

***Risky Youth or Gang Members?: A contextual critique
of the (re)discovery of gangs in Britain.***

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Output

by
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Abstract

The aim of this body of work has been to explore the anti-social behaviour and criminality of disaffected young people. In particular, my focus has been on how the perception of young offenders as ‘youth at risk’ needing guidance has metamorphosed into one of ‘gang’ membership requiring a punitive response. My work examines how community agencies and the criminal justice system have responded to this shift and focuses on the consequences for young people. Theoretically, this body of work has been influenced by a constructionist epistemology and incorporates a feminist methodology. The research work upon which this body of work rests consists mainly of qualitative research with marginalised young people, family members and practitioners working with them. My findings, detailed in various publications, have challenged assumptions about anti-social youngsters, the nature of collective offending by young people and the role the family plays in ‘gang-related’ offending. Most notably, they have sought to shape academic and political discourse in Britain by adopting a critical position against the prevailing view that ‘gang-related’ offending is the primary driver for the rise in violent offences. The work has contributed to the conceptualisation of ‘gang’ groups as they exist in contemporary Britain. It has influenced public policy on the gang, particularly in relation to defining the gang, on crime control and it has rerouted the debate about the involvement of girls and young women in street-based groups.

Introduction

I worked for many years as a contract researcher, then senior research fellow, before moving into the academy as a senior lecturer and, latterly, reader. The body of work presented here was published during the period 2004-2014; it consists of peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters and practitioner reports. The central focus of this work is on marginalised young people, both as perpetrators and victims of anti-social behaviour and violent crime. The publications explore the anti-social behaviour and criminality of disaffected young people and the accompanying political discourse. A major thread here is the manifestation of the ‘gang’ as a social problem in the UK in the context of an increasingly punitive response by statutory agencies, arguably often influenced by media constructions.

The point of departure for much of this work, some of which is co-authored and so cooperatively produced, typically consists of questions posed by commissioning agencies about the nature and level of criminality by young people and how effectively to eradicate it and minimise social harms. Therefore they arise within, and are often framed by, local and national political and policy concerns. Such questions have been addressed in each instance using appropriate criminological theoretical frameworks (discussed below) and within this context my particular contribution to knowledge has been both to develop theoretical tools and to implement a methodology adequate to explore the social problem under investigation - whilst giving voice to young people and exploring the intelligibility of young people’s perceptions - and to challenge the dominant assumptions which underpin the ways in which ‘social problems’ are constructed.

Since my key focus has been the ways in which young people, who are identified as ‘at risk’, anti-social, vulnerable and/or as ‘gang-associated’, construct their worlds, their identities and the existential resources upon which they draw (both discursive and socio-economic), the work draws upon interactionist and feminist traditions within criminology. Interactionism recognises the importance of human agency and interaction between individuals in creating the social world (Blumer 1969) and the feminist tradition acknowledges that human action operates within a set of inequitable social power relations which shape, frame and influence it (Letherby 2003). What this yields is an empirical body of work that engages ‘hard-to-reach’ young people in social research that captures their actions and attitudes and tracks how these are interpreted and reflected in the actions and attitudes of more powerful others.

What follows can be broken down into several parts. The first section provides a brief outline of the socio-political context in which my work emerged. This is followed by a reflection on the theoretical framework and a consideration of methodology and methods employed as part of the research exercise. The second section provides a thematic overview of the papers to be considered as part of the PhD by Prior Output. It will seek to demonstrate the theoretical and methodological contribution each piece makes to knowledge and illustrate how they constitute a coherent whole and continuing body of work.

Part 1: Anti-social youth to (re)discovering the gang

In the early 2000s there was increasing concern within statutory agencies and the media about the anti-social behaviour of young people which came to be organised around a discourse on gun and knife crime and the issue of ‘gangs’. These concerns form the historical context of this work. Although concern about the moral and behavioural decline of young people has, according to Pearson (1983), been a perennial feature of adult society, during this period an intensified focus on youth developed and a narrative of ‘youth in crisis’ emerged. Arguably a process of deviancy amplification (Cohen 2011; Young 1972) was set in motion whereby rare, but serious, events come to be highlighted but also, importantly, become the dynamic force in the emergence of moral panics. According to the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, at the heart of the problem were “unfettered feral yobbish kids engaged in low-level thuggery that causes other people misery” (Blunkett 2003). This political rhetoric was reproduced, and influenced by, media coverage that was inflammatory, salacious and discriminatory in relation to particular social groups, most notably working class and Black and minority ethnic young men.

Reported recorded increases in hospital admissions for stab wounds (Lane & Wheeler 2003), an increased number of school age children carrying knives (Ipsos MORI 2003; Phillips & Chamberlain 2006) and a record number of youngsters murdered were all held to evidence an emerging knife, gun and gang culture amongst young people and signalled, as Innes puts it, “that something is wrong with British society and its criminal justice process” and engenders a fear of crime which “requires some sort of corrective response” (Innes 2003:51). These statistical ‘facts’ however were

problematic in so far as the figures were, as so many others are, aggregated and included the offending of adults, a point repeatedly made by Squires (2011) in his investigation of young people's involvement in anti-social behaviour and weapon use. Since the problem of anti-social behaviour amongst young people had emerged strategies for dealing with it were sought. One strategy was mentoring which was thought to be a panacea for such social ills. My research (with Shiner, Newburn & Groben) evaluated the utility of mentoring in combatting youthful deviance and criminality, setting in motion a 10-year career that tracked how the perception of young offenders as 'youth at risk' in need of guidance and mentoring (Newburn et al 2005) had metamorphosed into 'gang members' requiring a more punitive response.

Increasingly discourse came to be focussed upon 'the gang' as the primary driver of destructive youth culture. Media coverage depicted a crisis: "It's lawless out there" claimed the Guardian (Helm 2000), reporting on the senseless murder of Damilola Taylor, the ten year old victim of a Peckham-based gang known as the PYG. Violence involving young people armed with knives was seemingly at "epidemic proportions" (Alleyne 2008) where carrying a knife or a gun was all part of a "murderous fashion" (Barker 2003) amongst teenagers who were now depicted as "Britain's deadly new menace" (Townsend 2006). The press reported on deadly turf wars by gangs in Manchester nicknamed 'Gunchester' (Hughes 2009), in 'Shottingham' (Nottingham) and other cities such as Birmingham, where the drive-by murder of two young women, Letisha Shakespeare and Charlene Ellis, on New Year's Day 2004 consolidated 'the gang' as the UK's newly emergent crisis.

Throughout the period of concern here, ‘the gang’ has continued to be constructed as a serious problem. Official statistics calculated the existence of and a rise in the number of gangs in Britain, and attributed their growth to persistent offending and serious violent Crime (Stelfox 1998; Bullock & Tilly 2002; Shropshire & McFarquhar 2002; Bennett & Holloway 2004; Sharpe et al 2006; Communities that Care 2005; Smith and Bradshaw 2005; Pitts 2007; HM Government 2011). Gangs are held to have penetrated schools (Home Office 2015) and prisons (Wood & Adler 2001; Wood 2006). As violent subcultural groups, gangs of thugs are held to use dangerous dogs (Harding 2012) and rape and other sexual violence against women and girls (Firmin 2010, 2011) as weapons in the commission of crime and, according to Prime Minister David Cameron (2011), bear the responsibility for orchestrating the riotous urban unrest that occurred in British cities in the summer of 2011. More recent news reports have claimed that “regular gang members are bonding with Muslims” (Rose 2012) adding to the significant terrorist threat.

