

Article Title:

Killing Time: the role of boredom in Glasgow gangs

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Abstract:

Boredom may be one of the largest maladies of the modern world. A phenomenon which has increasingly become embedded in our social structures. Yet, as a concept within criminology there is a dearth of knowledge concerning it, despite the influence it has on offending and offending behaviours. Through a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology with gangs in Glasgow, insights are shared, exploring how and in what ways boredom affects gang members and the strategies employed to alleviate it. This paper applies Svendsen's (2005) existential definition of boredom and explores the concepts of temporality, meaning making and agency as occurring at the nexus of boredom and excitement seeking behaviours for Glasgow gang members.

Keywords:

Boredom, Excitement-seeking, Gangs, Glasgow, Time and Temporality,

Introduction

We should be in the summer spirit.
But it might as well be rain.
We should be having such a good time.
But I'm so bored it's causing me pain.
(Muse, 2014 song lyrics)

We know boredom is ever-present in gang member's lives (Thrasher, 1927; Bloch and Niederhoffer, 1958), with the link between boredom and structural factors for deprived communities being well established (Fraser, 2015; Willis, 1977; Corrigan, 1979). But we don't know enough about boredom to explain what causes risk-taking or why the type of boredom gang-members experience result in them engaging in visceral acts such as violence. This study is the first to foreground boredom and conceptualise what happens at the nexus of boredom and risk-taking for gang-members in Scotland. In developing a conceptual definition and theoretical overview of how boredom manifests itself, and the strategies adopted to negate it, I highlight how gang-members respond to boredom via an embodied process that occurs due to the complex interplay between their local lived experiences and the larger social structures in their lives.

Although boredom itself is under-theorised, the link between boredom, structural inequality and troublemaking is documented historically and globally. In rural Mexico (Willging, Quintero and Lilliott, 2014), the link between boredom and young people's drug consumption relates to social positioning. Musharbash's (2007) study of Aborigines living in reservations found boredom as the reason behind their drug and alcohol consumption. Bengtsson's (2012) work in Finland found boredom was institutionalised resulting in risk-taking actions. In Belgium, the impact of boredom via routinized activities resulted in forms of redacted meaning negatively impacting mental health (Bracke, Bruynooghe and Verhaeghe, 2006). The same themes are recurring globally: lack of meaning, lack of control or agency and structural elements of boredom resulting in either depressed or withdrawn states or the opposite, thrill-seeking behaviours. Historically, youth-gangs have been associated with boredom and trouble-making more than other youth groups.

Gang studies spanning the earliest to contemporary works identify boredom as a central part of 'ganging' yet the studies focus on other aspects of gang life. Thrasher's (1927) seminal study highlights how a protective function of gangs was to alleviate boredom, but concentration was on the quest for experience or the re-imagining of their worlds, not boredom. Corrigan (1979), Willis (1977) and Patrick (1973) each have a chapter on boredom, yet they only mention it as a precursor for other activities. Willis (1977) is the exception, when he discusses boredom's link with temporality and how the 'lads' in his study use violence to manage the mundane:

It is one way to make the mundane suddenly *matter*. The usual assumption of the flow of the self from the past to the future is stopped: the dialectic of time is broken. Fights as accidents and other crises strand you painfully in the now. Boredom and petty detail disappear. (Willis, 1977:35)

The rest of the chapter then focuses on the violence used to alleviate boredom. Corrigan's (1979) *Smash Street Kids* stated how having nothing to do involved having conversations resulting in the creation of weird moments which then got the boys into trouble, yet concentration was on the weird moments rather than what caused them. Patrick (1973) described Glasgow gang-members as plagued by boredom, and gang life as nothing but 'dossing awa the day' (doing nothing all day) but does not discuss the conditions of boredom or the structural factors that cause it, as Corrigan and Willis do. Instead, his chapter focuses on the topic of conversations between the gang whilst 'dossing'. Bloch and Niederhoffer (1958) discuss the predictable repetitiveness of gang life highlighting 90% of gang-members' time is spent doing nothing. The aforementioned studies concentrated on the risk-taking response to boredom or the structural conditions that cause it rather than conceptualising or theorising boredom itself. With the exception of Corrigan's four sentences, none of them conceptualise what is occurring at the nexus of boredom and thrill-seeking or define what the concept is, and this is common across the literature.

We currently do not have a sociology or criminology of boredom and as such academic understandings of boredom are fragmented between different disciplines with no one defining feature or unifying theory (Goodstein, 2016). There is a longstanding exploration of boredom in other disciplines such as psychology, literature, and philosophy but less so within sociology or criminology. Providing a definition of boredom is difficult as the one thing that is agreed upon across disciplines is that the defining feature of boredom is its fluidity and ambiguity (Musharbash, 2007). Psychologists define boredom as a drive state which leads to internal and external motivation (Smith, 1981). Musharbash (2007) defines boredom as an emotion, Kuhn (1976) likens it to depression, whilst Ferrell (2004) views it as a social construct and Ohlmeier, Finkielstein and Pfaff (2020) define it as a social emotion. Boredom results in action, depletes meaning within the world, and is a cultural, structural, emotional, and physical phenomenon (Ferrell, 2004) whose complexity is difficult to capture. Trying to define boredom is like trying to define a ghost.

