

"We're not a gang, we're a group"

A micro-ethnographic study on the roles of football, religion and community in the work with youth delinquency in Panama City

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Gracias por ayudarme a completar el estudio
Thank you for helping me complete this study
Tack för att du hjälpt mig att genomföra studien

Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to understand what, according to social workers and people with criminal backgrounds in Panama, contributes to change in criminal behaviour amongst delinquent youth with focusing on projects using football, religion and community as changing means. The empirical data was collected according to micro-ethnographical requirements and consisted of twelve hours of observations, seven interviews and additional information through web pages and brochures. The results were analysed through the theories of Social Identity by Richard Jenkins and the Symbolic construction of Community by Anthony P. Cohen. The study showed on a number of important aspects that contribute to change with football, religion and community as primary means. Factors such as a sense of belonging in a setting of relationships, an identity through self-esteem and social recognition and leaders with 'the right kind of experience' were identified as contributors to change. The roles that football, religion and community play generate different consequences depending on what level they are analysed at. The study also highlights the tensions between pro social activities and anti social ones, such as gang memberships, - the social phenomena and what is appealing with the different groups are not very different, it is built upon the same foundations.

Key words: Youth delinquency, Change, Identity, Symbolic constructions, Collectives

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1 Introduction

Juvenile delinquency. Youth crime. Illegal behaviour by minors. Youth crime, as one dimension of the general crime problem, is a well-known social issue worldwide and social forces causing it are identified. Discovered riskfaktors are among other things social marginalisation and exclusion, unemployment, inadequate or no education, dysfunctional families and difficult living conditions (Sandahl, 2014). Specific contexts are also important in the understanding of youth crime (Rodgers & Gareth, 2009) - it may appear different and it might be treated different in different societies and different times. This micro-ethnographic study investigates how change can be created amongst delinquent youth.

Youth delinquency is an increasing problem in Central America and, even though it can take many forms, regional youth gang phenomena is presented as the most severe issue. Although gangs are a significant contemporary concern in the region they can also be seen as a profoundly misunderstood group due to the fact that "youth" and "violence" are ambiguous and often reduced categories (Rodgers & Gareth, 2009). Juvenile delinquency is more than a youth gang phenomena but the gangs are in a larger range considered by wider society to be violent and criminal by nature. Other forms of illegal and violent behaviour are generally not perceived as normative; rather induced by temporary influences, such as alcohol (Ibid.). This is interesting from different points of views; Youth violence has to be understood in both separate and combined categories and as a phenomena which is looked at differently if it is performed by groups or individuals. Regarding practical social work this issue is interesting on an operating level. The methods for working with criminal youths are many and there is well established research. Sandahl (2014) presents how the school can be a protective factor against youth crime and Nichols (2007) explains how sport can create environments that dissuade young people from crime. If both education and sports are popular and well functioning preventive methods, what does it really consist of? Why does it work?

Rodgers & Gareth (2009) present an overview and an agenda for research focusing on the latin american context. They also argue that particular types of policies are the key to understanding the increasing nature of youth violence in Central America (Ibid.). In relation to latin american gang activities it is interesting to highlight the strong links that some of these gangs' have to their local communities. This sometimes means that these communities are protected from their violence or criminality toward the local population and in some of these countries, it also means that these gangs maintain a form of social order (Rodgers, 1999).

Panama is a country in the middle Americas where organized crime and gang mentality is one of the larger issues in the area and the main preventive work against crime is led by churches and religiously founded organizations or social service organizations with some degree of religious affiliation (Salas-Wright, 2013). According to Munyo (2013) the reason for the increase in juvenile crime in the central american region is that the gains from crime has outgrown the rewards from legal activities. In line with improving the quality of education as one the most effective ways against the increasing juvenile delinquency some of the countries are considering reducing the age of criminal responsibility and imposing the heavy hand of the adult criminal justice system. The same report also states that the increase in juvenile crime can be interpreted as a rationale response to changes in the incentives and that youths choose between legal and criminal activities (Ibid.). As illustrated, the issue can be discussed on many levels. How much influence does the youth have over its choices? How strong are the community allegiances?

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to understand what, according to social workers and people with criminal backgrounds in Panama, contributes to change in criminal behaviour amongst delinquent youth with focusing on projects using football, religion and community as changing means.

1.2 Research Questions

- What role does football play in the work with youth delinquency?
- What role does religion play in the work with youth delinquency?
- What role can the community play in the work with youth delinquency?

2 Previous Research

This chapter presents already existing research on the matter of understanding youth criminality and how to work with it. The intention is to give an understanding of the subject, and to make this clear the different themes of chosen research are presented separately. Another intention is to show how this knowledge is useful for understanding my own empirics. A third intention, and maybe the most important one, is to develop and widen this existing knowledge with applying my own findings on it. The first article is about understanding youth street gangs and is written by the certified gang specialist Akiyama (2012). The second sub-chapter presents the role of football in the personal

development of socio-economically disadvantaged individuals (Cowan, 2014) and the third section highlights associations between religiosity and youth violence (Salas-Wright, 2013).

2.1 Understanding Youth Street Gangs

A youth gang is a formal or informal ongoing organization, association or group, consisting of at least three members, that associates on a regular basis. They often have identifiable names, hand signs, or symbols. One of the primary objectives of a gang is criminal activity, which differentiates a youth gang from various social groups. Gangs include various types of members, from hard core to wannabes. Depending on their level of commitment, the use of attributes, such as gang-related tattoos, clothing or other types of marketing varies. All members have the potential to be very dangerous but the wannabes are particularly dangerous because of their motivation to be part of a gang. They need to prove that they are committed and dedicated since they are at the bottom of the hierarchy and by performing gang-related crime they prove their commitment (Akiyama, 2012).

The strongest motivational factors for joining a gang are the search for fellowship, identity and recognition, protection or intimidation. The gang is most often a substitute for a family with cohesiveness, closeness and camaraderie. A gang membership allows a level of status which most gang members believe is impossible to achieve outside a gang. Joining a gang can also protect them from what they perceive as a hostile outside world, with support from the other gang members protecting their neighbourhood. Though the reasons can be many the most pervasive motivational factor for joining a youth gang is the sense of belonging to a group that respects them. This feeling of belonging and having a sense of family, a sense of safety, and a sense of identity is so emotionally powerful that many gang members will do anything to become accepted and respected by the gang (Ibid.).

2.2 The Role of Football in Personal Developments

A Phd. thesis written by Cowan (2014) explores the role of football in the lives of disadvantaged individuals and its key findings that explain what contributes to personal development are important in relation to my gathered empirics. Cowan (2014) suggests that organised football programmes are an attractive diversionary activity and a vehicle for positive development for disadvantaged young people. One of the respondents (an earlier socio-economically disadvantaged youth) revealed importance of football at each stage of his life. What is also interesting is the contradictions they

found to these results; sports may also provide opportunities to engage in illegitimate activities such as selling drugs while playing football. In connection to this, the study shows need for social recognition from peers and professionals. Where this recognition is found shows to be flexible, it could be from the team mates as well as from the peers in the gang or from the drug dealers. Furthermore the study shows that mere participation in sporting activities not is sufficient to divert young people away from crime and to promote developmental experiences, but it emphasises on a combination of the opportunity to play football and the satisfaction of the desire to be recognised. This is where support and guidance offered by coaches show to be important in transition from criminal behaviour to more legitimate activities (Ibid.).

Other findings focus on the particular football context and show provision of a meaningful rationale as important. A coach providing this meaningful rationale by explaining how sports activities are important for life goals and transferable skills, can enhance the participants feelings of autonomy and competence. In addition to this the study also shows that a coach who provides clear instructions regarding rules and expectations may enhance attendees' resilience because they then experience feelings of competence. These results express the preposition that positive relationships with caring adult mentors within organised sport programmes are vital for the behaviour and engagement of their participants. It predicts autonomy, competence and relatedness (Cowan, 2014).