The body of work here, the conclusions of which are built on the evidential basis of qualitative research with marginalised young people and practitioners working with them, challenges populist conceptions and attempts to construct the issue of violence by young people essentially as a problem of ‘gangs’. I take a critical standpoint against the discourse on gangs and develop a position of scepticism in relation to the ‘gang’ as the key variable in increasing violent crime. The articles here argue that violence by and amongst young people is complex and that the analysis of it requires that we resist reifying the ‘gang’ and rather attend to the different ways in which young people coalesce into groups and often live their lives ‘on road’. My research (Young et al 2007; Young & Hallsworth 2011; Young 2009) illustrates that whilst

violence amongst young people associated with 'gangs' can be serious, it is rarely so and the use of guns and bladed weapons, particularly amongst females, is limited. My research locates violence along a spectrum where it is the people most deeply immersed in 'road culture' who are capable of lethal violence.

To see young people's group life and criminality exclusively in terms of the 'gang' then is inadequate, not least because this was not a term consistently in use by the young people themselves. As such, the 'gang' as a concept had limited usage when offering explanations for youth violence or engaging young people in social research as the gang was, mostly, something outside of their experience. The concept 'on road' emerged from the empirical research as an experience to which young people could more readily relate. It is a concept utilised by other scholars writing about gangs in Britain. Anthony Gunter perceived 'on road' to be a subculture where "a small minority of young men engage themselves into a world of badness" (2010:94). For Hallsworth and Silverstone 'on road' represented "an elected lifestyle brought on by exclusion from mainstream society" that encouraged a street 'sovereignty' (Hallsworth & Silverstone 2009:365).

Young and Hallsworth's definition of 'on road' complements yet extends the concept of 'on road' to include a consideration of the psychological impact upon the young men and women deeply immersed in the 'world of badness' who operated as 'kings' or 'queens'. This concept of 'on road' has a range of connotations, sometimes, but not always, referring to gang involvement. 'On road' depicts both a physical space and a way of being in the world for young people in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. Indeed, we define 'on road' as:

The 'hood' or the 'ghetto' where young people, worn down by marginalisation and exclusion, struggled to survive in a society they believed did not care or cater for their needs. At its most extreme, the hood – and by extension 'the road' – was a place where young people adopted a 'hood mentality', a fatalistic attitude to life that held 'no dreams, no ambition, no drive; no nothing' (Young & Hallsworth 2011:3).

To be 'on road' then may involve being in a gang but it may equally be to associate with a group of people who regard the street as a social space in which to 'hang out' or the illegal drug economy. My work therefore employs the term 'on road' to allow for the complexity and fluidity of urban street life.

The empirical work undertaken in this period led to the development of a new typology of urban collectives and a more nuanced definition of the gang that challenged the common-sense invocations of that term which had previously been integral to policy making and political discourse (Hallsworth & Young 2006, 2010). To be clear, my research does not find the gang redundant or that gangs are not real entities, but argues that the complex ways in which young people organise themselves and the resultant criminality is not captured by prevalent 'gang talk' and that such talk (and writing) reinforces social myths and unhelpfully feeds a moral panic about youth in general.

Here come the girls: Girls and gangs in Britain

Political discourse in the early part of the period focussed exclusively on the anti-social behaviour and gang-related offending of young men. This specificity has also historically been reflected in the work of academics as well as in media coverage. However in 2008/9 focus expanded to include the offending behaviour of young women, in part due to a statistical increase in women and girls being arrested for

involvement in violent crime and in conjunction with a political agenda committed to tackling offending by women and girls and their experience in the criminal justice system (see Ministry of Justice 2009). This shift brought with it a tendency to contextualise the newly-identified activity of young women as yet another indication of a 'gang' problem.

I challenge both the tendency within the academy to ignore the relationship of girls and women to anti-social behaviour and violent crime, and the ways in which this activity has been presented in media constructions of the 'girl gangster'. Most significantly, I address the lack of focus on female involvement in street-based groups in Britain by applying the critique of 'gang talk' to the female experience. With the exception of Archer (1995) who focussed specifically on media coverage of 'girl gangs' in London, there had at this time been no exhibited interest in the relationship of young women to 'gangs', although Batchelor et al (2001) and Batchelor (2005) studied the nature and form of violence practised by teenage girls in Scotland. Three of my publications (Young et al 2007; Young 2009, 2011) offered a deconstruction of the dominant discourse around female involvement in 'gang' groups and female offending, particularly violent offending. These were based on empirical work with young women including offenders.

I also challenge the ways in which media coverage has constructed the image of the 'girl gangster'. For example, the newly emergent girl gangster was presented as a new breed of gangster (Thompson 2001) and held to be "menacing the neighbourhood" (Smith 2005) in a style akin to her male counterparts. Girl gangsters were presented as 'deadlier than the male' and as capable of instigating murderous

inter- and intra-group rivalry and, due to wily skills and manipulative ways, as equally likely with men to appropriate high positions within gang groups (Harding 2014). In Young (2009), I draw upon the experience of girls and young women to engage directly with their experiences in ‘gangs’ and challenge the pervasive view of ‘gang’ girls as habitually aggressive; I go on to develop a more mundane and nuanced analysis of young women’s involvement in street-based groups and violent crime. This research broke from the androcentric tradition of criminological research, specifically gang research (male researchers interviewing other men about their experiences and those of women/girls in gang groups which according to Carlen (1990) largely ignored the offending of women as an intellectual problem and, when it did address this, held an essentialist and sexualised view of women). My research, exploring as it does the existential reality for girls and young women associating with or involved in street gangs, challenged the pronouncements about the nature of their gang membership and offending.

1.1 Theoretical framework

A constructionist epistemology has been important in the generation of this body of work in that constructivism focuses on the ways that people construct their worlds and emphasises “the idea that society is actively and creatively produced by human beings’, social worlds being ‘interpretive nets woven by individuals and groups’” (Marshall 1994:484). Thus, to understand a social problem such as ‘gang’ formation and youth violence, requires the exploration of the phenomenon from the vantage point of the individuals thought to contribute to it, attending to the meanings people attribute to their lived reality as these meanings derive from, and arise out of, the

interaction with their fellows (Blumer 1969:2) and examination of the society in which such groups emerge, not least because the way lived lives are perceived is shaped and framed by cultural processes and the hold these have over us (Crotty 1998:58).

However there are limitations to adopting a purely constructivist-interactionist framework that focuses only at the level of the empirical, in the sense of what is observable at an individual or group level. As Giddens notes, social reality cannot be fully understood as a composite of micro-associations between people but rather requires recognition of historically emergent macro-level social structures; agency and structure are inextricably linked together (1984). So I have sought to proceed with a recognition of the power relations in which young people are embedded and the limits on their resources, both existential and socio-economic, but also in a way which uses a praxaeological conception of the human subject (McNay 2008), i.e. one which recognises the constructive activity of human beings without lapsing into seeing social reality as nothing more than an outcome of labelling processes.