The following literature review seeks to bring these disparate understandings together, drawing on commonalities across disciplines to create a conceptual definition that is applied within this paper. The creation of a conceptual definition which incorporates Svendsen's (2005) philosophical typology of boredom is one of the main theoretical contributions of this study as it aids understanding as to why Glasgow gang member's reactions to boredom are so visceral. The findings section is split into two sections: Nothing to Do and Killing Time. Nothing to Do highlights how gang-members experience existential boredom through the social structures in their lives whilst searching for meaning. Killing Time, brings attention to how they cope with boredom through temporal management and how their risk-taking behaviours are designed to create ruptures in the present alleviating the impact of boredom for them. The discussion weaves together concepts of time-space ruptures, meaning making processes and structure and agency to detail the processes Glasgow gang-members go through in developing and responding to boredom. In so doing, it extends the emerging theoretical development of boredom within criminology (Bengtsson, 2012; Miller, 2019; Steinmetz, Schaefer and Green, 2017).

Psychological Understandings of Boredom

The field of psychology echoes the field of gang studies in problems of defining due to the difference between conceptual and operational definitions. Conceptual definitions define concepts by other concepts, which make them useful in sharing information but also make it difficult to measure using them. They are normally associated with qualitative research and are sensitised so that they provide a general sense of reference and don't cement the concept within fixed characteristics (Bryman, 2008). An operational definition is when a researcher takes a concept and decides they wish to measure that variable, highlighting key indicators to identify it. Issues can arise when in attempts to measure or quantify, operational definitions come before a conceptual definition, or a definition becomes typified by its indicators (Bryman, 2008). An example of an operational definition becoming typified by its indicators can be seen in the field of gang studies with the Eurogang definition (Weerman *et al.*, 2009). This is because the definition was operational and typified based on its main indicator: criminality, which resulted in the gang being labelled as criminal. These definitional issues are also occurring regarding the definition of boredom in psychology.

Vodanovich and Watt (2016) carried out a literature review of boredom in the field of psychology finding that although there were many psychometric tools (n=16) for measuring factors surrounding boredom such as boredom proneness, boredom susceptibility, sensation seeking etc, there is still a lack of agreement on what boredom as a concept is. What is largely agreed within psychology and is of import in this discussion is that boredom is either an emotion or an affective state that is distinct and different from other emotions such as sadness, or restlessness (van Tilburg and Igou, 2012). This is important as it allows us to understand that boredom is an experience that is felt by individuals differently which has physiological effects on the individual; it can act as a motivator to do something and change our thoughts towards something. We know that boredom can also be a mass phenomenon reflecting wider societal changes and is linked closely with modernity (Gardiner and Haladyn, 2016). We talk about boredom rising with modernity because it shows the social aspect of it arising not an individualised account or feeling. For a good review of the implications of a psychological understanding of boredom please see Goodstein (2017).

Sociological Understandings of Boredom

Ohlmeier, Finkielstein and Pfaff (2020, p. 208) argue "the subjective factors influencing boredom are well understood while its social conditions are poorly understood." To explore its social character and begin the foundational steps of generating a theory of boredom within sociology, they argue boredom is a social emotion. This is useful in that it considers psychology's subjective element of boredom and the impact it can have on one's emotions and moods but also allows for the social construction of boredom to emerge. Understanding boredom as a socially constructed emotion allows for the different components of boredom to emerge which are required to include historical, cultural, and structural factors.

This is notable as boredom is interlinked with grand ideologies and structural societal changes such as modernity (Klapp, 1986), existentialism (Lefebvre, 1995; Svendsen, 2005), loss of belief in religion (Scitovsky, 1999) and the dominant ideology of our time, consumerism. The

mass production of the social structures in our life, the standardisation, regulation, control of risk and mitigation of civilised bodies has had the effect of institutionalising boredom within our societies (Ferrell, 2013). Boredom is not just a feeling of emptiness or having nothing to do, changes in our social structures such as technology and consumption have further embedded boredom due to an overload of choices. The large amounts of information processed by individuals daily has sterilised and withdrawn meaning that in:

a Babel of signals we must listen to a great deal of chatter to hear one bit on information we really want. We discover that information can become noise like when it is irrelevant or interferes with desired signals, so tending to defeat meaning – making it harder to extract meaning from information. (Klapp, 1986: 186)

Whether a result of overloading, having nothing to do, or a heady mix of both, boredom exists in the structures of society which means it can affect those with lower incomes in more existential ways, as they can experience an overload of choices of consumption while remaining excluded from such consumption (Jervis *et al.*, 2003). This coupled with the ‘babel’ of technological information that inundates the population, makes many symbols and signals in life redundant and degraded. This highlights an important factor that boredom is not just the experience of nothing to do; what causes boredom and part of its phenomenology is also the meaning we ascribe to situations or tasks.