2.3 Associations Between Religiosity and Youth Violence

The Latin American contexts are very different in each country but in an attempt to contextualise Panama and understand its cultures following research is presented. Religiosity and spirituality have been found to be an important protective factor for the involvement of violent behaviour amongst youth (Salas-Wright, 2013). This article investigates the direct and mediate associations between religious coping, spirituality and youth violence in El Salvador. It examines the protective effect of religious engagement on gang-involved Salvadoran youth in violent behaviour. Religious conversion has been identified as one of few viable avenues for gang exit and research shows that churches are more common in Central American communities with high rates of gang involvement. Also the majority of social service organisations have some degree of religious affiliation when offering assistance to gang-involved youth. An understanding of these relationships is of great relevance to public health and the well-being of young people across the hemisphere (Ibid).

More than three out of four Salvadoran youth consider religious engagement a "very important" aspect of their lives and development (Salas-Wright, 2013). Elevated levels of religious

coping and spirituality are associated with less antisocial bonding, which, in turn, is associated with lower levels of violent behaviour among high-risk and gang-involved Salvadoran youth. Study findings suggest that religious coping and spirituality are indirectly protective for youth violence among this high-risk population. The emphasis lies on the *mediating* factors since the protective effect of religiosity and spirituality may not be entirely direct in nature. Coupled with the strong direct association between antisocial bond and violence, Salas-Wright's (2013) results suggest that the indirect relationships between religious coping, spirituality, and violence were primarily mediated by antisocial bonding. The study emphasises on the findings that religious coping and spirituality indeed are important factors in relation to violence, but that their association to violence is exclusively via their relationship to social developmental factors (Ibid.).

It is common to study youth crime and its protective factors, it is most often done separately like the research above or done either on a individual, group or societal level. My contribution to the area of research is to highlight the problem using combinations of football and religion together with a community perspective as well as exploring the matter on all three levels.

3 Theoretical Perspectives

Using the following theoretical perspectives as base and framework for analysing my empirics I hope to reach a greater understanding of why people choose to join criminal gangs or other forms of groups. With these perspectives I also hope to understand what could be of importance in the work with preventing such creations or when change on that matter is made. I will be doing this by combining the theory of *Social Identity* (Jenkins, 2014) with the theory of *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Cohen, 2001). The chapter is initiated with a presentation of the theories that is followed with an explanation of their relevance in relation to my empirics.

3.1 Social Identity

According to Jenkins (2014) and his theory about Social Identity the process of identity is what humans use to know who's who and what's what. This process is a multidimensional classification of the humans, both as individuals and as members of collectivities, their world and the places within it. This multidimensional classification, or in other words the process of identity, is a man-created matter and therefore an emotional matter, capable of influencing actions. Identity is also made to matter through power of symbols and ritual experiences (Ibid.). The process of classifying

things or personas and associating and attaching oneself to something is always an act of choice that must be established. This assertion explains why identity is a negotiable and flexible matter of interests, connected to motivation and behaviour. How you identify yourself is influenced by how you define your interests and how others identify you depend on how they define yours and their interests (Ibid.). Basically it says that identity is something that can be altered throughout the course of time when your interests are changed.

Considering capacities to mobilise people (influencing actions); group, collectivity, and organisation identities are powerful forms of identification. The identification process amongst collectivities is one important aspect of Jenkins (2014) theory that plays a big part in understanding my empirics. In sense of symbolism and power collectivities are constituted in objectivities and behavioural norms, shared amongst the members who are convinced that these conceptions are real. This is applicable when wanting to make a change. When the pursuit of shared objectives in line with the wanted change, it is likely to provoke concerns about identity and when someone feels concerns about their identity the will to change grow (Ibid.).

Earlier in this chapter it was stated that identification works on multidimensional levels. Jenkins (2014) states that the individual, the collective and the society are entangled with each other and that their identification only exists within interaction. The individual order is embodied in socially constructed selfhood whereas the interaction order is created through relationships. Further, it also applies an institutional order where we follow established ways of looking at and experiencing things and other people. The multidimensional view provides an important aspect for the understanding of identity. According to Jenkins (2014) these three orders occupy the same space, intersubjectively and physically, and every order implies the other. The theorisation of identification must therefore accommodate the individual, the collective and the society in equal measures (Ibid.).

The theory of Social Identity provides many theoretical concepts and relevant starting points but what I really want to highlight are the following concepts. First of all, identification is a *flexible* and negotiable *process*. Secondly, it *impacts motivation and behaviour*. And last, it works on *multidimensional levels*.

3.2 Symbolic Construction of Community

Cohen's (2001) theory about the symbolic construction of community is also suitable to understand my gathered empirics. The theory captures how community is symbolically constructed as a system

of values, norms and moral codes which provides a sense of identity to its members (Ibid.). To be able to understand it sufficiently we need to take it apart and understand some of its foundations; *symbols, community, boundary* and *rituals*.

To begin with it is necessary to gain understanding of the concept *symbols*, what they are and what they represent. Cohen (2001) presents symbols as being dynamic and continuously in process, giving us the capacity to make meaning of and attach meaning to social behaviour and making sense of what we observe. He continues with emphasising on that, when employing symbols the meaning is rather supplied by the person using the symbol than pre determined with a static meaning (Ibid.). Symbols are shared by those using the same language or participating in the same symbolic behaviour, but due to the dynamic behaviour of the symbols the meaning is not necessarily shared by the participants using them. The more elusive the meaning, the more ambiguous the symbolism. This characteristic is what makes symbols malleable and what explains the fact that symbols can be made to fit the circumstances of the individual. Most symbols can only be expressed by ideas and do not take either visual nor physical form. This contributes to making the meaning even more elusive and is also the reason why symbols are effective (Ibid.).

Another important concept in Cohen's (2001) theory about symbolic construction of community is *community*. Community is defined as the arena where people acquire their most substantial and fundamental experience of social life outside the family. It is where they acquire culture, practice how to 'be social' and learn the meaning of kinship. Culture and community is created and continuously recreated by people through social interaction. Social interaction is directly connected to the transaction of meanings as well as the individual's interpretation of that interaction. The community is where people acquire symbols that equip them with the knowledge necessary to interact and understand each other (Ibid.). The above mentioned concept concludes that community itself and everything within it has a symbolic dimension, constructed by people.

In the theory of symbolic construction of community the concept of *boundary* and the meaning people decide to assign community boundary is of importance. Cohen (2001) states that the reality and efficacy of the community and its boundaries depend upon its symbolic construction and embellishment. Contents of different categories can be so unclear that they only really exist in terms of symbolic boundaries distinguishing one category from another. Within these boundaries, people are wanting to be equal which also results in the community expressing its difference from those elsewhere, leading to division between different communities (Ibid.). Communities often import structural forms across their boundaries but infuse them with their own meanings to serve

their own symbolic purposes. The symbolic expression and affirmation of boundary heightens people's awareness of and sensitivity to their own community but also the community of others. This is explained by people becoming aware of their culture only when encountered with other cultures, achieving awareness of other ways of doing things or merely discovering contradictions to their own culture. Such awareness is necessary for the valuing of culture and community.

Cohen (2001) also adds the concept of *rituals* in order to understand his theory. Rituals confirm and strengthen social identity, people's senses and social location: they are important means through which people experience community.

What I would argue is one core element in Cohen's (2001) theorisations is the fact that interpretations of community and boundaries are not random. They are made within the terms of characteristics of a given society and influenced by its language and traditions of belief and ideology. These interpretations are responsive to the circumstances of interaction where symbols act as its engines (Ibid.).

3.3 My Use and Combination of Presented Theories

In the section above I hope to have presented how the theoretical concepts work, what they are constituted of and how both are relevant in relation to my study. What I now would like to add is how these two theories and its concepts are relevant to each other and in fact necessary to use in combination to understand my empirics. As a start, when Jenkins (2014) argues that a collectivity is a powerful matter even though it is not an actual entity he implies a symbolic meaning to the matter. Regarding Cohen's (2001) theory, one product of the symbolically constructed community is identity. When talking about boundaries and distinguishing one community from another he encapsulates the identities of those communities. Both theories imply similarities and differences, which is a direct product of classifying (or identifying) things or personas. Creating "I's" or "Us's" are constructs of identity constructed in transactions at and across boundaries (Jenkins, 2014).