I recognise that power relations exert constraints and set parameters on interaction and recognise also the agency of people in accomplishing their social world and in constructing identities and social reality. The people who are the subject of my research inhabit a social world replete with structural inequalities that Young argues engenders feelings of exclusion and a 'crisis of identity' produced by living in a contemporary society which encourages conspicuous consumption and the pursuit of wealth and status whilst "systematically excluding its realization" (Young 2003). Clearly influenced by Merton's structural concept of anomie (1949) and Katz's

agentic seductions of crime (1988), Young posits that this crisis of identity, brought about by unrealised success and frustrated ambitions experienced by young people living in bulimic society, gives rise to a humiliation that fuels the transgressive violence associated with the excluded urban poor – that is thuggish violence in the pursuit of respect and ‘gang-related’ violence (Young 2003). What Young’s theory recognises is the need to attend to both structure and agency in the pursuit of knowledge about a social problem, such as ‘gang-related’ violence, and to engage in research that recognises both the power embedded in state institutions and the interactive decisions made by individuals in the cultural milieu in which they live. My research attempts to illustrate the structural constraints and individual possibilities available to marginalised groups whose interactions are, to some degree, influenced by broader macro-structural developments but are also produced and reproduced via micro-level associations and the meanings that these have for them.

Adopting this position has incurred some criticism. I refute the contention made by Harding (2014) that my work is fundamentally located in a new left idealist position. Following Matthews’ (1987) critique of left idealism, in which he states the problem of crime is conceptualised “predominantly as the product of well-orchestrated moral panics, mis-labelling, or a product of arbitrary social reaction” (1987:371), my work does acknowledge the existence of criminal gangs in the UK. I accept that the ‘gang’ has an ontological reality and is not simply an abstraction although at the same time I argue that the ‘gang’ is a social achievement.

I also acknowledge the significant harm that occurs within the phenomenon commonly known as gang, gun and knife culture but I have critically appraised the

discourses which invoke a flimsy base upon which widespread claims are made. I have stated that gangs are rare but that violence committed by young people is real. Within the context of my research I have listened to many people who have retold their experiences of abuse, neglect, violence, rape and murder. Some have evoked the concept of the 'gang' in relaying their experiences; most have not, preferring to frame what has happened to them or to significant others within the context of being 'on road', involved in the illegal drugs economy, street robbery or some interpersonal criminality. I attend to the experiences of victims and accept that crime, particularly 'gang'-related offences, are experienced most commonly by disenfranchised communities within which 'gangs' are formed. However, as my work illustrates, many of the people understood as criminal gang members and delinquents are also the victims of violence. My work attempts to consider all of the component parts that relate to youth violence and whilst doing so attempts to illustrate how the criminality of young people can impact upon society at large but also on the local community and the perpetrators themselves. I do not operate with an idealised or romanticised notion of 'gang' but attempt to grasp the reality of youth-based violence and anti-social practice in its context. My theoretical position therefore is closer to new left realism than to any form of idealism.

The purpose of my research was to provide information of benefit to practitioners with a remit to control the anti-social and offending behaviour of young people associated with 'gangs' and the damaging effects such groups are perceived to have on the wider community. From this point of departure, what the commissioners have wanted to gain is some understanding or, as Weber put it, '*Verstehen*' (Weber 1949), of the 'gang' phenomenon as it was emerging for them as a local problem. Each time

I was commissioned to investigate a fundamental social problem in order to provide policy makers and practitioners with pragmatic action-orientated research that made recommendations for tackling the issues head-on.

It might be assumed that my theoretical positioning is in some tension with the requirements of contract research associated with administrative criminology. Practically this tension has not erupted in destructive ways and the critical insights developed through my research have, in general, been received positively by the commissioners of the research. Often practitioners engaged with young people themselves are critical of the direction of governmental policy and often they are sympathetic to the difficulties experienced by the young people with whom they work. However, following Becker (1967) I do acknowledge that my research has involved 'taking a side'; I make no apology for this positioning. I have conducted research which sets out from the judgment that marginalised young people's realities have not adequately been attended to, either by statutory agencies or within academia. I believe that the debate needed this perspective and it is important for policy and practice fully to engage with the 'reality' as it is constructed by those within the context of the 'gang' and/or young people 'on road' and to respect their voices, not least because, if they are not able to recognise themselves in the constructions of dominant discourses, they are less likely to engage in initiatives designed to help them.

I therefore accept the partisan nature of the research I have undertaken which, according to Denzin (1989), is common practice amongst contracted researchers and I argue that value-free research is impossible, not least because I bring to the research

field a set of assumptions that inevitably guide my interpretation. With the adopted methodology I have sought to understand and humanise the ‘deviant’ which itself implies a particular political position. Feminist researchers in particular have argued that the identity and social positioning of the researcher is an intrinsic part of the research process (Stanley & Wise 1983; Holland & Ramazanoglu 2002). I believe that my capacity to connect with my research participants is enhanced by my identity as a woman of dual heritage raised in a working class family in an urban neighbourhood very similar to those environments in which I have encountered the young people who spoke to me. I have experienced being ‘on road’ as a young teenager so the accounts of my research participants resonate with me and my capacity to identify with them enhances the rapport to which I aspire as a qualitative and engaged researcher.

1.2 A note on methodology and method

I have drawn from feminist theory and method. Feminism as a methodological approach brings with it the assumption that what constitutes reality in society is unequal and hierarchical and what counts as legitimate knowledge is dependent upon power held both at the level of the individual and the social (Skeggs 1994). There is no single feminist method but rather a set of guiding principles, the primary focus of which is to emancipate women. As a methodology, feminist research is a political endeavour concerned to give voice specifically to girls and women who have historically been denied power and the right to produce legitimate knowledge. There is however in much feminist work also a clear recognition that, in challenging the relationship between the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’, feminism holds out possibilities of changing men’s lives for the better too.

As Letherby notes, “feminist researchers start with a political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women’s lives through social and individual change” (2003:4). Adopting this methodology is important since my work concentrates on the knowledge held by those young people who are accorded very little opportunity to express their view of the world, namely girls and young women, but also marginalised boys and young men. My work shows how the lives of young men and young women are interconnected and it is important to attend to the dynamic impact of this interconnection. In other words, my research has sought to *mean* something, to reveal and interpret what is going on in the lives of young people conceptualised as ‘at risk’ anti-social youth or ‘gang’ members and in the lives of their family members, to articulate their experience and interpretation of the phenomenon of the ‘gang’ and, as far as possible, to consider respectfully the often messy existential reality of the relatively powerless. Such lives are often scrutinised by statutory agencies and habitually constructed as problematic in the media and, in some instances, demonised when they fail to conform to normativised standards of behaviour. Thus, following feminist research practice, I have sought as far as possible to engage my research participants in non-exploitative emancipatory research that focuses on their experience(s) as marginalised groups whose knowledge has often been delegitimised and/or who have often been denied a public voice.

Method

In addition to securing funding for all of the research projects upon which these publications rest, I was the principal researcher and largely responsible for research design, implementation and analysis. Since the broad aim of my research has been to investigate how people construct and interpret the phenomenon of the ‘gang’, and to

explore young people's experience 'on road', I have adopted an interpretive perspective – that is, one that is concerned with subjective meanings from the point of view of social actors – and employed a largely qualitative approach. This has included traditional methods of data collection such as individual or groups interviews which have been loosely or semi-structured and have included the use of vignettes based on real life scenarios. I have also engaged in overt participant observation on a three-year longitudinal study on mentoring, discussed below; this involved observation of mentor and mentee training, residential courses and of the mentor-mentee relationship in practice. These qualitative approaches, particularly the interview, fit with the constructivist epistemology that frames the research and interactionist positioning of my work as it allows for in-depth exploration of the phenomena under study and as Jones notes (1985:45) is a very good way to understand people's constructions of reality in a way that addresses the rich context that underpins the substance of their meaning.