The meaning-making processes we engage in provide us with identity, purpose, and value in life. This paper takes the viewpoint that there are emergent multiple realities; reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be, and as such, how we create meaning is a socially stratified process. Humans interact with and understand the world based on the meaning they ascribe to things, and meaning is created through our interactions with others via an interpretative process of self-reflection and interaction (Blumer, 1981). Meaning typically refers to a set of “symbolic objects interactively formed or constructed, which identify or create salient social realities. Meaning, is not an intrinsic property of objects, but of ‘the relations persons enter with them” (Barbalet, 1999, p. 631). If meaning or purpose is found, then regardless of repetition in task or topic, the oppressive cage of time will not close on the individual (Ferrell, 2004). Steinmetz’s *et al* (2017) study of boredom in hackers, lifers (prisoners with a life sentence) and detectives, found both meaning and agency acted as buffers to developing boredom. Therefore, it is not an activity, task or behaviour or absence of such that causes boredom, it is the meaning it is or is not imbued with. It is generally accepted that the withdrawal of meaning from task or situation is how boredom manifests.

Alongside meaning, temporality and the slowing of time is consistently referred to as part of the experience of boredom. It is generally agreed when a body is bored, time is stretched or slowed down (Anderson, 2004; Barbalet, 1999), which is why Svendsen (2005) situates boredom in the present as it contains an awareness of being trapped. Time is essential to our meaning-making via our stream of consciousness as whenever we engage in meaning-giving it is done within our own inner time. When we carry out an act within the world, its meaning is situated in a tense, our experiences of the past contribute to the subjective understandings of the present and inform our expectations of the future (Gashi, Pedersen and Ugelvik, 2019; Schutz, 2012). Boredom is built over a period of time (Barthes and Howard, 1975), it is not an

instant response to an emptiness but a whole production of bodily habits and events, or lack of, that form over a course of years. Boredom is also linked with the standardised organisations of space-time (Highmore, 2002; Portschy, 2020) we engage in collectively. Foucault (1970) brings attention to the knowledge/power relationship that occurs with time and how it can be a marker of social exclusion due to a hegemonic standardised time flow within societies. Time as a marker of social exclusion is important within this study and is often neglected within criminology; the majority of studies that refer to time and boredom are recent and focused within prisons (Gashi, Pedersen and Ugelvik, 2019; Bengtsson, 2012; Foster, 2019). If boredom is understood as a withdrawal of meaning then part of its phenomenology that arises is the distortion of time sense that occurs (Barbalet, 1999).

Philosophies and Typologies of Boredom

People experience boredom in different ways. When gang-members claim that boredom leads them to such extremes, can they really be experiencing typical everyday boredom? The discipline of philosophy have managed to capture the complexity of boredom more than other disciplines due to its historical fascination with, and longstanding belief that “boredom is a philosophical wellspring” (Kingwell, 2016, p. 216). One of the main discussions within philosophy that is applicable to this study is the introduction of typologies of boredom which allow us to understand that people experience boredom differently.

Kuhn (1976) distinguished between everyday boredom and ennui, stating boredom is a state of being that most experience whilst ennui is a spiritual malaise as well as physical, arguing ennui is associated with melancholy, depression, and malcontent. For Kuhn, everyone experiences boredom, but not ennui, which robs the world of significance; it is a state of emptiness in which a person loses interest in action and begins to disconnect from society. Svendsen (2005) further distinguishes between everyday boredom and ennui, coining the terms; situative and existential boredom. Situative boredom is an emotion that contains a longing for something desired which can be fulfilled through activity; it can be the drive that sparks creativity or action. It is the type of boredom experienced by most people at various points in their lives. It is hegemonic, and if a person has never experienced another type of boredom, it is the type assumed to be common. Existential boredom refers to a deeper malcontent, like Durkheim’s anomie or Marx’s alienation (Seeman, 1991), in which there is a sense of disconnect with social life or withdrawal of purpose or meaning. It depletes meaning in one’s world such that one questions their own state of being. Application of Svendsen’s (2005) typologies is useful within this study as it encapsulates the withdrawal of meaning and disconnect from society participants experienced, enabling a deeper theoretical understanding of boredom and risk-taking. Svendsen’s (2005) typology alongside the other concepts from psychology and sociology which were part of the phenomenology of boredom has resulted in me putting forward a conceptual definition of boredom as:

A social emotion that is both simultaneously felt by the individual and informed by the socio-cultural history in which the individual is situated. It occurs when meaning is withdrawn from activity or situation and affects an individual’s experience of time. It can either be situational or existential.

This definition is conceptually porous so may be of use to other researchers who require a starting point in defining boredom within sociology and criminology.

Methods and Setting

This paper draws from a larger 5-year (2010-2015) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) study of gangs in Glasgow. Located in the West of Scotland, Glasgow has been notorious for gang and violent culture as far back as the 1880's (Davies, 2007). Entrenched historical territorialism has institutionalised gangs within deprived areas of the city (Bannister, Kintrea and Pickering, 2013; Miller, 2020), from which participants in this research hailed. The overarching study produced a definition of Glasgow gangs, and a CGT of how young people grow in and out of gangs. The conceptual definition created and applied to Glaswegian gangs throughout this paper is:

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, 2015:111).

It is out with the scope of this article to discuss the issue of defining gangs, but please see Miller (2016) for a review of the literature and outline of how this definition was created. Charmaz's (2006) CGT was employed as with CGT the analysis is grounded in the data and led by participants' concerns. Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently until saturation was achieved (Charmaz, 2006). This involved me spending 6 weeks with each gang or gang-member. The first 2 weeks were spent building trust and engaging in any activity participants took part in. In week 3, they completed an amended version of the Eurogang Survey (see Weerman *et al.* (2009) for survey), which gathered structural and cultural characteristics of the gangs' participants represented. In weeks 4 and 5, they took part in arts-based focus groups, using two pre-existing youth workshops to do this: Creating Your World, and Circle of Influences (Sharp Solutions, 2007). I did not want to analyse the pictures to create data, they were used to create discussion of how participants interpreted their world, positive and negative influences, and what was important to them. This brought up many group contestations and discussions based on the individuals' creations, allowing me to explore the groups' cultural norms and boundaries. Finally, in week 6, they took part in in-depth individual interviews lasting roughly an hour and a half.