When starting my research I had no specific theories in mind but a way in, I understood that being someone, becoming someone and belonging somewhere were important aspects in the stories told by my respondents. I thought that both identity and symbolism could be useful to understand my empirics, and since both theories uses foundations of the other I decided that they needed to be combined.

4 Method

My thesis has been conducted as a micro ethnographic study through observations and interviews. This means that I have been focusing on a certain aspect of a theme while being limited to a shorter period of time (Bryman, 2011). Since my focus lies in details of what contributes to change in criminal behaviour and my time for conducting the fieldwork was limited to 8 weeks, I found this method suitable.

4.1 Selection and Access to the Field(s)

The road to finding my respondents was spontaneous, unsystematic and unstructured, demanding both great awareness and flexibility. Advanced planning was never much of an option, it never turned out as expected. My choice of social environments was at first an organization working close to my matter of interest but due to unexpected gatekeepers¹ I had to consider other environments. So, what field do I navigate within and what social environments have I studied?

The research field which I consider that my study belongs within is "Direct and preventive social work with youth delinquency". Regarding the social environments I have divided them into two separate ones but they still apply to the bigger field since they both work towards the same goal. The above mentioned obstacles led me to focus on the importances of *football* and *religion*, and with the respondents somehow being connected to this work in prison I categorised my first social environment as *environment 1* and named it "Prison". *Environment 2* is different (a district) and has a different approach and perspective and is therefore presented separately. The selection of respondents has been due to their professional roles or their personal experiences. The respondents are people from different professions, but with experience of working with criminal youths in a way I found relevant for social work, or people with their own experience of delinquent times. I decided to include both professionals and beneficiaries to get a wider perspective of the subject. More precisely my chosen environments and respondents are following:

¹ A person who helps or prevents you from getting access to the field (Bryman, 2011)

Environment 1: Prison

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Coach G | A football coach with great experience in working with criminal youth, using football as a tool to contribute to personal development and change. |
| The football players | A group of eight inmates who participated in a football tournament between prisons, whom I interviewed to understand their views on the tournament. |
| The tournament initiator | An ex-inmate who during his time in prison got the idea of creating the football tournament. |
| Pastor | A man who during his time in prison met God, became a pastor and decided to continue God's work inside and outside of prisons. |

**Environment 2:
The Old City**

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| The guides | Ex-gang members who left their criminal paths behind, joined a local and social venture club, and started to host guided tours through their former gang territories, the development of the district and their personal changes. |
| The entrepreneur | A lawyer by training who steered his career into restoring buildings and creating businesses in The Old City. |
| The outreach worker | A social worker who I followed out on the streets and interviewed with the purpose to get to know one of his areas of expertise; preventive field work. |

Just working with one social environment would have provided a better insight and a certain continuity which had been practical since it takes time to get to know the environment, establish the right contacts and blend in (Svensson & Ahrne, 2011). In search of possible environments and completely unexpected and interesting ones were presented I decided to explore them all. That the fields in some aspects are very different from each other is not something I consider limiting, rather a chance to find important similarities and differences in ways of working in a broad field of research.

To find the participants and the different environments snowball sampling was used, a process of selection where scientist use already established and relevant contacts from the field to find cases or individuals with the features of interest (Bryman, 2011). Simply put, I let people in the field point towards others I could contact. Snowball sampling as a method has its pros and cons, Bryman (2011) puts it this way:

Snowball sampling is in many ways comfortable and convenient but it is not in any way random and it is unlikely that the sample would be representative for an entire population. Though, on its behalf, it is

a very suitable method when there is no framework of the population from which the most representable samples can be chosen freely (Bryman, 2011:196).

With being completely new to the field, with zero knowledge about its logics, and lacking the knowledge to be able to completely on my own identify the characteristics of possible respondents and cases, I found myself in just that situation. By using snowball sampling to find my respondents, researching was limited to a specific network even though I could have been interested in a bigger domain (Bryman, 2011). To get around that I tried to find my way to other networks and took opportunities to create new contacts when given to me. That strategy generated fixed points to orient by and further interactions with the respondents later into the process gave me the possibility to specify my empirics even more.

But actually, snowball sampling wasn't everything. To find the one who came to be one of my most important respondents, "Coach G", was completely by luck. Or at least, he was not found as the method requests by relevant and established contacts in the field (Ibid.), he was found thanks to friends. "Coach G" then came to act as my gatekeeper, with his help I got access to the rest of the respondents in environment 1. That I heard of environment 2 was also thanks to acquaintances and with some help from google I found the guided tour and got the chance to explain my purpose when buying a ticket to participate.

4.2 Course of Action

I chose to work in a way that Aspers (2007) calls complete empiricism which is combining different empirical sources and methods to better understand a phenomena. I combined interviews with observations to be able to also use what is not said with words as empirics. This choice of method permitted me a necessary flexibility in the process of gathering empirics. I could, with an advantage, adapt my design of research in relation to what was happening during my fieldwork. Time spent out on the field could overlap with the time spent analysing the empirical material, conducting interviews or gathering a wider understanding of the context (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). My material consists of:

| The observations | Location | Lenght |
|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Outreach work | The Old City + Suburbs | 8 hours |
| The guided tour | The Old City | 3 hours |
| The football tournament | By video | 1 hour |
| Preaching sessions | By video | 15 minutes |
| The interviews | Location | Lenght |
| Coach G | Café | 1 hour |
| The football players (8) | Prison | 1 hour |
| Pastor | Church | 1 hour |
| The tournament initiator | Apartment | 30 minutes |
| The guides (2) | The Old City | 30 minutes |
| The entrepreneur | By email | |
| The outreach worker | Office | 1 hour |

These methods have been combined with **secondary materials**; information through brochures and the official web pages of the specific projects or organisations

I understand that the techniques and the number of sources might seem wide and since these methods also require different analysis and transcription approaches an explanation of how they fit inside the same study is required. As stated earlier both environments cover ways of working with youth criminality and as I will illustrate later they all have many focal points. Additionally, the interviews complement the observations and vice versa and the secondary materials enrich the primary sources.

4.2.1 Observations

My observed material consists of both participatory and non-participatory observations, with a total of 12 hours and 15 minutes observations through 4 sessions. When out on the field, I was working with open observations which entails that the respondents always were informed of the study and my intentions (Lalander, 2011). What is important to consider is the division between open and hidden observations, which is not obvious when it comes to ethnographic studies (Bryman, 2011). I have not been conducting directly hidden observations but it is still important to take the matter into discussion. The intentions with the research have been completely open in relation to the

respondents. Everyone of them has been treated in senses respecting the ethical principles (see discussion further down) and they have taken part of the information letter (Appendix 1) sent out and consented to my participation. But others, for example the youth that these professionals work with, has not been completely informed of my intentions. It has not been necessary nor possible, that would have interrupted the natural relations between the professionals and their youths (Aspers, 2007). Instead, when asked, I was presented by the professionals with their own chosen words, such as for example "she is here studying different social organisations, amongst ours, to get to know their working methods".

4.2.2 Interviews

The interviews were also conducted with an open and inductive approach. I knew my field of interest but that was about it. Because of that open unstructured interviews with the logics of a conversation (Aspers, 2007) were conducted since a method like that works well with an inductive approach. I only steered the interviews with different themes depending on the respondents experience and expertise. The locations for interviews have always been chosen by the respondents. A number of seven interviews, with a total time of 5 hours and 15 participants were conducted. One of the interviews was conducted with a group of 8 inmates in prison. The theme of the interview was mainly the meaning of their annual football tournament. One interview was held with a football coach regarding the same topics as with the inmates as well as other projects of his and the meaning of football in general in work with delinquency. Those interviews led me to speak with the founder of the football tournament which led me to conduct an interview with a Pastor working in these prisons as well as with the football tournament. Two final interviews were done with two guides from the tour I took and an entrepreneur in connection with them as additional information to the observations of the tour. The interviews could be very different, in some occasions it was a lot like a conversation and in others I was almost consistently quiet just listening.

One important impact to consider when it comes to interviews is that these interviews does not entirely reflect the truth in all aspects (Aspers, 2007). The respondents chose what to answer and what information to share. It is not to say that what was received was untrue, rather affected by my presence and the respondents feelings regarding these interviews. In relation to these aspects the observations were specifically useful.