My research is premised upon the involvement of 'at risk' and vulnerable people who are not an immediately accessible cohort. Because each project addresses a particular field of questions, purposive sampling has been appropriate, as I have sought to include participants with expert knowledge (e.g. young people with experience of being 'on road' or family members who have relatives involved in 'gang-related' criminality) of the phenomenon under examination. However, this sampling plan has, as far as possible and where the research has dictated, included a varied sample of respondents to ensure validity; that is that the sample of respondents included in the study 'fits' the aims and objectives of the overall study (Punch 2014).

As a contract researcher I have accessed young people via local and statutory agencies, schools and third sector charities and I have also accessed participants using a snowballing methodology, being referred on to friends or other people with valuable knowledge. The decision about which sampling method is appropriate is taken in the context of negotiation and discussion with practitioners involved in commissioning the research and determined by the research focus and research requirements. As the principal field researcher (on all projects over the course of the ten years) I have accessed and engaged young offenders, self-professed gang members, sex workers, drug dealers, the homeless and ex-prisoners in social research. I have spanned the country from the West Country to Scotland talking with hundreds of people from diverse communities about anti-social behaviour, mentoring, gangs, gun and knife crime and sexual violence. I have sat in cars, on stairwells, in pubs and cafes, on brick walls, at bus stops, in offices and youth clubs, on the edge of football pitches, in houses, parks and gardens, and mum and toddler clubs observing and conducting interviews. I have also engaged practitioners and law enforcers in the research process to provide a holistic grasp of the phenomena under investigation.

Part 2: The published works – an overview

This overview presents a critical analysis of published work submitted by Tara Young as partial fulfilment of her PhD by Prior Output. It provides the context for the author's work and presents the theoretical and empirical development of her work and the resultant original contribution made to knowledge. The published works contained in this submission are generated from a number of commissioned pieces of research carried out by Young over a 10-year period (2004-2014). It contains co-authored peer reviewed articles, books, and chapters that have generated from the empirical research as well as sole authored articles.

The body of work

- i. Young, T., Fitzgibbon, W. & Silverstone, D. (2014) 'A Question of Family? Youth and Gangs'. *Youth Justice*, Vol.14 No.2 171-185.
- ii. Young, T., Fitzgibbon, W. & Silverstone, D. (2013) 'The Role of the Family in Facilitating Gang Membership, Criminality and Exit'. A Catch22 Publication.
- iii. Young, T. (2011) 'In Search of the Shemale Gangster' in Goldson, B. (ed.) *Youth in Crisis? Gangs, Territoriality and Violence*. Oxon: Willan Publishing ISBN-10: 1843927519, 2011.
- iv. Young, T. & Hallsworth, S. (2011) 'Children and Young People as Young Victims of Violent Crime and Violent Offenders' in Barter, C (eds.) *Children Behaving Badly? Exploring Peer Violence between Children and Young People*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell ISBN-10: 0470727055. 2011.
- v. Hallsworth, S. & Young, T. (2010) 'Street Collectives and Group Delinquency: Social Disorganisation, Subcultures, and beyond' in McLaughlin, E & Newburn, T. (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Criminological Theory*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. ISBN 978-1-4129-2038-4, 2010.
- vi. Hallsworth, S. & Young, T. (2011) 'On Gangs and Race: A Rejoinder to Joseph and Gunter' in Joseph, I., & Gunter, A. *Gangs Revisited: What's a Gang and what's Race got to do with it? Policy and Politics into Practice*. London: Runnymede Trust Publication.
- vii. Young, T. (2009) 'Girls and Gangs: 'Shemale' Gangsters in the UK?' *Youth Justice*, Vol. 9; No.3. 224-238, 2009

- viii. Hallsworth, S. & Young, T. (2008) 'Crime and Silence: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21)'. *Theoretical Criminology*, 12: 131-152. 2008.
- ix. Hallsworth, S. & Young, T. (2008) 'Gang Talk and Gang Talkers: A Critique'. *Crime, Media, Culture* Vol. 4, No. 2. 175-195, 2008.
- x. Young, T., Fitzgerald, M., Hallsworth, S., and Joseph, I. (2007) 'Groups, Gangs and Weapons: A Report for the *Youth Justice Board of England and Wales*'. London: The Youth Justice Board, 2007.
- xi. Hallsworth, S. & Young, T. (2005) 'On Gangs and Guns: A Critique and a Warning'. *ChildRIGHT*, October CR220, 2005.
- xii. Hallsworth, S. & Young, T. (2004) 'Getting Real about Gangs'. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 55: 1, 12-13 Spring, 2004.
- xiii. Shiner, M., Young, T., Newburn, T., & Groben, S. (2004) 'Mentoring Disaffected Young People: An Evaluation of Mentoring Plus'. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/mentoring-disaffected-young-people-evaluation-mentoring-plus>, 2004.

What follows is a synopsis of the publications clustered around five themes that reflect the key issues under empirical investigation. These are: mentoring disaffected youth, contextualising the gang and its (re)emergence in Britain, girls and gangs, the production of crime and violence and the role of the family in facilitating gang membership, criminality and exit.

2.1 'The kids are not alright!' - Mentoring disaffected and anti-social youth

The first paper reviewed is a report by Shiner et al (2004) generated from a longitudinal research study on mentoring as a strategy for anti-social youth and young offenders. Mentoring was implemented in Britain during the 1990s when New Labour had real concerns about social exclusion and tackling increasing levels of youth anti-social behaviour and criminality. As a strategy developed in North America, mentoring showed great potential for improving the lives of vulnerable and delinquent African American youngsters. Grossman & Tierney's (1998) evaluation of the

flagship Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BB/BSs) indicated beneficial effects for mentees. Young people attending the programme experienced improvements in academic ability and a reduction in misconduct and other undesirable behaviour. Similarly, a meta-analysis of over 50 mentoring projects in the US conducted by DuBois et al (2002) found significant improvements in mentees' emotional well-being, problematic behaviour and educational commitment. However, US research dominated the discourse on mentoring and few British projects had been officially evaluated. Anecdotal accounts about the protective capacity of mentoring and the overall championing of it as a viable crime reduction strategy obscured the fact there was little empirical evidence to indicate positive outcomes for reducing anti-social behaviour, offending or improving the life chances of vulnerable young people. Also, the results on its success were less robust than presented. As Rhodes (2002) points out, the positive effects experienced by young people were often short-lived and generally dissipated within a year of completing the programme. Indeed, findings from a systematic meta-analysis of crime prevention programmes conducted by Sherman et al (1997) a few years earlier found that, at best, mentoring showed 'promise' rather than tangible, long-lasting effects with young people.

The evaluation of Mentoring Plus represented the first, comprehensive evaluation of mentoring in Britain. Commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, this study provided a formative and summative evaluation of 10 Mentoring Plus projects and calculated the impact the composite parts (e.g. structured educational element and the mentoring) had on reducing anti-social and criminal behaviour and increasing social inclusion. Echoing the US research, the evaluation highlighted the limitations of mentoring as an intervention strategy. The findings showed that Mentoring Plus as a

strategy 'worked' but not as expected. The taught component, the Plus element, improved some young people's levels of inclusion but neither the Plus element nor the mentoring had a significant impact upon offending (Shiner et al 2004). The evaluation also exposed the complexity of the mentoring relationship and the difficulties inherent in engaging disaffected young people in a relationship. Moreover, it highlighted the interactional difficulties young people had with adult mentors which undermined the intervention.