Originally, a purposive sampling procedure was followed with recruitment through gang intervention programmes, but this was yielding only heavily involved, core members. To capture fringe members, participation also occurred through street work, youth clubs and employability courses in Glasgow. I was a youth worker in Glasgow during this period. Participants represented differing levels of gang involvement, some just entering the gang, most current and some ex- members, which allowed a more holistic picture of gang involvement at different stages. All participants self-identified as gang-members which is why the term gang or gang-member is used throughout. The numbers of those who participated were as follows:

- 60 surveyed, representing 21 different gangs across the city,
- Of those, 35 participants engaged in 8 focus groups,¹
- 20 continued to engage with in-depth semi structured individual interviews.

The survey generated descriptive statistics on 21 gangs in Glasgow which, coupled with qualitative data, allowed access to both group and individual meanings and perspectives beyond which either method could produce in isolation. Participants were aged between 12 - 25 years, the majority aged between 16-20. There were 53 males, 7 females and 95% of participants were Scottish white, 1 Slovakian, 1 Polish and 1 European.

Qualitative analysis was carried out via NVivo following CGT analysis (Charmaz, 2006) . Initial data analysis involved line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding. Codes (n153) were categorised into overarching categories (n23). 18 advanced memos were written which then explored the relationship between categories, theorising the concepts within each. Most data in this article came from the advanced memo ‘Nothing to do’, which included categories such as killing time; nothing to do; humour; banter; drug taking; storytelling; and fighting through your teens. Its main relationship was with a memo entitled ‘The Buzz’ and it is mainly from these two memos the following findings were drawn.² What is presented here is not a developed CGT, the original CGT developed and followed within the field explored the symbiotic relationship between The Buzz and Boredom, concentrating on theorising a Buzz. I realised after data collection and analysis I had fallen into the same trap as many before me, I had focused on the thrill-seeking aspect of boredom. So, I returned to the dataset and conducted further analysis, specifically targeting boredom. Rather than a developed CGT, within this paper I present theoretical concepts with porous boundaries that advance an interpretive frame (Charmaz, 2012) of what occurs at the nexus of existential boredom and excitement-seeking behaviours. In doing this, I have sensitised theoretical concepts which provide an abstract understanding of the relationship between the gang-members’ local world and their experience of boredom and larger social structures which tentatively theorise these connections.

Nothing To Do

Gangs Search for Meaning

Participants in this study experienced existential boredom arising from structural disadvantages: territorialism, lack of leisure and labour opportunities, poverty, and time stress. Existential boredom results from a deeper crisis of meaning, not just discontent but a lack of meaning within their lives often resulting from a lack of meaningful experiences (Svendsen, 2005). The search for meaning was evident throughout all discussions of what a normal day was for participants, what they liked to do during the week or at the weekend. Words such as “nothing” “something” and “anything” highlighted the oppressiveness of their daily existence and their futility in believing they could affect change within their lives.

¹ Two of the focus groups were unusable due to the rambunctiousness of the gangs involved and were not included so included in this analysis were 6 focus groups with 26 participants.

² The data has been anonymised and pseudonyms are used throughout.

Consistent use of these words highlighted how anything would fill the space of nothing that was the pervasive norm of their lives:

Gary: There's **nothing to do** but that's the thing. What is there? Cause there's **nothing to do** it's just houses in my place.

Interviewer: No parks there or that...?

Gary: **Nothing at all.**

Pete: Basically, **you want to do something, start to do something**, just talk and **that's all we do**. It's not like we are weans (children) we can go and jump up at the park and play, there is **nothing to do**, so we just talk and **that's all we do**.

The sense of futility and perceived lack of control over their lives comes across both in Gary's 'nothing to do' and in Pete's admission all there is, is nothing to do. Emptiness in boredom refers to a lack of meaning – boredom's enemy is not action or agency but rather meaning (Tada, 2019; Svendsen, 2005). Gary and Pete are discussing leisure activities such as socialising and talking with friends, but it is the lack of meaning in these activities that render it as being nothing. Luke's quote below highlights how the inability to find meaning in his daily existence sometimes robs his belief in his ability to enact agency upon the world.