4.2.3 Material and Coding

All interviews and observations were conducted in Spanish, except for one that was conducted in English. I did not feel that the language was a barrier for my understandings and I believe that my translations really capture the meanings. I chose to not record any of the interviews, on some occasions it was not allowed and on others I did not find it suitable. During some of the interviews and observations I took notes, when that was not an option notes were taken as soon as possible afterwards. One disadvantage with not recording nor note down more than key words during the interviews or observations is that details that could have been useful most definitely were lost or forgotten (Aspers, 2007). I chose not to record the interviews or having a notepad always in my hands during the observations in an effort to try to make the situations more natural and for me and the respondents to feel more comfortable. Regarding just mentioned aspects it is important to understand that it makes me as a researcher a big part of creating and affecting my materials whilst collecting and analysing it (Ibid.). If the language barrier or my notes resulted in something I felt had to be cleared the respondents were contacted again. If that was not possible I chose to really consider how to use that material.

I used the margin method (Aspers, 2007) to start the process of coding (categorising and organising the gathered information to understand it better), which is a method in consensus with the methods chosen to gather the information. The margin method implies reading the material and highlighting the parts belonging to a certain theme with different colours and its sub themes with different labels by its margins (Ibid.). The coding was most definitely a process and the codes changed and developed along the way. I started with an open and inductive approach and those sessions of coding made me choose what theoretical perspectives to continue with. After that, coding was done after specific themes in relation to those theories. When analysing the materials information changed from being considered important to not important and vice versa. The final results have been revised a number of times when theories, themes and results have been compared with each other. This also means that some material has been excluded. While exploring the fields I met with social workers who worked closely with the subject, gathered information regarding certain methods on the matter and got in contact with a number of organisations. When sorting out the empirics and starting the analytical process the chosen environments and respondents were what I found most relevant regarding my research questions.

4.3 Validity

In order to carry out a study of high scientific quality I have tried to adapt my research to some important *criteria of validity* within qualitative research (Bryman, 2011), while being cautious with only investigating what I had in mind to investigate. Though I need to admit that my study had to change in perspectives along the way due to different obstacles such as gatekeepers and cancelled encounters. This is nothing that affected the quality of the study since I have been aware of respecting the *principles of credibility*, that is, keeping a good correspondences between observations and the theoretical ideas these contributed to (Ibid.). One requirement that has been hard to fulfil, however, is the *requirement for external reliability* or transferability; the possibility to repeat the survey. This due to the facts that the ethnographic method and snowball sampling was managed with some unstructured luck as discussed above. Despite the weak external reliability in that the findings can be generalised since the details looked into not necessarily are bound only to the fields I explore.

Moreover, four specific criteria were respected to meet the *reliability requirement* (Ibid.). To make the study transferable to the furthest extent possible, the descriptions have been made as vivid, detailed and comprehensive as possible. This so that other interested parties will be able to judge whether the results are transferable to other environments. To fulfil the *criteria of dependability* everything was audited, that is, attempting to give you the most complete and accessible presentation of all phases of the research process as possible. Since it is not possible to achieve complete objectivity, the acts were all in good faith and to give the study authenticity, I hope to have shown fair illustrations and reflections of the opinions, perceptions and observations.

What also could be of importance to discuss are the genders and ages of my respondents. First of all, all my respondents were male. Before making cuts in the empirics there were some female social workers as well but when I came to focus on these themes, their work was no longer a part and they were all excluded. This is brought up to discussion since I believe that the fact that all my respondents are male is a weakness.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

This study is built upon general ethical guidelines regarding qualitative research (Bryman, 2011; Lalander, 2011; Kalman & Johansson, 2012), or more specifically some certain ethical principles. One of those principles is the *information requirement* (Bryman, 2011). All those concerned were

informed about the intentions and purpose of the study. The information given to participants regarding the purpose, structure and methods used in the study were explained clearly and understandable. To respect the principle regarding presenting the information in an understandable way I let the primary participants communicate the information to people being part of the study indirectly. To fulfil the information requirement an informational letter was sent out (Appendix 1) to all participants explaining the ethical requirements and the purpose of the study. I was always clear with the complete purpose of my study and the intentions with my involvement even though I in some interviews or during observations only focused on certain aspects of my research.

The participants have the right to decide over their participation and on what conditions they participate (Ibid.). The *consent requirement* entails that the participant herself voluntarily leaves her consent. The participant has the right to whenever wished for stop the participation without giving any reason why. Although, when conducting an ethnographic study it is not always practical nor viable to let everyone give their consent to an observation or a conversation since that would interfere with daily conventions (Lalander, 2011). As discussed earlier, this means that not entirely open observations could be of issue. I was never a hidden observer in relation to the main participants of my study but I could be in relation to the people that my participants made contact with. The actualisation regarding the consent requirement could for that reason be discussed but I believe that the situations I was in brought with them mitigating circumstances (Ibid.) This since what I was documenting in those situations cannot be tied to specific individuals. When in these situations the risk of doing harm was kept minimal by making the environment absolute anonymous. Before considered making a half-hidden observation I asked myself if this could be done entirely open with the same quality.

Regarding the *request for participation* I asked the participants individually and respected those who chose not to participate (Kalman & Johansson, 2012). This fact was actualised a couple of times when interviewing the football players or when meeting some youths on the streets. Some players went and left during the group interview. Regarding those I believe not understood my purpose fully or was not fully informed, I chose to not involve their contributions. When some youths were talking to the outreach worker and me I noticed some real tensions and nervousness. Because of that I chose to not use the information collected in that situation since I believe that they only spoke because of their relation to the outreach worker.

This brings up to discussion reflections regarding participation due to positions of dependence (Bryman, 2011). None of the participants were in that position in relation to me, rather

to my respondents. Even though I met parents to some of the under aged youth (and indirect respondents) and the fact that all of them got the necessary information I drew the conclusion that it was not enough to fulfil the requirements. When arranging a meeting with the football players it was through the coach that asked the team captain "a favour". After talking to the football players I came to the understanding that no position of dependence was forcing them to speak to me and are therefore confident with the material used from that occasion.

All personal information regarding the participants should always be treated with the greatest *confidentiality* possible (Ibid.). This information needs to be stored so that outsiders not will reach it. I have been respecting the principle regarding the confidentiality requirement by not storing names nor other personal information about the participants. The information received has as soon as possible been transcribed and stored where only I had access. The information collected about the participants have only been used for the research purpose presented. On all stages of my research I have been very careful to internalise these ethical situations discussed above (Aspers, 2007).

5 Analysis

My conducted research in Panama City regarding the work with youth delinquency has resulted in some interesting findings. Two central themes have come to take the greatest part of the analysis; the roles and meanings of football and religion in the work with youth delinquency. I mainly studied those two themes through individual or group perspectives but since I also found one project through which I could capture an even stronger collective perspective I decided to present it as a third theme. As discussed earlier in the methodological chapter the first two themes are pretty different from the third one but their relevance to one another will be illustrated. The themes will be illustrated and analysed through three specific projects I came to know during my eight weeks of field work; *the football tournament*, *the preaching sessions* and *the guided tour*. By applying the theories of Identity (Jenkins, 2014) and Symbolic Construction of Community (Cohen, 2001) as perspectives I hope to illustrate what factors within these works that are in effect to contribute to change on the matter of youth delinquency. Notice that what was presented as two social environments earlier, now are presented as three themes.

The analysis starts with an introduction to the field which is my attempt to bring you as a reader closer to the context as I came to know it. It then continues with a presentation of the projects

including the participants and their specific areas of experience and expertise. After the introducing chapters I present my empirics and apply the theories onto my findings in separated themes, i.e., every project is analysed separately.

5.1 An Introduction to Panama

Panama, a country placed just between North and South America is most famous for its canal connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean (Svenska FN-förbundet, 2013). It is a stable and successful country, yet with some institutional and democratic issues. Social policies are prioritising poverty and other challenges such as the high unemployment rate and the increasing gaps between groups of citizens. The current unemployment rate amongst youth is set to 12,4% of the population², people living in slum areas constitute 23,0% of the urban population³ and 32,7% of the population live below the national poverty line (Ibid.). With its geographical placement Panama also plays a strategic role in the region and functions as a transit country for illegal drugs from South America to USA (Regeringen, 2014).