Rhodes and DuBois (2008) argued that it is vitally important to understand how the mentoring relationship works in order to assess its value. Shiner et al's (2004) research introduced a conceptual working model of mentoring. This model illustrated the fragility of the mentoring process, reporting an often fractious, reactive process with multiple opportunities for breaks in the relationship. It found that well-matched, well-established relationships between committed mentees and appropriately trained mentors were more likely to succeed than others, a finding echoed in a recent US study on mentoring 'at risk' youth (Herrera et al 2013). The evaluation illustrated that mentoring works with some people, some of the time, under certain conditions and for a specified period. The success of mentoring in tackling social problems such as anti-social behaviour and offending, if realised at all, is largely unsustainable. In sum, it exposed the limitations of adopting a 'one size fits all' strategy for tackling social inclusion and offending. The evaluation acts as a cautionary tale against championing a single strategy as a 'silver bullet', particularly in the absence of robust evidence. This is important for projects funded by the public purse and for managing the expectations of vulnerable young people and the community. The findings from this evaluation provided the foundation for another publication, 'Dealing with

Disaffection' (Newburn & Shiner with Young, 2005), that has contributed significantly to the debate on mentoring. 'Dealing with Disaffection' is a much-cited resource (53 times according to Google Scholar) utilised by national and international scholars researching and writing on mentoring in relation to anti-social behaviour and criminality.

2.2 Everybody's 'gang talking': Contextualising the gang and its (re)emergence in Britain

A central thread running through Young's work is an attempt to contextualise youth crime and violence particularly as it relates to 'gangs'. As mentioned in the introduction, there was concern over rising violent offences by young people. A small but significant number of young people were dying at the hands of other youngsters armed with guns and/or knives. In the period between 2007/8 fifty-seven young people were fatally wounded and some political commentators, practitioners and academics attributed these murders to a rise in the 'gang' and an emergent 'gang culture'. Young remains deeply sceptical of this position and three articles (Hallsworth & Young 2004; Hallsworth & Young 2008; Hallsworth & Young 2010) present a direct challenge to the dominant 'gang talk' discourse. As a body of work they track political concerns about the deviant behaviour of young people and contest the notion that gangs are the key driver of urban violence. Young's work sought to contextualise violence by inner city youth identified as 'gang members' and to illustrate how perennial fears about anti-social youth have transmogrified into a discourse in which gangs are held to be central to urban violence but are inadequately conceptualised, with significant results for both understanding and social policy.

Hallsworth and Young (2004, 2008) drew attention to the problematic idea that US-style gangs had made a wholesale, transatlantic crossing into Britain. One reason for this stance was the limited evidential base upon which such claims were made. Several studies had sought to quantify the level of gang membership in the UK and the nature of offending by gang members (Stelfox 1998; Bullock & Tilly 2002; Shropshire & McFarquhar 2002; Bennett & Holloway 2004; Sharpe et al 2006; Communities that Care 2005; Smith & Bradshaw 2005) but as a body of work these suffered from what Field (2009) terms ‘criterion validity’ in so far as each study conceptualised and operationalised gangs differently and thus they were measuring different things. Additionally, the quantitative basis from which claims of an increase were made was equally questionable since, unlike the US, Britain had no baseline measure from which to assert a rise in such groups. Indeed, there was little consensus on how many gang groups existed. In the absence of a coherent definition of the gang in Britain or a robust empirical base to illustrate a rise in gangs or gang-related offending, Young asserted that the ‘gangland Britain thesis’ was founded upon multiplicitous conceptions of ‘gang’ groups which did not take into account the complex ecology of urban street life and the social construction of violence (Hallsworth & Young 2008).

Young’s sceptical position has attracted criticism from some sections of the criminological fraternity. For example, John Pitts accuses ‘left idealists’ (his term for scholars such as Hallsworth and Young) of engaging in “futile squabbles over definitions, stubbornly denying the existence of gangs and underestimating the impact of gang violence” (Pitts 2012:27). Quite how Pitts, and other critics, came to these conclusions is perplexing since Hallsworth and Young have, from the outset,

acknowledged the existence of gangs; indeed they were the authors of a heuristic model of urban street-based groups for the Metropolitan Police Service which included a definition of street gangs (see Hallsworth & Young 2006, 2010), and was based on an appreciation of the real violence that emerges within street contexts, a fact which appears to have been forgotten in the hubbub about and fixation upon the gang.

Young's articles/chapters that focus on the gang in fact tell a cautionary tale, a warning against the over-application of particular labels to define and/or describe youth violence. This position does not underestimate the very real violence that occurs amongst young people but points to the implications of overstating the significance of the gang; Young's rejection of 'gang talk' is on methodological and epistemological grounds, not ideological ones. A core theme running through these articles is to challenge the 'added value' of adopting the term 'gang' to conceptualise youth crime and violence. As a US construct the term 'gang' is not neutral; it is replete with racial connotations and laden with stereotypical connotations relating to the urban underclass (especially minority youth) which obscure the complexity of youth crime and violence, alienate minority youngsters, misrepresent or overstate the danger these youngsters pose to wider society (see Aldridge et al 2008) and contribute to the construction of the gang, and its members, as the new *public enemy*.

Overall, the papers illustrate the tenuous link between rising 'gang', gun and knife crime' and violence amongst young people more generally and expose the lack of neutrality in the discourse on the gang as a signifier of crime and violence. The paper pointed out these epistemological flaws and challenged the evidential basis upon

which the ‘gang’ discourse was raised and pointed to the disjunction between political rhetoric about gang violence and the actual existence of it amongst young people. The articles attempted to expose the view of the gang as a BME problem signifying a ‘transcendental evil and the monstrous other of the foreign object’ (Hallsworth & Young 2010) which stoked perennial fears about young BME men and increasingly young women. The papers ultimately take issue with the ‘othering’ of individuals that occurs within the paradigm of objectivism and the punitive initiatives that follow from the objectification of young black and ethnic minority males as intrinsically violent. The paper concluded by suggesting that the de-contextualised ‘gang talk’ by ‘gang talkers’ was doing harm to disenfranchised, structurally oppressed young people from the black and minority ethnic (BME) community. Essentially, the articles tracked how the perception of young offenders as ‘youth at risk’ in need of guidance and mentoring (Newburn & Shiner 2005) had metamorphosed into ‘gang members’ requiring ever more punitive responses.

2.3 ‘Where are the girls at?’ – Girls and gangs in Britain

Research on gangs typically involves men as academics and research participants. Until relatively recently the experience of girls and women had been ignored, downplayed or overlooked in an exclusively male arena where the focus had fixed firmly on the adolescent male experience and the analysis of that experience filtered through an academic male gaze (Letherby 2003). In this early literature girl gangsters were either portrayed as sexual chattel (something the boys fight over) or maladjusted, violent ‘tomboys’ or sex toys or all of these. In other words, they are ‘nuts’ or ‘sluts’.