See sometimes when I am sitting in the house, in my bed, "what do I actually do the day?" You know what I mean? Do nothing but sit about man. I used to, a few years back when I was young, I had to be out the house. I had to be out wae ma pals. A just got up man, a wanted to be... (Luke)

Luke's quote highlights the protective nature his youthful social interactions with the gang used to have. Participants when younger found meaning in the social context of the gang and the unusual opportunities for risk the street provided, but as they aged, the gang became another form of social exclusion for them. It is well established Glasgow gangs can be referred to as territorial gangs (Bannister and Fraser, 2008; Fraser, 2013), which local young people are socialised into (Miller, 2020), but they are not hierarchical, are not organised and tend not to have leaders – they are essentially street-based youth groups. For the younger members in this study, they were like Fraser's (2013) Langview boys, who were entering the gang or in the midst of it, the gang for those participants was meaningful and their territories part of their positive social identities. Yet, as Luke highlights for those older members or those on the cusp of leaving or having left, their relationship with the gang and street was different and meaning was withdrawn due to negative consequences associated with the gang and offending. Survey data highlighted that between the ages of 4-18 participants spent on average 4 to 6 hours a day, most days, on the street. Participants continually occupied the same places and participated in similar activities, as little opportunities existed for new experiences. Sarah's quote below was emblematic of participants' areas:

Sarah: They don't like other people going into their territories, as you would call it. A scheme (working class council estate). Like Dreary Park, we class Cern, Dreary Park, and the Hole as all part of us. And The Other Side just classify The Other Side as theirs.

The areas Sarah describes are streets within her neighbourhood, each place no larger than three streets long. The Other Side (a territorial rival) is less than 250 yards away from her street, separated by a road. Although this small territorial footprint helped define who they

are/are not and where they belong and do not, the prolonged repetitive nature of space and leisure over time resulted in a withdrawal of meaning from the activities they engaged in. The impact of territorialism meant going to other areas was problematic and cuts to youth funding resulted in reduced services which limited locally available leisure activities.

Dillan: Do you know the worst thing about it? See every single scheme in Ourtoon they've got an arena, a football arena. In Chicktown we've got fuck all.

James: We used to have a community centre and that's all away now and all.

Boredom can be explained by both a dearth of experiences (Doehlemann, 1991), and an overabundance; what is important is withdrawal of meaning from activities. Consider members of this gang's discussion on how meaning has been withdrawn from activities due to repetition.

Darren: See the reason you get into fighting and that and all 'cause there's nothing else to do. What is there to do on the streets that we've not done? Kick a ball about right, play football, I don't like football. There is nothing to do but. What is there to do? You go down to Govan...

Interviewer: Swimming...

Darren: Swimming right done that fuckin so many times.

Interviewer: Join a football team that you meet twice a week?

Darren: Fuck that shite.

Interviewer: And then you're going swimming on the Wednesday...

Darren: Swimming shite...

Interviewer: Then at the weekend you could get the bus to Loch Lomond or...

Johnny: And have a hike.

Darren: You need to have money for that.

Darren's opening statement 'that's why we fight' introduces a very important output of the malaise of boredom - participants believed the primary agency they could enact was embodied within themselves, which resulted in embodied reactions to boredom.

The Gang as Inclusion and Exclusion

As the above quote highlights, participants access to leisure was impeded by lack of income linked to deprivation and exclusion from the labour market. Getting a job was viewed as a means of inclusion within society through consumption. As they aged, they wanted to work, buy clothes, go out at the weekend with partners or go dancing with close friends and no longer gang-members. Their involvement in the gang impeded this as they had garnered convictions which moved them further from the labour market. Availability and access to leisure and consumption, 'the' main activity for young people had a large role to play in their inability to participate in socially acceptable activities rather than the street-based adventures typically deemed as delinquent. Participants within this study lived in areas included in the 5% most deprived areas in Scotland (SIMD, 2016), therefore access to a disposable income was limited:

Interviewer: What's the worst thing? Like, I was asking, "What's the best thing in your life?"
You said your pals. What's the worst thing in your life?

Burnsy: Being skint, all the time, man.

Interviewer: Being skint? What would you do if you had money?

Burnsy: What wouldn't I do? That's the question, I think. I'd do all sorts, man. Everything. I'd go on holiday; I'd go mad with it. (Burnsy)

For Burnsy having money and being able to engage in consumption provided opportunities to fill his leisure time and avoid boredom. Survey data highlighted limited experiences of working life, in the past year, out of the 60 participants, 5 had a full-time job, 5 a part-time job and 50 had not worked. Although, 41 had been on 3 or more 3-6-month training courses aimed to get them into employment.

Interviewer: Do you like doing it (construction work)? So, did the careers officer say anything like?

John: No, I have been, I have worked with them (careers) loads of time and they just send you on loads of courses and I have done all the courses.

John's quote highlights the futility of these courses and his comment 'I have done all the courses' indicates how they are viewed as having no progression and this having a detrimental effect on his self-efficacy. The accumulation of these training courses with no progression resulted in the training programs becoming meaningless, and another marker of exclusion, resulting in existential boredom. Having a job held a deeper meaning than economic stability, it represented hope they could get past their trappings and a form of status as resilient. Participation within a working week indicated they held value, as a productive member of society. Something most had not yet experienced.

I want to be out earning money. Because when I go out and earn money, I feel good about myself, because I am actually putting a shift in do you know what I mean. (Alex)

The structuration of time held cultural meaning with specific expectations, daytime in particular was noted to be a time stressor for the participants as the time markers which denote a working day is a hegemonic time within society (Portschy, 2020) and not being able to engage in it a form of exclusion. Consider Mark's discussion of how the day should be structured with productive activities and leisure activities at night, and his assumption that to remove unfilled time would result in less gangs forming.

Mark: A good day is on the course (training programme), aye a good day is coming on the course instead of just kicking about doing nothing, coming here.

Interviewer: What would you do to stop gangs?