The text above lays out about all I knew about Panama before going there and that is not at all sufficient for conducting an ethnographic study. Rather, a study like this implies a heavy understanding of the context and culture on the specific country. Jumping right into my observations and interviews I travelled all around the city and came to construct my own understanding of it. What first hit me was how fast the city seemed to be growing. Observing the surroundings I noticed construction going on, old buildings facades were being restored, the metro net was being amplified and skyscrapers were popping up everywhere. What I also noticed was the increasing gaps between social classes I had read about over the internet. I did not need to walk far to explore both areas of luxury real estate buildings and the opposite sensation of a living environment. In the richer areas the streets were clean, full with luxurious cars but fewer people. On the other side, the streets were messier, kids where running and playing everywhere, clothes where hanging to dry outside the windows and you could meet families having dinner out on the street just outside their apartments. As once told while walking through areas like these: The rich ones live on that side and on that side live the humble ones.

² Population set to 3,5 million (Svenska FN-förbundet, 2013)

³ Urban population set to 74,6% of the population (Svenska FN-förbundet, 2013)

Since I found the public transportation system a bit tricky I travelled a lot by taxi. The traffic in Panama City is very busy and unpredictable, meaning these taxi rides could take a lot longer than expected. This was not at all negative since I came to have really interesting conversations with the taxi drivers. The discussions about God were many, often ending in me agreeing with them that I should go to church and live the life God has intended for us. When not speaking about God we often spoke about football, comparing Sweden and Panama mostly, and I got extra 'points' when telling them I actually went to see a Panamanian game. After shallower presentations of my thesis we often discussed those topics from their perspective. That was when I got the feeling that my topics really interested them and in some ways had connections to their own life experiences. Returning home from the prison I visited, the taxi driver shared with me his story about his time in that same prison. Another time one driver spoke to me about his worries about his son in prison. Others spoke to me about the increasing gaps in society and how it affected both them and their society in general. One told me that these gaps illustrate that people really do live in different conditions and with different possibilities. It shows people what there is to endeavour and that possibilities do matter, emphasising on that this could have both positive and negative consequences.

5.1.2 The Themes

The following table contains descriptions of the three themes, corresponding respondents and environments.

The Football Tournament

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Description | Once a year a football tournament is held between different Panamanian prisons. The tournament is played during one week but the preparations start a lot earlier. Two months before the first game each prison starts with football practices Mondays through Fridays. 18 players, whom have to be sentenced for a crime, get elected through an internal tournament. The tournament is played outside of prison, on official stadiums where families are invited to watch. The main purpose of the tournament is to be a tool for rehabilitation and socialisation. |
| Respondents | Coach G, the tournament initiator, the football players, Pastor |
| Environment | Prison |

The Preaching Sessions

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Description | The main purpose of this project is to bring what they say is "the liberating word of God" to those who are deprived of freedom. The workers visit prisons around Panama every week and neighbouring countries from time to time to share the Word of God. With that they say that they bring hundreds of inmates to Jesus and prepare them to return to society completely changed by the power of God. |
| Respondents | Pastor, the tournament initiator, the football players |
| Environment | Prison |

The Guided Tour

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Description | A tour through the Old City of Panama is run by a group of previous gang members who decided they wanted to tell their story in a new way. Their business is now a walking tour of their former stomping ground, a travel through their personal development and the Old City's changes. |
| Respondents | The Guides, The Entrepreneur |
| Environment | The Old City |

The observations and interviews with **The Outreach Worker** is used complementary to the findings regarding The Guided Tour and Environment 2.

I argue that these three projects and the respondents illustrate different ways of working with youth delinquency and that they all can be compared. My analysis will later show on similarities and differences in their work that can be put together to understand what is important and "what works" in the work with delinquent behaviour by youth.

5.2 Football as an Instrument for Change

Already on the first day of my field studies it struck me how central football seemed to be to the people in the city, especially to the youth. I spent my first day just getting to know the organisation that I thought I was going to observe and spoke a lot with the kids attending that organisation. These kids live in what we call social risk environments, these in specific are exposed to child labour. By coming to this organisation they get away from those areas and are allowed to focus on education. There were many that seemed to find my presence interesting and the questions were many. Questions regarding football were the main content. Did I know Zlatan Ibrahimovic? Do I play? What is my favourite team? They told me about their dreams of becoming professional football

players and they spent all breaks that day playing football. When it was time for them to go home they told me they were going to spend the rest of the day the same way.

This chapter will focus on what role football can play by being part in a process of change, such as in social work with its purpose to create social change amongst individuals, groups or society in general. This chapter will also process what meaning this instrument might have to the ones being exposed to the projects involving football. Football as an instrument for change and the football tournament is what I present first in order to show on its attraction. An attraction that could be looked at as step one in a process of change.

5.2.1 Football, a Double-Edged Sword

Coming home from my first day of fieldwork I told my host family about the fascination for football I met during the day and that I thought that was a topic to hold on to. They then told me about their friend, a football coach who had some experience in football projects with criminal youth and youth in risk. That is how I came in contact with Coach G. A few days later I met with him in a café where we spoke about what effect football could have for youth members of criminal gangs. Following is an extract from my field notes where I describe what Coach G told me that day.

What Coach G finds as one really important factor is that a football team could replace that sense of belonging that exists in a gang. In one way, he says, those feelings of belonging and community are the same in a team as in a gang. He tells me that it is not uncommon for gang members to recruit new affiliates during football games since people there could be looking for the same thing - the belonging [...] Symbols for being part of a team could be wearing the team sweaters and in a gang it is replaced with tattoos, brand clothing and jewellery. In a team you have each other's back and in a gang as well. In a gang there is stability and someone who cares. Just as a team represents a district a gang can do likewise [...] We continued with talking about whether or not his football projects had been hard to legitimate to the possible receivers. He told me that presenting a football club with great history and successful results and wearing team clothing had helped him, he says it attracts people. To represent something that people are proud of and to invite people to join that group is welcomed. The football is the centrepiece but it brings with it a lot of other good. Football is the tool and if you focus on that you get the rest for free (Field notes with Coach G, November 11, 2014).

The extract involves information that are interesting to analyse from many perspectives and it confirms parts of the previous research as well as the foundations of the theories. First of all, Coach G states that being a part of a football team could raise ones sense of *belonging*, just as a gang

membership could. Remember that the most pervasive motivational factor for joining a gang is the sense of belonging to a group that respects them (Akiyama, 2012). Both Coach G and Akiyama confirm everyone's need for belonging and the fact that gang membership provides that. So it seems like belonging is a feeling that should be worked with to prevent gang membership. According to Salas-Wright (2013) football can also be a place where people engage in criminal activities. The feeling of belonging does not seem to be everything, football needs to be combined with something more in order to, or at least with a greater chance, prevent gang recruiting activities. Football seems double-edged, it could be used as something that keeps gang membership on a distance but the football field could also be a place where gangs expand. It seems that football can produce a place where social workers, or others working for constructive social contexts, have to compete against gang recruiters to see who offers the best sense of belonging.

By highlighting the importance that symbols seem to have in this situation a deeper understanding regarding the sense of belonging will be reached. It does seem like this sense of belonging is built upon their *shared use of symbols*. As stated earlier, symbols are shared by those participating in the same symbolic behaviour, even though its meanings might not be transferred (Cohen, 2001). The football team can be a symbol in itself but it also consists of symbols that can contribute to this sense of belonging, such as team sweaters. Through such symbols the individual herself understands the meaning subjectively and uses it to reach a feeling of belonging.