However, a substantial body of feminist research, principally from North America, has contributed significantly to the discourse on girls' involvement in street-based groups covering a range of issues such as the nature of girl gangs and the distinct experiences of women in all-female and mixed-gender and/or auxiliary groups (Campbell 1984, 1990; Taylor 1993), female participation in crime and delinquency (Miller 2001; Fleisher 2000; Chesney-Lind & Hagedorn 1991), gender dynamics and how this shapes and frames the experience of male and female gang members (Miller 2001, 2008; Messerschmidt 2002; Joe-Laider & Hunt 2001) and gender victimisation including sexual abuse and violence (Miller 2001; Joe-Laider & Hunt 2001).

As a body of work this research suggests that the gender composition of gang groups radically influences the experience of girls and young women with females involved in single-gender groups experiencing more autonomy and control than girls and young women in mixed-gender or male-dominated groups, with the latter experiencing higher level of victimisation and abuse. Girls and young women are found to join gangs for a variety of reasons which include: living in close proximity to gang groups (Moore 1991; Miller 2001); to liberate themselves from the harsh drudgery of the life of girls in poor urban neighbourhoods (Campbell 1981; Nurge 2003), to escape victimisation within the home and in the wider community and find a protective network (Moore 1991); and/or for empowerment and self-affirmation (Campbell 1981; Nurge 2003, Moore 1991; Miller 2001). Research on girls' involvement in gangs has also shed light on the nature of female offending in violent crime. Whilst they do engage in more crime and delinquency than non-gang-involved girls (Esbensen & Winfree 1998), they do not do so with the same frequency as boys and young men (Chesney-Lind 1997) or severity as males within the groups. They are

often excluded from more serious violent crime by the males or use their femininity to extract themselves from trouble (Joe-Laider & Hunt 2001).

North American research dominates the knowledge base on female gang members shaping and framing international conceptions of girl involvement in street-based groups. Comparably, there is precious little research emanating from Britain and, with the exception of research by Archer (1995) and Batchelor (2001, 2005) and Young et al, (2007, 2009), few studies have explored the nature of girls' associations with street groups and the nature of female violence.

Young's empirical research (Young et al 2007, 2009, 2011) represents some of the few contemporary studies on girls and the gang in Britain (Batchelor's research focused on victimisation and agency amongst girls in Scotland and Archer's research on gangs is restricted to an analysis of media reports). This research sought to explore street groups from the perspective of female participants, thus breaking with the androcentric tradition of gang research (i.e. male researchers interviewing males about their own experiences and also those of women). In this regard then, the report sought to expose the epistemological shortcomings within the gang discourse by focussing specifically on female experiences and moving beyond the narratives of boys and men who shape and frame females within their own narratives and according to normative values they hold about girls and young women. The research examined whether the female gangster, as conceptualised in North American research, existed in Britain. Moreover, it sought to compare the motivational drivers and existential realities of gang-associated young women in the US and UK more broadly. Young et al (2007) found girls did not belong to gangs in the traditional

sense but to single and mixed gender friendship groups with similar life trajectories. Girls engaged in relatively few violent acts and, when they did, the violence was often expressive rather than instrumental. The study exposed the expressive violence of girls, often fuelled by a toxic mix of alcohol and jealousy, and some of the sexual violence and exploitation against girls and young women. The young women's violent altercations were largely with other girls and rarely involved the use of guns or other weaponry including knives.

Young's later work extended the debate on girl gangsters, seeking to deconstruct the dominant discourse around female involvement in the 'gang' and gang-related offending, particularly in relation to violent criminality, in response to an increasingly pathological portrayal of girls and young women within political and social discourse. These papers challenged the pathologisation of girls and young women as depicted in media, political and some academic discourse (see Bracchi 2008; Pitts 2007; Centre for Social Justice 2009). By deconstructing the logic of 'gang talk' Young (2009, 2011) set about decoding the stereotypical myths about girls and young women affiliated to street-based groups and who engage in crime. She challenged common-sense representations of 'girl-gangsters' as gender-deviant girls and young women as 'natural born killers' (Flintoff 2006) and deadlier than their male counterparts (Smith 2005), commonly manifest in media, academic and political literature (see Bracchi 2008; Centre for Social Justice 2009). By drawing upon the experiences of girls and young women these papers engage directly with young women's experience in 'gangs' and challenge the pervasive view of girls and young women as uber-aggressive or as victims, as presented in other academic work (Firmin 2010; Pitts 2008). The papers have been well received and have contributed to the ongoing

debate on the existence of female ‘gangsters’ and their behaviour. ‘Shemale gangsters in the UK’ is cited as amongst the top 50 most read articles published in *Youth Justice: An International Journal*.

2.4 The production of crime and violence

At the time of publication, there was rising concern about the emergence of gangs in the UK and the burgeoning gang, gun and knife crime. Several research reports (Sharpe et al 2006; Lemos & Crane 2004) outlined the offending behaviour of youth groups (Sharpe et al 2006) and the rationale for carrying or using weapons (Lemos & Crane 2004) but few studies had concentrated specifically on ‘gang-related’ offending and the use of weapons within this context. The policy-focussed research study upon which this report is based attempted to fill in the gaps in knowledge about gangs in the UK and to determine the links between these groups and rising levels of gun and knife crime. Three papers sought to explore the production of violence amongst young people in a street context.

Young et al’s (2007) report on gangs and weapons use amongst young people illustrated the gendered and contextual nature of weapons usage and revealed that young people’s weapons use is largely restricted to young males who, if they carry weapons at all, are more likely to be armed with a knife than a gun. For young men knife carriage was associated with victimisation with a sizable proportion of young people carrying weapons for protection. Young women decried the use of weapons and were much less likely to sanction the carriage or use of weapons.

The study highlighted how offending amongst young people is most commonly associated with peer groups and not gangs. Much of the crime and violence enacted by these groups was expressive (in response to disrespect and 'honour' slights) and instrumental activity (theft, dealing), occurred within a local context and was initiated against themselves (i.e. within the peer group) and rarely involved a stranger. Whilst violence amongst these groups could be serious it rarely involved guns and bladed weapons and was rarely premeditated. The study attempted to counterbalance the rhetorical presentation of young people as consistently 'tooled up', on the rampage and dangerous. The study found evidence of the 'gang' as defined in the literature but these were largely conceived as adult groupings (18+) more aligned with organised crime and the illegal drug market than the group of young offenders under the auspices of the YOS.

Hallsworth and Young's theoretical discussion of the role of silence in the commission of crime (2008) suggests that silence plays a pivotal role in encouraging interpersonal violence at a macro and micro social level. At the time of publication this article represented one of the few criminological articles to address the issue of silence as a variable in crime production. It examined the constitutive role of silence in the aetiology of crime and violence and argued that criminologists have long ignored its influence by focussing too intently on human action; that is, criminology as a discipline has focussed intently on the active perpetration of crime and violence and not on the seeming silence that surrounds it. Introducing the concept of silence as 'the absent presence of crime' the article puts silence centre stage in the analysis of crime and violence and is sensitive to what is not being done or said in the commission of crime and violence rather than concentrating on the violence and

activity in the commission of it. By suggesting silence to be the “absent presence of crime” Hallsworth and Young (2008) mean the silence to be recognised as a constituent part of crime in the way a negative is required to produce a photographic image; the negative is rarely seen or examined as an object of enquiry in and of itself even though the picture would not exist without it.