Mark: I don't know if there were more jobs people wouldn't be in gangs, there's nothing else to do, nothing to do during the day, because there would be more to do during the day.

For Mark, the gang fills the time resulting from his exclusion from the labour market. Mick mirrors this, highlighting one of the gang's functions is negating the boredom experienced during the week when their time may otherwise be engaged in work.

Aye when I get a job, I'll move out of that (the gang) because I'll not be out, I'll just be out at the weekends and that I would just like a job so I can get money and not fuck about the streets anymore, just stay at home all the time. (Mick)

Musharbash (2007) also found specific time-markers denoting busyness were actively avoided forms of exclusion for her participants. Exclusion from the labour market, and inability to engage in 'respectable' activities at the correct times fed into the belief they were unable to enact agency within the world. In this study, participants felt they were living and reliving the same day repeatedly with no progression, resulting in that search for something. They viewed the activities they engaged in – whether it be smoking weed, playing video games, sitting in the house etc – as empty. Existential boredom did not just emerge; it built over a period of years situated within their social structures. This is not to say they did not experience situational boredom; they did, but over a period of time they developed existential boredom, and this impacted their daily rhythms and belief of agency. Participants' activities lost meaning and life lessened for them, but they were not slaves to it, and as such, forms of resistance emerged. They embodied their agency, developed means of negating the boredom, of creating meaning in experience and learned how to kill time and it is these embodied forms of resistance the next section will attend to.

Killing Time

Manipulating Time

Participants were very inventive and creative in the ways in which they enacted agency upon the world, imbuing it with meaning. Trying to alleviate boredom – 'killing time' – occupied most of their lives. The structuration of time was an indicator of exclusion for participants in this study because markers of time were value-laden with meaning and expectations participants could not achieve. Participants actively engaged in activities that allowed the working week to slip by, avoiding markers of time which indicated their inability to engage with that working aspect of the world. Staying up at night and playing video games, sleeping all day, and partaking in activities such as drink and drugs were ways to manipulate time.

Aye that's all it was about killing time, as we had nothing to do. (Alex)

Smoking cannabis either in solid form or as grass (referred to as weed) was particularly common, because it sped up the passage of time for participants and made the experience of time passing as bearable. Weed was a good way of killing time because markers of time that indicated busyness or when they felt they had to be doing something slipped by, unnoticed. The activities they engaged in did not change, but perceptions of time altered and markers of time lost meaning when they were under the influence of cannabis. Discussions of smoking weed to kill time emerged when participants were asked to describe a good and a bad day:

Interviewer: What would be a bad day?

Sarah: Sitting bored at my house, doing nothing at all. Sitting there all day, for nothing.

Interviewer: What do you mean doing nothing?

Sarah: Without a smoke, or anything to fill the time.

This reference to nothing and emptiness doesn't indicate Sarah doing nothing, Sarah was in her house, but her experience of existential boredom resulted in this withdrawal of meaning and slowing down of time. For most weed was an enjoyable experience and had developed as a habit, but for others it was not enjoyable and used as a coping mechanism:

Interviewer: If you could have a good day, what would a good day be?

Sean: Playing football and not smoking drugs. That's it, play football, no smoking drugs and enjoying myself.

Interviewer: Why not smoking drugs? What made you say that?

Sean: There's nothing else to do apart from take drugs.

Interviewer: What kind of drugs normally?

Sean: Cannabis.

It was commonly assumed if there was something they deemed meaningful to fill their lives, typically a job, then they stop or lower their weed intake. Job insecurity and the concept of low pay/no pay (Shildrick *et al.*, 2010) and the anxieties surrounding it are typical experiences of young people in deprived communities. Batchelor *et al.* (2020) study in Glasgow found low-paid, insecure contracts followed by periods of unemployment or a reduction in temporal control within participants' lives resulted in stress, anxiety and fear of empty and unproductive time highlighting how experiences of temporal stress and work/leisure dichotomy is adversely affecting many young people in society, not just gang-members. However, it is how gang-members react to it that reaps attention. One of the main strategies to killing time that garners more academic attention for gangs is the use of risk-taking behaviours commonly referred to as a buzz. Fighting was one of the most common ways of gaining a buzz.

Rupturing Time

Fighting and having nothing to do were consistently coded together during analysis, emphasising the interrelationship between violence and boredom. Conflict ruptures time for participants, removing the slowing down of time experienced in a bored state. Violence, the embodied control of physicality, was often the response to end the numbing pervasiveness of their lives and provide feelings of power.

No, it was just do you want to go for a game of football. Aye, go down play football. What do you want to do now? Fuck it we'll go and fight Othertown, we'll go and fight Outsiders or whatever, it was just something to do to be honest with you, that's all it was. (Alex)

This was also exemplified in Arnie's response to the question "Why fight?", 'What else have you got to do in Sunny?'" Participants understood provision of activities alone would not stop violence as it was due to deeper malcontent, but it was generally agreed providing activities could lower violence levels.

Interviewer: Is that why you fight to protect the reputation or?

Liam: I think it's for the sake of it. For something to do...

Interviewer: Is there nothing to do?

Liam: No there wasn't anything back then.

Interviewer: Do you think if you were given something to do that it would have made a difference?

Liam: Aye it would have made a wee difference; but it wouldn't stop it.