There are at least two other things in the extract that is of importance. First is the part *it attracts people and is welcomed*, which I think should be understood in connection to the competitive aspect mentioned above. It brings into discussion not only the individual that experience this, also the people surrounding that individual seem to be of importance. I would argue it (it being the encircling group) could either be affected or actually affect. It seems like Coach G and his projects, when being welcomed, are socially recognised in the sentence that the bigger collective accepts it and then is part of affecting the individual to feel social recognition. The second thing might be a bit hidden in the extract but through my observations I found it clearly important - what role does Coach G play in this? He says it himself when he tells me about representing something that people are proud of and I saw it myself when being in his presence. *He* is recognised. The fact that he is who he is could also be an attractive force and this attractive force in people, leaders, could be what people see in gang leaders. We discussed the same topic when he told me that sometimes, people other than social workers or similar might be needed to reach out with a message. Someone who people would rather listen to. Salas-Wright (2013) argues that a

coach who provides a meaningful rationale for tasks may enhance sports participants feelings of autonomy and competence. Could a coach be that meaningful rationale?

5.2.2 The football tournament

Once a year a football tournament with rehabilitative and socialising purposes are held for prisoners in Panama. It lasts for one week but the preparations start two months in advance with football practice Mondays through Fridays, if not earlier individually. 18 players are elected through a tournament that is played internally in every prison to identify the best competitors. To be considered performable you also need to be sentenced for a crime and, according to the football players, you need to behave all year as well. Neither during the tournament is there time for misbehaviour, one tells me that by doing so your actions could affect the entire team. The tournament is played outside the prison walls, on actual football stadiums. The families of the players are allowed to come and watch and one of the profits of winning is getting to go home for a day. During the time of the tournament focus is what is expected of the players, by the players. They told me that they like that focus, it makes them forget reality and the regular routines for a while. They also feel that they get a greater social life for a time even though it ends when it all goes back to normal again. During the tournament the inmates gain respect for one another and form new friendships. As the team captain told me: "I might be the captain but on that field we respect everyone's decisions, everyone is a leader".

I also had the opportunity to meet the founder of the prison tournament. He told me that after spending a few years inside, he felt that something was needed, a tool for joy but mostly for rehabilitation, socialisation and self-esteem. He said:

The players reach a greater sense of self, an understanding of that they are good at something and they start to believe in themselves. The tournament also contributes to better contacts with families and it shows that people outside, agencies and authorities, do care. Inmates and authorities come closer to each other. The tournament also creates endeavour for a better life outside of prison, such as improving the contacts with their families. The inmates understand the profits you get from investing in something you believe in and that gives you actual satisfaction (Field notes with the Tournament Initiator, November 18, 2014).

First, some aspects of power are important to remember throughout this chapter. Can we look at the tournament as means of power? Yes, due to a number of reasons. First of all, the players are selected

through an internal tournament, someone else on a higher hierarchical level decides that. Secondly it creates power relations between the inmates when the categories "football player" and "not a football player" are created. Thirdly there are power relations between the selected players such as in the situations when stated inside the team that it is not allowed to misbehave. Another aspect of power lies within the price of winning the day with their families. It can and should be looked at as a reward and something worth striving for but it is also a rare luxury in the sense that only a few will have the opportunity. That, as well as the first three aspects create situations of powerful categories of "us" and "them". When so, collective identities are created (Jenkins, 2014). Or in other words collectivities that entail belonging, or a lacking sense of belonging.

The fourth aspect, the price, is interesting from another perspective as well. The tournament initiator says that the games also generate endeavour and better contacts with families. Looking at it that way it can be argued a motivational factor due to two reasons; the sense of belonging (both because of fellowship inside the team and a positive connection with the family) *and* the pursuit of familiar relationships. Adding multiple motivational factors could make it harder for the gangs to compete with the activity.

Relevant to a discussion of motivational factors is the theory of social identity. Jenkins (2014) argues that identity is closely connected to motivation and behaviour. If he is right this football tournament could be looked at as one way of changing identities. The players get in to that discussion when telling me about the respect they grow for each other during the tournament, which is saying that they start to identify themselves and their teammates differently. The tournament initiator says so when he tells me that they start to believe in themselves, they and others can start looking at the criminals as talented football players. Interesting is also the fact that social identity is strengthened by rituals (Ibid.)

Observations of the football tournament

The tournament is a ritual in many ways, by looking at it as a ritual in the means of what is happening before, during and after the tournament some interesting facets can be highlighted. Before the games, they are all gathered; the players, the founders, the families, the leaders, the preachers and the authorities. This is a ritual that generates acknowledgments. Before the games start the players and some of the other participators gather to pray together, what might that symbolise?

The observations of the football tournament show one of Cohen's (2001) core arguments performed practically. Community is a boundary-expressing symbol and as a symbol it is held in common by its members but its meaning varies with its members unique orientation to it. In the face of this variability of meaning, the consciousness of community has to be kept alive through manipulation of its symbols (Ibid.). The ritual unites the team members in an allegiance, that with time, symbolises a powerful group to members and to outsiders. When performing the rituals, such as gathering in a circle just before the game starts, even stronger symbols of a community are created. This could be looked at as social recognition that is significantly needed amongst disadvantaged youth (Salas-Wright, 2013). When applying just mentioned arguments on what I observed and was told I find that the discussions regarding belonging and identity really can be understood.

So what has been my purpose with presenting football as a tool for preventing criminal activity? Salas-Wright (2013) describes it well when saying that football in itself is not a sufficient activity to divert people away from crime nor to promote developmental experiences but it creates the opportunity to play football and satisfies the desire to be recognised. When I first got the answer from the football players "well it's just fun to play football" when asking what importance it had to them, I was a bit disappointed. But now, in hindsight, it tells me more than I first thought. Maybe fun is just what we are looking for. And to combine this 'fun', or attraction, with the social recognition that comes with is a start.

5.3 Creating Identity with Religion

This chapter aims to deeply analyse the second main focus of my study, more precisely the role of religion in work with delinquency. More specifically to understand in what ways religion can be used when leaving a delinquent path behind but also in what ways religion can be *the way* forwards. "When in contact with God the rest often works out for the better, God fixes that. He makes the way more comfortable. What then happens, always happens for a reason." (Pastor)

5.3.1 Meeting God in Prison

During interviews and observations covering the role of religion I came to speak with a few people about their process of getting to know God in prison. Pastor told me how he had spent all his adolescence in and out of prison and gave it many attempts to change his life but never succeeded. When he was contacted by God he decided to try that road instead. Before analysing their

experiences with theories of identity and symbolic constructions of community I have chosen parts of a slideshow of pictures and short movies, transcribed into text in an attempt to present parts of this process.

Pastor R stands preaching on the prison square. Inmates around him participate, listen and pray. Some are more active than others. People cry, they show joy and they show anger. The symbols are many, hands are outstretched in the air, necklaces with Jesus or crosses adorn their necks and I observe movements of the sign of the cross.

The ministry has had the opportunity to visit different prisons in the world. Bringing with us the words of faith and hope [...] We thank God for this moment, for giving us the possibility to be here [...] God has called us and asked us to work inside these prisons (Someone talking)

The slideshow flips over to a short movie showing the interns singing, praying and preaching together with the pastor and his associates.

The only one who can really change a man is Jesus Christ [...] The only safe way to live in the world is not to walk armoured, It is to walk with God [...] Being in prison, and not being dead, you have been given a real opportunity to make a change in your life (Someone talking)

The slideshow ends.

This chapter will take a stronger individual approach than the previous one. Doing this research I came to understand that the process of finding God seems to be individual and the journey seems to take most place inwardly. But before reaching the discussion of how and why an individual finds meaning in a religious context I will reflect over what effect might come from carrying through these preaching sessions in groups, openly in the prison square.

The prison square preachings could be looked at as a ritual, as a means through which the participants experience community (Cohen, 2001). Sharing rituals can be a strong mobilising force (Jenkins, 2014). By sharing those moments together the sense of a collective might influence the constructions of meanings as well as the identification that is experienced and it might influence actions taken (Ibid.). The process is individual but persons are probably going to be affected by the collective around them. Everyone chooses to enter the process individually, perhaps by the support and activities around them. Let me exemplify with what I call "the group of uncertain participants" as an example, the ones that might be listening from the outskirts of the square. At first, they're just

there. At the next meeting they might be getting closer to the crowd or participating more actively. This might end with, as it did for some of my respondents, them identifying themselves as christians with a mission from God to continue the work alongside the church. This is interesting because behaviour like that is often found to be meaningful by acts of interpretation, by making sense of what we observe (Cohen, 2001). It might be somewhere here where the individual aspect can be relevant to discuss.