By way of illustrating this theory the paper maps how techniques of silence performed at the level of the state, by formal social control agents, by bystanders and the victims interact to create barriers against disclosure of criminal activity and violence; to build a wall of silence fosters a culture of complicity that protects the perpetrators and allows for further violent and/or criminal acts. In this sense the paper highlights the interconnectedness of actors and the pervasive nature of silence that filters through society from the wider social structure of the state through to micro-level interactions between individuals. Ultimately, the theoretical premise of the paper is that criminal and violent endeavour is dependent upon silence.

In a similar vein, Young and Hallsworth’s (2011) empirical study of young people living in ‘gang-associated’ areas entitled ‘Children and Young People as Young Victims of Violent Crime and Violent Offenders’ attempts to provide an interactional account of violence in relation to ‘gangs’. However, this chapter frames violence within the context of life ‘on road’ by outlining the constituent features of ‘on road’ and the place that violence has within this environment. The paper outlines the antecedent factors that push or pull young people away from engagement in conventional society towards a disenfranchised social milieu that is ‘on road’ where victimisation or involvement in violence as perpetrators is inevitable. It highlights the

omnipresent nature of violence in the lives of both young men and young women prior to and as a consequence of being 'on road' and points to the performative and instrumental nature of the violence that occurs there. Through the testimonies of young people the chapter demonstrates how the violence that emerges is inextricably linked to a social structure that limits people's possibilities to engage fully in mainstream society, the presentation of a credible identity and the preservation of the integrity of the self. This is so for both young men and young women. Crime and violence by young men is linked to the achievement of a credible masculinity in a context where their ability to achieve success via legitimate means is blocked (Merton 1938; Messerschmidt 1993) and this chapter illustrates how young men perceived their early life environments as hostile, lacking and exclusionary. It demonstrates how young men utilise violence to defend against status challenges and to maintain respect which, according to Sennett (2009), is difficult to achieve in neighbourhoods riddled with inequalities. Young women's violence is similarly linked to social conditions and notions of respect. According to Joe-Laider and Hunt, girls' violence is connected to accomplishing a 'bad girl' femininity that enables a young woman to defend her reputation as respectable (Joe-Laider & Hunt 2001: 676). In this chapter some elements of this theory emerge within the context of female violence as it relates to protecting individual personal integrity and that of other girls and young women.

There are of course other reasons for resorting to violence and this chapter illustrates how violence is used, instrumentally, to lay claim over a predefined territory ('reppin the endz'), in the commission of street robbery and as a regulatory tool by those who have little or no access to formal social control mechanisms such as the criminal

justice system. The instrumental violence identified in this chapter is a gendered practice associated with young men rather than young women. The chapter articulates levels of violence ‘on road’ along a spectrum; at one end is the commonly experienced low-level interpersonal violence characterised by ‘playfights’, followed by bullying which was in large part expressive, anomic and de-ritualised, to murder, experienced less frequently and most likely by those individuals deeply immersed in ‘road life’. Replicating some of Decker and Van Winkle’s (1996) findings on violence amongst LA based gangs, the chapter highlighted the ‘schismogenic’ nature of violence that occurs at the extreme end of the spectrum where unremitting retaliatory action culminates, albeit with relative rarity amongst the cohort within which this chapter is framed, in death.

The chapter ends by considering the brutalising effect of violence and the socio-psychological consequences that can occur as a result of individuals being subject to sustained levels of violence. Drawing again on the symbolic interactionist perspective, but also with reference to Batmanghelidjh’s (2007) neurological work and Gilligan’s shame-violence thesis (1996), this chapter demonstrates the deleterious impact of violence on concept of self and the psychological impact of consistent exposure to violence. It illustrates how some individuals, exposed to substantial levels of violence, formulate a violent self-image derived in interaction with a different generalised other from other people ‘on road’ and internalise a ‘survivalist mentality’ that provides support for acting violently in the brutalising culture, at the sharp end of being ‘on road’.

2.5 'It's a family affair?' - Gangs and the family

As highlighted elsewhere in this overview, tackling anti-social behaviour and crime topped the political agenda of New Labour when they came to power in 1997. New Labour's stance against anti-social behaviour manifested in a complete restructuring of the youth justice system and the implementation of tough policies against young people (Goldson 2005) that were premised upon managing risk and, according to Muncie (2002), responsabilising working class young people and their families. This new managerialist agenda resulted in ever increasing state intrusion into working class family life and interventionist policies designed to correct the 'parenting deficit' thought to underpin youth crime (Goldson & Jamieson 2002) Initiatives such as the Parenting Order (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998) were implemented to 'assist' families experiencing difficulty in socialising or controlling their young people. The 'carrot and stick' approach of sanction and support that underpins the Parenting Order rests, arguably, on the assumptions that families are not only failing to instil order, moral decency and responsibility in their children but are also transmitting anti-social norms and values (Goldson & Jamieson 2002).

This view of the family has historical precedence. It is not just the predilection of New Labour to correlate family pathology with deviance and offending and the tough, neo-liberal initiatives did not cease with a change in government in 2010. Successive governments have implemented a new wave of parenting initiatives specifically designed to target 'troubled' families (e.g. Family Intervention Projects) thought responsible for increasing levels of juvenile offending, anti-social behaviour and criminality. Indeed, a specific remit of Family Intervention Projects is to intervene in the lives of the most 'highly problematic families' and offer them the help and

incentives required to become decent members of the community (Home Office 2011). Arguably, the commitment to tackling anti-social behaviour via the family has seen the conflation of two political discourses: the ‘troubled families’ agenda’ and the ‘tackling gang-related offending’ agenda. Indeed, in his analysis of the August riots in 2011, David Cameron consolidated the two when he said that gangs were “incredibly violent groups composed of young boys mainly from dysfunctional homes” (Cameron 2011: Column 1054). Government reports such as ‘Ending Gang and Youth Violence’ (HM Government 2011) pledge a commitment to “turn around 120,000 troubled families” in the fight against gang and gang-related violence.

Two outputs (Young et al 2013, 2014) sought to contextualise the debate on gangs and families. Both emanate from empirical research (commissioned by Catch22) to, first, inform the development of a specialist support programme for gang members and their families (known as The Dawes Unit) and, secondly, to contribute to the national ‘Ending Gang and Youth Violence’ agenda. Both critically engage with debates that unreservedly connect the family to gang formation, membership and criminality. Young et al’s (2014) article entitled ‘A Question of Family? Youth and Gangs’ provides a critical review of existing US and UK academic research on juvenile delinquency and gang membership. It is conjectural in tone and asks if, and in what way, the family is implicated in the rise of the ‘gang’ and ‘gang-related’ violence. The article unpicks the evidential basis for the claim that the family is the principal causal driver for gang formation, membership and criminality. It reveals multiple explanations for gang formation, membership and criminality that include, but extend beyond, pathology within the family. Within the substantial body of literature a number of studies point to familial antecedents showing how family

structure, weak parent-child relationship, inadequate parental supervision and/or control and erratic parenting style is associated with juvenile delinquency but there is also compelling evidence pointing to variables external to the family located in wider social structure. For example, the paper cites studies that show factors such as social disorganisation, social deprivation and exclusion, lack of employment opportunities or high levels of unemployment amongst adult males, the presence of an illegal drug economy and individual characteristics such as a 'defiant personality' (Jankowski 1999) which are also correlates for gang membership. Moreover, these factors are thought to interfere with the ability of the family to operate effectively as an informal social control mechanism for young people.