This implies the gang functions to provide meaningful social activities and feelings of connectedness for members. Emphatically, I am not suggesting fighting is merely a leisure experience: it is much more complex. This research data indicated fighting was a learned form of resilience, an emotional response to the structural disadvantages and systemic and interpersonal violence participants experienced. This is not to deny it can be an enjoyable experience, especially when participants were entering the gang as it was an exciting activity that ruptured the norm and a means of enacting agency upon the world through physical means. Fighting was a buzz, a moment in time in which they could transcend the present and live in the moment.³ As they got older there were consequences associated with violence and violence began to be seen as something to avoid:

Interviewer: Why do you think they (the gang) don't fight anymore?

Dill: Because we regret it, getting charges coming up, and you get into jail, it wakes you up. It's stupid pointless, you are better off just going to get a drink now, have a good time, go home that's it.

As already established, the availability of acceptable social leisure pursuits was not viewed as attainable so to ease the boredom participants would often come up with risk-taking activities in attempts to kill time, often resulting in criminal convictions. They would engage in other activities to get a buzz such as egging each other on into risk-taking behaviours and daring activities:

Interviewer: Could you describe a normal day in the gang for me?

Jamie: Just normal days, no fighting and that, just walking about and then playing football that is a normal day and getting stoned... That is the same every day. It is boring. That is how we all end up picking up charges because there isn't anything to do. (Jamie)

This is not a new finding, the buzz, edgework, or the spectacular violence associated with gangs is where the academic gaze tends to focus rather than theorising the symbolic interplay between buzz and boredom, with some exceptions (Fraser, 2013; Fraser, 2015; Lyng, 2004). What is new is exploring what happens at the nexus of these two and conceptualising what processes are occurring with gang-members that result in the buzz. Existential boredom is at play here, it has developed over time due to their structural conditions developing their bodies into bored bodies, and this informs all aspects of their life (Anderson, 2004). These risk-seeking or violent behaviours allowed a means to transcend the relentless boredom they experienced. These activities and the possibilities of them typically occurred in the weekend, a time holding special meaning for participants as it provided a break from the repetitive, oppressive nature of the week with unexpected and unknown opportunities. Alex comments on how events would escalate to kill the boredom,

But it's just guff (rubbish), it is just boredom. We would sit on the cross [junction] right and we would sit, and smoke weed right. And we would sit smoking weed because we were bored. Then we'd all be

³ For a full definition of 'the Buzz' see XXXX (2019).

sitting in the close [communal area of housing flats] and you would get ones that would terrorise the close. They would get mad with it (drunk) in the close, break shit and all that, smashing windows and things, pure mindless violence. (Alex)

Anderson (2004) takes a materialistic approach to boredom and how bored bodies develop believing the effect of time slowing and the withdrawal of meaning has negative effects on bodies. In analysing the findings, I would argue gang-members have a very specific response to boredom in which they attempt to rupture time-space to break the present. Because they have learned to embody their agency, this was often done with activities that had immediate effects such as the escalating of experiences as discussed by Alex. Being able to engage in witty banter, telling stories and reminiscing the buzz all acted as a means of killing time and lifting the mundane elements of their life into something memorable that could be revisited and discussed in times of hardship.

Discussion

Existential boredom was not fleeting, nor tied with a temporary situation, and could not be alleviated with normal activity. Existential boredom ran deeper and affected participants relationship with all objects. Existential boredom was an undercurrent in all their daily activities resulting in that constant search for meaning highlighted in the findings. Participants still experienced situational boredom but when this occurred participants responses were more visceral and required them to break the present as it almost became unbearable for them. Boredom and the slowing of time acted as a form of temporal disruption for participants which affected their social identity. Goffman (1956) discusses how daily rhythms are established early in life and continue into adulthood. These include understandings of time such as the working week, the leisure weekend but also, and importantly, rites of passage indicating adulthood such as entering the labour market. These daily rhythms structure the organisation of self by creating expectation of what experiences are to occur in life and when. Daily rhythms, temporal patterning, and the expectations they create are significant as they structure an individual's sense of self and the social. As the findings highlighted, boredom, whether situational or existential disrupted the temporal rhythm of participants' day or their week and when temporal disruptions occur, people need to restore established time frames in which they re-pattern their environment to establish control and feel they have agency (Hale, Barrett and Gauld, 2010). Restoration of temporal disruption was shown in the embodied visceral time-ruptures those in the gang engaged in. The following discussion will highlight what is occurring in that time-space between boredom and risk-taking behaviours unique to gang-members.

Nothing To Do highlighted how the structural barriers in participants lives led them to believe they had limited ability to enact agency upon the world. Over time this contributed to them developing existential boredom. As a result, for these participants killing time was largely achieved by embodying their agency. A person's agency is a temporally embedded process of social engagement (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998), this could be seen in their use of drugs and drink, their engagement in the buzz and the avoidance of specific time markers. This embodiment was the use of the body as a representation of resistance against the structures

that diminished their belief in agency. Embodied responses such as conflict, violence, or aggression created ruptures in the present, which helped, create instant meaning for participants. Conflict creates opportunities for meaning construction and as a strategy for boredom aversion (Barbalet, 1999). The strategies employed by those experiencing existential boredom can sometimes result in the most damaging behaviours, as the extent someone will go to in order to break the monotony of it can be extensive. The killing of time was akin to rupturing the space-time present, removing markers of time, and alleviating the time stress experienced. Part of breaking the habit of boredom is the rupture of the norm, the breaking of time and present. And, if these participants are experiencing existential boredom due to structural factors (territorialism, their inability to consume, repetitive tasks, lack of availability to acceptable leisure and labour), then the gang, when they are younger, holds a protective function to the meaning threats presented in their lives.