So what can be the reasons for an individual to find meaning in a context like this? Exactly what meaning, what symbols and what sense is made in a processes of finding God is up to every individual herself. But I can exemplify with something Pastor shared with me:

It is up to each individual to participate in the activities and its all up to them if they want to continue the path with God. You do it only if you want to. And if you not yet know what to do you are most welcome to just listen

God sent us here for a reason, by living our lives well we respect his wishes. By choosing a delinquent path we ignore his reasons. Finding God, or entering that process, could also be looked at as a part of your change to a new way of living. (Pastor)

The symbolism in the empirics is very palpable, both physically and mentally, it is expressed through words, ornaments and actions. At the same time it is also abstract, religion is something that is shared by billions of people but leaves room for personal interpretations. Remember, the more elusive the meaning, the more ambiguous the symbolism (Cohen, 2001). The symbols are shared but the meaning it provides is entirely individual (Ibid.), a person creates her own reasons and sense of meaning to follow the path. But this sharing of symbols and the interpretations of its meanings seem to be between two people. The speakers, the pastor and his companions, speak with powerful words and with strong convictions, sharing the symbols they in that moment are employing. Even though the meaning is supplied by the receiver it does seem affected by its "givers". This leads me back to some questions I raised in the earlier chapter. What role and meaning can we give the leaders in contexts like these?

5.3.2 Respecting a Religious Man

"You respect a religious man, gang members do it especially. People who earlier wanted to kill you start to look at you with respect." (Said to me by various respondents). The citation is what this

chapter will be about. It seems to be all about becoming someone, in the eyes of yourself and of others. It is therefore all about social identity, identification as how one identifies herself and how one is identified by others. Finding God and dedicate to that, labels you as someone to respect. What could this be all about? ”By time, when my surrounding peers had accepted and chosen to believe that my change was real the respect for me and my work grew” (Pastor).

A starting point to analyse what is said above could be Cohen’s (2001) theory about boundaries. He states that a community is called into being, like the individual also is, by the demands of social interaction. He follows with arguing that boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or another with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished (Ibid.). I find the latter explanation as applicable on an individual level as the first and that is what I will use to understand the citations above. Pastor told me about his religious journey that led him to starting to work with it. Notice ”by time” in the citation above, he is implying a process where he was judged. From my meetings with him I know it was both internally and by others. He is explaining that he turned into someone that received greater respect. Apparently, finding God made him different from some and similar to those already in contact with God. It made him someone on an individual level as well as on a collective level, a part of a community with its values and its missions. So it is a discussion of identity. What is interesting to apply onto these findings is that identification, whether individual or collective, is always symbolically constructed (Jenkins, 2014), here with all the abstractions that comes with religious devoting. Further, the statement that identity is connected to motivation and behaviour becomes relevant again, here in the sense that ones identity also affects the motivation and behaviour of others.

Since religious conversion seems to claim respect it can also be looked at as protective. As Salas-Wright (2013) addresses religious conversion has been identified as one of a few viable avenues for gang exit. This makes me wonder, is it only indirectly protective against criminal behaviour as he states or is it also directly protective? Not everyone I spoke with seemed to think it solely was due to religious conversion, some told me that the church equals protection. Without validating who is right and wrong the perspectives share some similarities. Regardless reason, religious conversion seems contextually considered valid. And inside this valid context the actions, as I came to know them, are pro social. And pro social activities (which I later will continue to discuss), is associated with less violent behaviour (Ibid.).

The processes and changes I have tried to analyse above as well as arguing whether or not it is directly protective made me notice some tensions regarding whether or not you can be both a

criminal and a religious man. It seems to me that the categorisation in situations like these are strong. Salas-Wright (2013) argues that the religious coping has to go through social developmental factors and when looking at the similarities between gangs and social groups and what can be the outcome (belonging, identity, etc.) it makes me wonder, could sharing criminal activity be one of those?

5.4 Constructing Community

This chapter examines in what ways community can affect an individual's criminal behaviour. Do I need this last chapter with a title that says Constructing Community? Is not everything I have analysed above parts of constructing a community? Well, yes *but* the last theme I focus on is how preventive work can be done on a group level that also generates effects on a structural level. To analyse this I will mainly use Cohen's (2001) theory of Symbolic Construction of Community, which even in its title is hands on what I will be looking at. Doing so I will also use the theorisations of symbolic and collective identities and argue why these are important to understand. My main empirics that I will use in order to fulfil the purpose of this chapter is observations of the guided tour and interviews with the guides and the entrepreneur. I will start the following subchapter with information gotten from the outreach worker regarding community projects. This in order to provide a wider understanding of why questions regarding preventive work also need to be looked at from a collective perspective.

In one of the articles previously presented it is stated that what differentiates a youth gang from various social groups is especially the groups' criminal activities (Akiyama, 2012). During my fieldwork I got to speak with one man (the entrepreneur) focusing on changing the objective of the group, or as he puts it, from anti social to pro social behaviour. Motivational factors for gang membership are fellowship and brotherhood, identity and recognition, protection or intimidation (Ibid.). As stated before, these factors could be found in many other groups than criminal ones, so the matter should be about finding replacement. Following chapter presents ways of doing so by focusing on the community. A community is a powerful everyday notion in terms of which people organise their lives and understand the places and settlements in which they live, and the quality of their relationships. In fact, it is indispensable, exploring how people construct a sense of themselves and their fellows as belonging in a particular locality or setting of relationships and interaction and with, if not to, each other (Jenkins, 2014). This is why I will look into how symbolic constructions and collectively formed identities are important in environment 2, The Old City.

5.4.1 Collective Identities

During my fieldwork I came in contact with social workers and other professionals working with developing communities around Panama City. Some of these areas of the city are labelled "the red zone" to mark socially deprived areas with criminal activity. One of their main missions were working with the families and locals in these communities with the opinion that each community needs to take responsibility for its own. Community in this sense includes the inhabitants but also the churches, police, schools and organisations in the area. One social worker I spoke to works specifically with outreach work in these areas with one purpose; to make them aware of how to contribute to the system of society, especially regarding responsibilities and values. One of the main goals they are working with is to identify the specific social problems and its riskfaktors. They are also working with creating "community boards" in an effort to organise the locals of the community.

By organising and developing a sense of communal responsibility with common values, norms and goals the community inside itself and to other passes along meanings and senses of "a self" as a community. Or in other words, a sense of identity, collective identities (Jenkins, 2014). That is why community boards can work. First, collective identities are not homogeneous nor consensual, they can and do change, they vary from context to context, and from person to person, but yet they can and do persist (Ibid.). This is why it is important. With understanding the symbolic dimensions of identification we can understand the collectivity. And with these understandings, we can make persistent change for the better. Secondly, the more pressure there is on communities to change as part of this process, the more vigorously boundaries will be symbolised. Difference will be constructed and emphasised. And it is in talking together about 'community' - which is, after all, a public doing - that its symbolic value is produced and reproduced (Cohen, 2001).

5.4.2 A Guided Tour Through Social Changes

I found the old parts of Panama City really interesting in relation to my studies, especially concerning the theme of community and how groups are powerful forms when it comes to changing societies. As I have mentioned earlier the Old Town is an area with vast differences between more luxurious and poorer areas. But what is specifically interesting with this area is the changes that it is going through, it is all being restored and the ambience is changing.

I bought the guided tour through the neighbourhoods of the Old City, promised to get to know the life story of the city as well as of the ex gang members and how they changed their lives. We met in the afternoon, outside the old hotel where everything started. The gangs, earlier all friends over boundaries, who used to occupy the building, sit inside and watch out over the plaza. When they saw a suitable person to rob they did. The continuous stories are filled with violence, drugs and murders. They take us into the hotel and show us a wall where the current owner has wallpapered the stairs with pictures from that time it was occupied by the gang members. There are pictures of the gang symbols, of the names of the gangs, of crosses, of territorial boundaries and of threats. One of the guides, later one of my particular respondents, tells me about his time as a gang leader and what made him change is life. The tour ends with dinner and drinks in a small alley. The guides are real entrepreneurs, they cook the dinner, make the drinks, decorate the alley and guide the tour. When dining I ask one of the guides how they came up with this original idea. He tells me about the entrepreneur (my naming), the one looking out for them and inspiring them to start a project but the idea was their own. "Before we used to rob tourists, now we know how to make them pay voluntarily" (The Guides). I was amazed by how creative and innovative I found their business, a pro social and constructive way of doing "the same thing". What I mean by doing the same thing is staying in the same area, keeping the same friends and keeping to affect the area.

