang about with you?** Aye... **Did you hang about with the older ones when you were younger?** Aye... (Jamie)

Jamie's quote also illustrates the spatial and temporal element of where and when culture was passed on. Jamie was on the verge of leaving the street and only occupied them at the weekend which was when the young ones were allowed to interact with Jamie and his peers. The younger members would only see the spectacular and fun elements of Jamie and his peers' life which occurred at the weekend, making membership something to aspire to. The passing on of culture from olders in the street to youngers is due to the hierarchical structure of gangs being based on age (Moore, 1991, Vigil, 1988) learning the cultural frames and scripts of the street allowed them to navigate gang and street culture and pass it on to the generation below them.

Territorialism & Territorial Othering

Areas with a historical territorial gang and membership were symbiotic in Glasgow. Tita, Cohen and Engberg (2005, p296) would describe them as "long enduring inter-generational gangs in a chronic gang city". Gangs within Glasgow have been recorded as early as 1870 (Davies, 2007) and throughout time have developed gang set spaces (Tita et al., 2005) which are the collection of either a few streets or a neighbourhood. Members were bound up within their territorial space, bonded to their territory through predominantly spending their time on the streets (Klein, 1995). This territorial bond was felt both consciously and subconsciously and was indispensable to the individual's existence (Gasperini, 2010). Their gang identity was developed implicitly and explicitly

through their attachment to territory.

As this section will illustrate this belonging developed from their time spent occupying the street learning the visible and invisible (Pickering et al., 2011) boundaries and borders from other street actors. This bond to territory and the loyalty attached to it diminished as they matured and the more they distanced themselves from gang life. But, whilst they were learning gang and street cultural frames they viewed their attachment to territory as a positive bond. Territorialism was a cultural transmitter which passed on the cultural frame of valuing violence and the belief that their scheme and gang name was something to be valued and protected as it provided a sense of belonging and identity in an otherwise hostile world.

The presence of a territorial other prevents the socialisation out of violence in adolescence. Preschool children typically act out through physical expression and small childish fights in the neighbourhood and primary school. Normal progression is a reduced participation in fighting as violence becomes distanced, something to be feared as an alien and extraordinary event that is not encountered. But this does not happen with young people who occupy streets historically attached to territorial gangs. Instead they grow up absorbing a fear of the territorial other and learning to value violence as a means of resilience and protection.

Obviously, if you're brought up in a scheme, then you hang about with them, and you start fighting because the younger ones follow in the footsteps of the bigger ones, like we all did. Kieran and Gary and that – they never used to fight. They used to always run away. But last year, they all turned about, and they didn't run anymore. They just went for it, because they'd seen the big ones. (Lisa)

Participants from a young age observed on a daily or weekly basis people they knew from the street sustain injuries from fighting and heard how others from rival territories were responsible. They grew up hearing stories of their territorial rivals and the crimes they enacted. So, over the course of years within the child's conscious a known enemy, an 'other' out there develops as a threat in their minds. Fraser (2013) in his ethnographic study in Glasgow also found that his 'Langview boys' were bounded and bonded by territory, othering those who bordered their area.

Violent reciprocity is oft recognised as the main instigator for gang violence (Decker, 1996, Papachristos et al., 2013) with retaliation being the main form of justice for members (Anderson 1999). Within this study reciprocity was a part of the collective consciousness of the street with the majority of fighting being intergroup conflict with neighbouring territories. Following the same pattern described in the street socialisation section, of observing and then participating, this was also how fighting rivals was learned. Stories focused on how they attended fights and as they became accustomed to them they would run in and out of the fights shouting the scheme name and giving verbal abuse to the rival territory. This was their first foray into the territorial violence they had previously heard about. The Young Crazy Krew members discussed how the younger boys in their area began to take part in their territorial fighting, again in the cyclical process described earlier of older passing on the traditions and rituals of the gang to the younger:

J: What about wee Robbie (child from the scheme) and that they use to...

D: They were crazy bastards

J: ...run about with golf clubs and all that while we were boxing YTT(a rival gang) and that, the ones we used to fight with, wee guy Robbie he used to run about with golf clubs and all that trying to skelp (hit) them about, he's only a wee guy. (Young Crazy Krew)

Progression to high school opened up their world and it is normally this transitional period when they begin to participate in fighting. As it brings them into contact with their rival territories outwith the protection of the neighbourhood. They have already developed preconceptions about their rivals and it is expected they will carry on the tradition of fighting them. For most members, they did not want to fight but core members who occupied the streets the most and who internalised street and gang identities it was expected of them. Core members were encouraged to protect the identity and reputation of their scheme. If they did not they were compelled to do so by the olders.