By exploring existential boredom and the effect it has on individuals' lives we can begin to understand the behaviours or actions of gang-members in new ways. Applying different typologies of boredom moves past hegemonic understandings of boredom which individualises gang-members responses to it and reifies the belief that gang-members are violent individuals who are self-seeking. If we understand existential boredom occurs as a social force built over a period of time, then we develop different ways of understanding boredom and risk-seeking behaviours. A young person avoiding the working hours (Musharbash, 2007), a prisoner banging their head (Bengtsson, 2012), car racing, drug taking and vandalism (Jervis *et al.*, 2003) can be seen as structural responses to the conditions they are operating within rather than irrational behaviours. They are designed to rupture time-space. So, time, the meaning we imbue it, and boredom are all linked with a need to transcend and do something that creates immediate meaning, as does violence or fighting. One of the main findings developed is that due to their structural conditions and the consequences associated with gangs, gang members are more likely to experience existential boredom than other social groups. Due to the participants' experience of existential rather than situational boredom, taking part in "normal or traditional" leisure activities does not have the ability to alleviate their feelings of doing nothing and they therefore seek more extreme forms of activities to rupture their time-space.

Gangs within this study acted as liminal sites for gang-members providing a space they could occupy whilst 'betwixt and between' adolescence and adulthood. Turner (1969) describes people who are in liminal periods as 'liminal entities' who are "neither here nor there: they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial..."(Turner, 1969, p. 96). Daniel (2006) further broadens the concept to describe the social niches that develop between social categories, and it is here analysis of the gang as a liminal space has value. Originally the gang provided meaning within their communities, yet as they aged, the gang and its consequences pushed them further from social mainstream spaces and the social rites associated with adulthood such as being able to fill their time, getting a job and consumption. The gang stretches the liminal space participants occupy by moving them further away from these ritualistic symbols of adulthood and citizenship. The gang becoming a negative life influence is a common finding in gang exit (Decker and Lauritsen, 1996), whereby activities previously offering protection from boredom and imbuing lives with meaning resulted in negative consequences such as criminal convictions (Barry,

2010), loss of friends or family due to violence (Vigil, 2003), personal injury, and stigmatisation (Wood and Alleyne, 2010). This further removed them from the ability to engage in the labour market and 'acceptable' leisure activities.

If we understand boredom and its link to deviancy as being structural, then we can have a societal response rather than an individualising one which includes providing legitimate activities which have meaning. In Scotland, youth-services funding has shifted away from youth-work based initiatives focused on informal education. Instead, focus is on interventions aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour (ASB) and crime (YouthScotland, 2019). Unfortunately, these initiatives typically last only 6 to 12 weeks, lacking meaningful progression or impact. This pattern extends to the labour market, where short-term interventions fail to result in long-term or meaningful employment. For instance, the Community Jobs Scotland program, funded by the Scottish Government since 2011, provides employment opportunities for NEET (not in employment, education, or training) young people, but 38-43% of participants return to unemployment after completion (McTier, Clelland and McGregor, 2012). This rate is even higher for young people with convictions (McTier, Macdougall and McGregor, 2015). These outcomes are worsened for gang-members who, due to their gang involvement, typically have criminal convictions further removing them from suitable labour and leisure activities (Bannister, Kintrea and Pickering, 2013; Barry, 2010). If policy makers and politicians wish to limit or lower the times gangs present as a viable option for young people, then they need to address these transition pathways and provide viable and longer-term leisure and labour activities. If more meaningful social and leisure activities were provided this could act as a buffer to the development of existential boredom. That is not to say I think it will stop gangs developing but it may reduce the liminal period for members, aid in quicker gang exit and result in less visceral responses to the experience of existential boredom.

Ferrell (2004) highlighted we need more understanding on boredom within criminology, which is true, particularly as it is one of the most commonly cited reasons for committing crimes. Boredom and temporality are areas requiring further research within sociology and criminology. This paper helps develop a criminology of boredom with two main contributions: development of a conceptual definition of boredom incorporating Svendsen's (2005) typology of boredom and empirical findings which tentatively theorise the processes that occur at the nexus between boredom and risk-taking. As a society, we need to reimagine how to engage with young people and understand the detrimental and devastating effect existential boredom can have on lives. If we only look at spectacular events such as fighting or risk-taking, we will not be able to gain a full understanding of the issue at hand and will continue to reify the gang concept. This highlights a limitation of this study, it only worked with gang-members and as Hughes (2005) rightly points out when we are researching gangs, we should include non-gang youth from similar backgrounds to explore whether we are linking behaviours as specific to the gang and reifying the gang complex. I have argued based on these findings gang-members' are more receptive to existential boredom and their responses are different due to the visceral time-space ruptures they engage in. Due to the dearth of research on boredom we do not know whether non-gang youth in similar circumstances withdraw meaning and embody their agency in similar ways.

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