As mentioned, the guided tour is also an example of how identity is strong amongst groups - that it possesses the ability to mobilise people (Jenkins, 2014). One thing that the guides work with at the side of the tours is to develop their community with help of other locals, especially the young ones. For example they are part of painting the houses and cleaning the streets. This made me curious to what could be part of contributing to that change. This builds up to Cohen's (2001) arguments earlier, 'community' is itself a symbolic construct upon which people draw, rhetorically and strategically. To claim to act in the best interests of the 'community' or to represent the 'community' are powerful claims. 'Community' is ideological: it not only says how things are, it says how they should be. It is also 'essentially enshrined in the concept of boundary': it symbolises exclusion as well as inclusion (Ibid.).

Since identification is the production and reproduction during interaction of the intermingling (Jenkins, 2014) it is interesting to apply here together with the fact that collective identification places the emphasis on similarity. This implies a collective where members identify themselves and others similarly enough. It implies a community where these guides, their changes and their visions of the community are respected and shared. Patterns, like theirs, are generated

through processes of interaction that reflect constraints and incentives under which people act (Ibid.). This means that the guides painting together with their young neighbours is a collective act that generates positive consequences inside their community. What is important though is that these kinds of interactions are maintained, it is only then identity changes occurs (Ibid.).

6 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand what, according to social workers and people with criminal backgrounds, contributes to change in criminal behaviour amongst delinquent youth. I wanted to understand what makes someone on a delinquent path change direction. To reach a wider understanding three themes were analysed and the roles of football, religion and community were explored.

The results show that there are a number of factors that could contribute to change. One aspect that seems to play a key role is the search for and sense of *belonging*. It is argued by my respondents and discussed in previous research as well as in the theoretical perspectives used to analyse the empirics. Akiyama (2012) states that the sense of belonging is the most pervasive motivational factor for joining a youth gang and Jenkins (2014) and Cohen (2001) agree that the belonging in settings of relationships is what is part of creating identity and community. Another aspect that came to be important has to do with *identity* and the fact that it is negotiable, flexible and can change. The term identity accommodates discussions regarding *self-esteem* and *social recognition* as examples of a few. The construction of a persons self-esteem was one of the primary goals with the football tournament and was confirmed by some of the players. Social recognition can come as a positive consequence when belonging to a football team (Cowan, 2014) and it could also be a means that leads to other positive consequences; The guides highlighted this when sharing the importance of the entrepreneur recognising them.

Both aspects above are also existing in gang memberships and this is where the difficulties lie. The three themes show that it is possible to create a platform through which this sense of belonging and identity could take form but since it also can be found in gang memberships the aspects need to be created more appealing by projects to "win the competition" against potential gang membership. In relation to this, the results highlight the important roles of professionals (Cowan, 2014) or people with "the right kind of experience", e.g., football players with status or

gang leaders. They can be seen as factors with impact since identity is built through interaction and symbols passed between people.

My respondent's statements have many times been very similar to theory and previous research, if not even completely corresponding. Also the themes have many similarities and focal points, corresponding conclusions can be drawn from all of them. This might actually be something to work from, it leads to a broad knowledge amongst different sources of knowledge which makes it relevant for other work with the same purpose, and the society and research on the matter in general. First of all, I believe that my results show that it is possible to approach the work with youth delinquency in many ways and that an openness in how to practice this work is needed, e.g. the guided tour.

Secondly, another central conclusion to think about is how symbolic constructions of individuals and communities provide meaning and identity. In other words, what does one get out of taking part in these projects or gang activities on the contrary? It does not seem to be the activity that always is chosen on first hand, rather what that activity can give a person. This brings me to mention why this thesis is titled as it is, I have not gotten to it earlier since I excluded all the other information I got from those youths due to ethical circumstances, but I decided it was too important to not mention at all. When I met them the social worker presented them to me as members of a gang but they were quick to tell me "we're not a gang, we're a group". This brought me into thinking and I believe it captures the essence of this thesis, there are not many differences regarding social phenomena between gangs and other social groups, and that might be exactly the thing we have to understand. This means that the roles I was seeking in football, religion and community many times are the same but my results show that these themes and their roles contribute to different consequences on an individual, group or societal level. That is why it is important not to always separate the themes or 'human levels' when understanding their roles.

6.1 Methodological Reflections

The used theories were chosen quite far along into the process. I started the fieldwork with ideas that I would use the theory of symbolic interactionism and the theory of good work but I later felt that I did not have the right kind of material to use those. After about half way into my fieldwork with some of the inductive coding done the theories of social identity and symbolic constructions of community were thought of as possible ones - and they seemed to be a perfect fit. With those in hand the rest of the fieldwork and gathering of empirics "took a different direction" and I am happy

with the result although I do believe it brought with it some consequences. The first one is the fact that the theories might fit a bit too well. Questions are if that made my perspectives and results too narrow. It is important to consider other theories as well and what knowledge could have come out of that. The theory of good work is a theory I do consider as suitable and by using that the role and importance of the professionals and people with "the right kind of experience" could have taken a great place. Another consequence of choosing the theories at the time I did is that, if knowing what theories to use beforehand, the interviews and observations could have been shaped differently and that could have led to a greater understanding and the fact that the theories might fit too well could instead have been a strength.

I consider the results possible to generalise but one methodological consequence is also the fact that my respondents only have been men. It would have been interesting to have women represented as well and see what that could have done to the result. A second aspect regarding the possibilities to generalise the results is the fact that I looked into two established themes in the work with delinquency, football and religion, even though their projects might be distinct. I have argued that the context is important to understand my empirics and that the context and culture need to take place in an ethnographic study, questions are how context-bound it really is. Questions for further research could therefore be to analyse the importance of contexts regarding these themes. One last methodological consequence, due to my way of conducting the research and the theories, and a question for further research could be to strengthen the structural perspectives in questions like these. What could happen if the same methods, research questions and theories were used as a starting point but the aim only was to capture a structural perspective?

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8 Appendix

This is a translated version of the informational letter sent out to the participants in Spanish.

2014-11-05 Panama City



A study about factors that contribute to social change in the work with youth delinquency in Panama City

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Hanna-Liisa Juntti, I am participating in an international exchange programme at the School of Social Work at Lund University in Sweden. I am conducting a thesis on social work with juvenile delinquency within this programme. I would be very grateful if you would like to share your expertise on the area with me. Your participation would be completely voluntary and you would always have the possibility to withdraw your participation.

My study aims to identify the working methods for treating and preventing juvenile delinquency. The intention is to find the factors in the working methods that contribute to changed situations in criminal behaviour. The result of my study will be presented in the form of a thesis for examination in Social Work at Lund University. The subjects of my study are:

- What are the methods to divert youth from crime?
- What are the main parameters used by social workers to manage and prevent juvenile delinquency?
- What determining influences that lead to criminal behaviour among youth are identified by the social workers?

I would be deeply grateful to have the opportunity to conduct this study based on observations of your daily work. I would also welcome a chance to observe the interactions of your social work with youth. I would be very grateful for your cooperation and support in conducting this study. I

would appreciate if you allowed me to accompany you for a few hours during your work day. I will, when the thesis is finished, share the results of my study with you.

All collected information will be anonymous. I will not include names of people or places. Detailed information will be amended so as not to be recognisable. I will use the material during the writing of this essay and until this work must be completed (January, 2015). After that, all documentation regarding the study will be deleted. Your participation would be among the references only if you so desire.

Thank you very much for your attention,

Hanna-Liisa Juntti

If you need more information about this project I will, of course, be available to provide the information you require.

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