Like years ago when we were all about 13 and that we used to hang about with wee Highbrooks and that and the big ones they kind of laid down the law they didn't allow it, so they told us if we wanted to hang about with them then we were to go to Highbrooks and we were like that no and then they made all the boys fight with all the Highbrooks boys and now we all hate each other man and now I can't walk through it without about ten lassies after me in Highbrooks (Lisa).

Lisa's quote highlights how core members protect the scheme against territorial rivals, learning this from the olders in the area. Growing up in an area with ingrained links to territorial gangs, spending time on the street and taking part in street-based play groups was the environmental context which facilitated membership. The intergroup fighting of territorial rivals alongside visible or invisible boundaries is an established process within gang literature; see Brantingham et al. (2012) for a discussion of these processes. Yet contrary to Brantingham et al. (2012) this article argues that violence in Glasgow is a direct result of territoriality. Similar to other studies the members here

used their adopted set spaces mostly for leisure time (Klein, 1995) whilst protecting the area from rival territorial gangs (Valasik and Tita, 2018) highlighting the importance of space within the construction of a Glasgow gang. Territorial socialisation and othering acted as a cultural conduit for passing on a fear of the other which provided the justification for violence but beyond this provided a sense of identity and belonging manifesting itself in a perceived duty they had to protect their scheme.

The link between violence and territorialism in Glasgow is well established (Bannister et al., 2013, Fraser, 2013, Holligan and Deuchar, 2009, Kintrea et al., 2015) as it is elsewhere (Decker, 1996, Decker and Curry, 2000, Klein, 1995, Papachristos et al., 2013, Tita et al., 2005, Valasik and Tita, 2018). Yet how territorialism is learned is oft missed in the literature. This research addresses this gap by discussing the development of territorial othering within Glasgow. Pickering et al. (2011) stated territorialism is a learned attribute while Holligan and Deuchar (2009) propose it is passed on generationally through families which has been supported by others (Bannister et al., 2013, Kintrea et al., 2015). This research challenges these positions finding that the streets were the main arena where territorialism was learned and passed on.

Territorial conflict was the catalyst which changed the group from a play-group into a gang and this conflict alongside friendship became the gang's main binding agent. The next section will address the role of storytelling in transmitting the cultural heritage of the gang, providing meaning in their lives and creating bonds to self and others.

Storytelling

The stories we tell ourselves and others construct our identity and our understanding of the world. With the exception of Lauger (2014), storytelling as a concept is not oft addressed or recognised within gang studies outside the use of myth-making. The concept of myth-making often refers to hyperbolic deviant representations or performances (Goffman, 1956) such as bragging (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996), violence (Katz, 1988) and online gang representations (Van Hellemont and Densley, 2018, Van Hellemont, 2012), that are related purely to gangs or gang behaviours which involves a fictional element (see Van Hellemont and Densley (2018) for a useful review of myth-making). This article views this framing as problematic as it treats normative social constructive processes which most teenagers engage in as purely gang activity. In contrast, storytelling helps us to understand the engagement of socialisation (Sandberg, 2016) into street and gang cultures. Storytelling is a vehicle in which members explore their issues, construct their identity and learn the working hypotheses in which to understand their environment and how to act within it (Lauger, 2014).

Storytelling was a primary transmitter of culture, passing on the histories and traditions - not just of street and gang culture but also their positioning within the dominant culture (Clarke et al., 2006) and providing scripts for how they should understand and interact with other social institutions. Storytelling provided cultural frames demonstrating the boundaries of behaviour, the norms and values of their subcultural context. It provided a source of nourishment in passing time, was a way to transmit frames of reference, a means of passing on histories and traditions, created a sense of belonging between peers and family members and acted as a binding agent to the gang. Storytelling was used as a tool, a cultural script, a way of passing on meanings and giving insights into their own and others' lives. Consider Suzie's discussion of how

her family disseminated knowledge of how the gang changed its name as it lost its links with Catholicism:

How long has your gang been known as KD? We used to be AD circles. Then it changed to KD. **Is that something to do with sectarianism?** Aye. It doesn't mean anything, it's just cause like years ago it was AD circles but that was like my dad and that they were all AD circles and like my big cousin, before he went to the army it was AD circles and then when he got out it was KD but for me it has always been KD. I have always known it to be KD since like I was born. But because AD circles was more or less catholic side but like after the orange walk and all that and the orange people (protestants) they kind of moved in to the scheme so they just changed it. (Suzie)

Suzie's story highlights how social change affects the transmission of culture with some traditions and norms being kept and others changing. Supporting the argument made earlier that to understand gangs as a meaningful activity we need to consider the structural, cultural and environmental conditions that gangs are situated within. Suzie's example regarding the reduction of sectarianism in her area was reflected within the changing name of the gang. This highlights how the stories they hear are situated within a cultural frame, even when they are telling their own stories its structure and references are drawn from the narratives of the culture in which they are immersed (Carless and Douglas, 2008). Storytelling made gang and street life seem exciting and something participants wanted to be part of.

Like see the stories that my dad and uncle tell you of all the stuff. I'm like that I wish I was one of their wee brothers when I was younger man. Aw they think its brilliant man. And they talk about all their stories and fucking and all that and they think its brilliant, like they are jack the lad and it sounds brilliant and great but then see when they are mad with it and drunk and they tell you the same story a million times you are like that aaaw man. (Jamie)

Jamie illustrates the bonding temporal role of storytelling, creating feelings of belonging and identity, as through the stories that his father and uncles told he related himself to them and through shared activities a sense of belonging and connectedness are created. It also taught Jamie to value behaviours which were risky and emulate them himself through repetitive telling of the story. The values and experiences that are situated within it become the social routine, the norm. The feelings of connectedness, identity and prestige they garnered from storytelling acted as a counter measure to the feelings of humiliation or shame experienced as a result of their social positioning (Moran, 2015).

Storytelling was used as a dissemination of culture describing the diversity of experiences and the wrongdoings they faced. As listeners they understood and gained insight into their own experiences and bias. Participants incorporated the stories they heard into their own narratives telling them to peers creating shared histories with others around them. For Douglas (2009) the storyteller's sense of self is constructed, preserved and advanced through affiliations and attachments. Storytelling created a sense of community and value for the participants' in this research. They created nicknames for themselves, had adolescent adventures, shared their stories with peers and then retold these stories repeatedly to negate boredom.

The stories that we hear and tell ourselves change and alter throughout time and between audiences; they are a temporal and situational practice that allowed individuals to communicate cultural ideas through the articulation of sequenced events creating narratives of self. For example, at the stage of growing into the gang, they cited the elders regaling their stories whereas members who were growing out of the gang would

cite family members and those who had moved out, giving more credence to these stories than others. Consider the example of Danny a younger gang member who was listening to Alex (who was growing out of the gang) detail the consequences of gang life stating that it was a fixed era in life.

What did you think about sitting and listening to Alex? I don't know there is nothing to do. I was trying to get a job in here too though. **If you got a job do you think you would leave it?** Aye probably. Probably just go out (on the streets) on the weekends. He is older; he is nearly twenty-three. **Does that make you think maybe I should get out now or...?** But see where I hang about there is older ones some are about thirty – they are all about thirty and they still run about. (Danny)

Rather than accept what Alex was saying Danny discounted Alex's examples and stories as they did not fit his temporal or situational frame. Danny then cited stories which supported his own cultural frame at that time. Stories only appeared as relevant and offered insight when they were congruent with the member's current frame. Temporal and situational elements of cultural frames were also found in Bengtsson (2012) study of youth offenders, and Garot's (2007) study of street violence.

Participants were not passive receivers of culture through stories, they interpreted them and shaped them into their own cultural frames. The retelling of past experiences allowed the storyteller to reinterpret an event while also providing the opportunity to utilise a script for how the event transpired. Carless and Douglas (2008) and Crossley (2000) argue that self may be developed and maintained through telling stories of our lives. The creation and sharing of stories was a part of maintaining and developing a sense of self, part of maintaining a coherent identity. As peers gathered and conversed about a specific event, individuals familiar with the incident serve as the

primary storytellers, but the whole group participates in negotiating the meaning of the story. Consider Jordan's short story:

My shed got robbed but I wouldn't bother phoning the Police. I'll find them when they cannot find them. Well it was my granny's shed and all and it got robbed and she didn't phone the Police. (Jordan)

The police are culturally framed as an agency not to be trusted, a collectively known 'truth', commonly accepted not just by gang members but also their families. This collective 'truth' created a space for collective stories and was reinforced by storytelling. To tell the story, the group, led by the primary storyteller, collectively used personal characterisations, labels, and cultural categories, which were linked together by a plot (Lauger, 2014). "Plots can mirror cultural scripts, as they are grounded in an established understanding of how events should transpire." (Lauger, 2014:185). In this instance the plot and the characters highlighted how structural inequalities informed members cultural frames regarding their lack of trust in legal proceedings and positioning within the social realm. Describing how the transmission of culture was a negotiated event, that through storytelling they learned scripts and norms.

Storytelling helped develop self-identity for the participants and enabled the diffusion of the culture of the street. Storytelling provided meaning to their lives and presented gangs as a source of friendship and excitement.

Discussion

This paper develops and expands work within street cultural studies (Kirk and Papachristos, 2011, Lauger, 2014, Vigil, 2007) by exploring the processes involved in passing on membership from generation to generation. Purporting that gangs and

membership in Glasgow is an institutionalised, cyclical process transmitted via the process of street socialisation (Vigil 1988), territorialisation and storytelling. Detailing each of these transmitters illustrated how street and gang cultures are more than vehicles for passing on criminal or violent behaviours. Gang and street culture taught members: the history of their areas, their traditions, rituals, friendship, shared lifestyles, the value of: loyalty, resilience, social institutions and protection of their scheme. This represents more than the transmission of deviant attributes which is a danger of researching disadvantaged groups; we only see the spectacular and miss the mundane. The gang members in this research absorbed norms and values in the same processes of socialisation as the rest of society, but what differs for these young people is that street norms and values are inimical with mainstream society.

At first, members were receivers of street culture, observing, listening and learning cultural frames (Corsaro, 1992). Then they began to emulate the older members, taking part in skirmishes, trying new activities and passing on stories until they took up the gang mantle. They would pass these same behaviours and cultural scripts on to the generation below them. This research found membership was not a choice but a part of their socialisation into their streets, illustrating the importance of incorporating the context of the street in understanding gangs (Hallsworth and Young, 2008, Hallsworth and Young, 2004, Hallsworth, 2013).

Street socialisation as a cultural transmitter taught young people to value and protect the areas they grew up in which created the structural grounds and bonds that tied the gang together through friendship, shared experiences and histories. Territorial socialisation passed on the cultural frames which showed the young people their gangs

and schemes were something to be protected, that they were at threat from territorial others who bordered their neighbourhoods justifying acts of violence. This territorial conflict was the catalyst that changed the play-group into a gang. Storytelling was the main transmitter of their cultures, bonding and bringing together these shared histories between peers, family members and others who occupied the same social arena as them. It was used as a vehicle to pass on traditions and rituals. Like Aesop's fables each story held within it a moral understanding, a map of meaning that allowed them to reinterpret it and incorporate it into their own narrative. Storytelling allowed interpretations of their world to emerge, showing how they negotiate their world and make sense of it is an area which requires further attention within gang research.

By bringing out these understandings of young people in gangs in Glasgow we can begin to see gang involvement as a meaningful activity, gangs are a part of their community. Membership was a role played out in the theatre of the streets. For those who symbolically constructed or internalised the gang role it became their main identity which created stronger links of loyalty and ties to the gang. Identity is a constantly evolving process and understanding or representing the gang concept as a static entity reproduces stereotypes that can criminalise those within them (White, 2008). By understanding members and membership as fluid, individuals can be represented as more than gang members. This research demonstrates that young people are not fixed within a gang role, unfluctuating and static. They are in a constant state of flux, changing and evolving their identities and association with gang and street life. The temporal and situational nature involved in the passing on of culture highlights that interventions need to occur at the right time with the right people otherwise, as with Danny, they do not fit the individual's cultural frame.

Further research into the cultural transmitters of gang and street culture would benefit our understanding of gangs and why young people join and maintain them. It would allow gang members to be presented as young people first, allowing a more holistic understanding of them to emerge out with the narrow context of the gang. Future research with young people involved in gangs would benefit from widening the academic gaze to incorporate not just the background but also the foreground of their experiences.

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