In sum, the article demonstrates the complex nature of gang membership and criminality and the interconnectedness of social, familial and individual variables, taking the debate beyond the responsabilising of the 'trouble family' agenda to consider macro-structural conditions that negatively impact upon the micro-social institution that is the family. The article registers disquiet with the 'troubled families' label attached to the families of 'gang members' and suggests that a substantial number of such families are best understood as 'beleaguered families'.

The second publication 'The Role of the Family in Facilitating Gang Membership, Criminality and Exit' (Young et al 2014) is a peer-reviewed practitioner report that examined whether the family was complicit in gang membership and criminality and desistance. The empirical study, which is one of the few to examine the role of the family in relation to gang membership in Britain, includes the literature review illustrated above and considers the following: a) family as an influential factor in the

formation of gang groups and group membership, b) that conspiratorial influence, or tacit endorsement of criminality, by family members can encourage gang-related offending; and c) the role of the family in desistance from gang life. This qualitative, multi-site study, drew upon the experiences of young people (53), family members (22) and practitioners (17) with direct experience of gangs and offered a nuanced picture of gang membership and criminality and exit. The research illustrated the difficult context in which children and families operate, highlighting the delicate balance between structure and agency in relation to gang membership, criminality and exit. It revealed a complex mixture of factors related, but not exclusive, to the family. It also identified a difference in perspectives related to gang membership, criminality and exit that were dependent upon whether the respondent was a gang member, family member or practitioner.

The research found that family members and young people were more likely to identify poor social conditions as antecedents to gang membership than practitioners. Many families lived in the most disadvantaged areas and experienced complicated inter-related issues like poverty, familial disruption (divorce, separation, imprisonment), violence and conflict (domestic violence and abuse), neglect and substance misuse that undermined and compromised relations within the family, weakened informal social control mechanisms and stunted the material and social progression of young people. The mothers interviewed felt unable to control their teenage children and were often unaware of the level to which their children were involved. They experienced stress, frustration, sorrow and shame as a consequence. The young people themselves clashed with authority and had poor educational experiences that limited future employment opportunities; they felt alienated and

frustrated, all of which influenced their involvement in gang groups. However, few young people implicated the family as instrumental in influencing their involvement. Indeed, in the main, the young people believed their family to be largely ignorant of the extent to which they were involved and likely to make attempts to divert them away from being ‘on road’ and offending.

The practitioners, whose engagement with their clients is likely to be influenced by a time-limited, target driven work culture that is slanted towards risk assessment and individual accountability (Jones 2002; Fitzgibbon 2011), believed that familial factors were, in large part, key antecedents for gang membership. Their perspective was that families, and gang members, were in denial about their role in facilitating gang membership and were, to a small but qualitatively significant level, complicit in the offending behaviour of young people. Practitioners saw parents benefiting either directly (through money/goods) or indirectly (from the young person’s independence) from their relatives’ involvement in gangs. Practitioners saw participation of the parent as integral to helping youngsters get off the road and argued that it was important to work with them on their communication and parenting skills.

Conversely, gang members or family members placed little emphasis on family, and there was an overall general reluctance to attribute any blame for gang membership to parents or other family members. Amongst this cohort variables leading to gang membership were more readily associated with socio-economic factors external to the family (e.g. deprivation, unemployment, hostile environment, lack of youth facilities, independence etc.) and/or a more permissive youth culture.

What the research revealed is a juxtaposition of different perspectives on the familial role in relation to the 'gang' problem and how it is constructed. It exposed the issues of knowledge production and 'truth' in relation to the gang and raised questions about what to do and how to tackle the problem. The papers exposed how the differences of perspective may interfere with a proposed intervention strategy if practitioners view the issue of the gang as principally a problem of the family whilst the young people and family members see gang membership as a mixture of social factors and [limited] individual decisions.

The report calls into question the efficiency of family intervention programmes if family members and young people attached to gangs do not view the family as a site of contention in the gang problem. There is an issue here with engagement. The report exposed a more complex picture than is otherwise suggested. For example, parents are not always knowing subjects; young people have agency and knowingly withhold information about behaviour. Therefore, the potential effectiveness of families as control agents of young people in their teens is questionable, particularly in families with multiple problems. Families have much to lose and little to gain from their youngsters' involvement with gangs and are largely impotent in stopping it after a certain stage. As a body of work on the gang-associated families the above publications have been well received and Young et al (2014) is amongst the top 50 most read articles published in *Youth Justice*.

Part 3: Conclusion and broader impact of my work

Overall this body of work constitutes a coherent contribution to knowledge by developing significant discussions in relation to the mentoring initiative with ‘at risk’ youth, the (re)construction of ‘gangs’ in Britain and their relation to gun and knife crime, the relationship of girls and young women to ‘gang’ formation and life ‘on road’ and the role of families in facilitating ‘gang’ membership, criminality and desistance. It argues for the importance of a methodology of engagement that is attentive to the voices and experiences of respondents. The importance of this is practical as well as theoretical. If politicians embed themselves in a discourse of ‘anti-social, yobbish feral kids’, ‘troubled families’ and ‘pathological gangsters’ then policy will engender a hardening of public opinion and foster an intolerant attitude towards disadvantaged communities as well as a call for ever more punitive responses to youthful offending as recent criminal justice practice shows (consider, for example, the introduction of the Anti-Social Behaviour Contracts, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Gang Injunctions, Gang Call-Ins, Joint Enterprise, the Safe and Secure police strategy, Gang Matrix, Operation Shield). The significance of critique through attentive engagement is that it can contribute to a critical discursive reconstruction which better grasps the needs and experiences of young people and proceeds from these, as well as the requirement for an ordered society, to produce more effective social and political policy.

As a body of work these outputs have influenced theory and practice. Hallsworth and Young’s (2006) heuristic typology of street collectives was integrated into policy and practice and for a number of years and the definition of the ‘gang’ was utilised by the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Probation Service and the Home Office.

Indeed, the current Home Office definition builds upon this initial definition. Young et al's (2013, 2014) work on the role of the family has contributed to the national agenda on working with 'gang'-related families (Catch22 2014; Sackville 2014).

The peer-reviewed articles and book chapters generated from the empirical work have contributed to academic debate. To date, they have received 270 citations and 547 publication views (ResearchGate 2015). The book generated from the mentoring study (Shiner et al 2005) has been well received; Hallsworth and Young's (2008b) article 'Gang Talk and Gang Talkers: a Critique' is one of the fifty most cited journal articles published in *Crime, Media, Culture*. My article 'Girls and Gangs: "She-male" gangsters in the UK?' (2009) is also widely read and is one of the fifty most read articles published in *Youth Justice: an International Journal*. The article 'Getting Real about Gangs' (Hallsworth & Young 2004) has received 44 citations. My work for the Youth Justice Board culminated in the publication of 'Groups, Gangs and Weapons: a Report for the Youth Justice Board of England and Wales' (Young et al 2007) and has received 30 citations. The article 'Crime and Silence: "Death and Life are in the Power of the Tongue"' (Hallsworth & Young 2008) has been cited 17 times and translated into Spanish. Young et al's practitioner report entitled 'The Role of the Family in Facilitating Gang Membership, Criminality and Exit' (2013) has informed the development of community-based projects seeking to work with 'gang' members and their families. As a contribution to knowledge, then, this body of work has both stimulated academic debate and informed policy and the practice of practitioners and so it is located within the strong tradition of critical criminological work which seeks to change the social world in positive ways as well as to contribute to theory and illuminate matters of academic concern.

4. References

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5. Papers as Published