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Township youth perceptions of poverty and unemployment in Cape Town, South Africa

Erin M. Barrar

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University of Cape Town

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## COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## Abstract

This study contributes to the understanding of how young adults living in Cape Town's townships experience poverty and unemployment in neighborhoods where both are prevalent. Unemployment is acknowledged to be a fundamental problem for township dwellers and yet the psychological repercussions on individuals in these communities remain largely understudied.

While young people are the majority of South Africa's population, their voices frequently go unheard even with regards to issues that unduly affect them. In the last decade, a growing body of literature emerged using qualitative methods to address this concern. Quantitative analysis has shown that young adults – specifically African youth - bear the brunt of unemployment but research has yet to look closely at how unemployment shapes their expectations, attitudes and decision making.

This research examines the effects of unemployment felt on an individual, psychological level as well as the contextual consequences of living in a neighborhood severely demoralized by widespread unemployment. Interviews with twenty youth between the ages of sixteen and thirty-two suggest that regardless of gender, age and class, (at least within the working class township community) young people are concerned with unemployment, which is often equated with poverty. In sharp contrast to the well-researched youth of the anti-apartheid struggle whose lives were altered dramatically by the turbulence of those decades, these findings show that today's young adults in Cape Town's townships are ordinary young people growing up under particularly difficult circumstances, and with varying ability to mitigate the trials of their social worlds.

Young adults in this sample are “ordinary”, in that when individually consulted, they cannot be categorized as a homogenous group. They have bold ideas about their future but their attention is often focused on the immediate. There are those who are ambitious and put their goals for personal success above all else. There are others who have high hopes but struggle both with their own decision making, and obstacles that set them back. Some are better-connected, some are more astute, and some are more at ease with their circumstances, willing to maintain the status quo rather than strive towards an abstract goal.

Having little guidance from adults their influences are largely derived from their peer group, which emphasizes material culture and fitting in. Most believe in the importance of making “good decisions” and aim to succeed but are easily frustrated by difficulties. They value the idea of education but do not always attend school or push themselves to excel. Even those who have achieved higher education sometimes question its merit in light of their disappointment in the job market. Despite assertions that there are “no jobs” one finds that there are jobs but those available are less attractive when compared to the aspirations of these township youth. Their expected jobs vary with the level of education they have achieved however all desire employment outside of manual labor.

This research shows that youth feel they can shape their futures but simultaneously expect their environment to hamper success. Success is largely viewed as a job or home that is “better” than their parents, further distancing them from apartheid to which they feel no connection despite the lasting effects these policies have on the neighborhoods and institutions which continue to impair young people's growth. More specifically, despite aspirations for “real” jobs in the formal market, the majority have ambivalent ideas for achieving these outcomes. Without examples of neighbors who have attained upward mobility, or access to information regarding opportunities outside of the township some youth's perseverance is stunted.

The psychosocial implications of this issue have largely been ignored in South Africa. These interviews shed light on how the township environment interacts with and influences the decisions and attitudes of young adults. On one level, its isolation hinders communication regarding jobs, training or opportunities. In a social sense, the ubiquitous nature of unemployment stifles any sense of urgency, and the optimism of youth is often overshadowed by a sense of melancholy. There is a sense of defeat inhibiting the environment that affects young lives and limits their potential.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Youth unemployment, a growing problem in the developing world, is perhaps the leading barrier to socioeconomic development as these regions become overwhelmingly “youthful”. In recent years, concern over growing numbers of young adults participating in the labor force has been noted by international organizations, scholars and policy makers as a pivotal issue. Authors warn that a large youthful labor force could be a blessing or a curse to a developing nation. On the one hand, in capitalizing on the demographic dividend, a nation could prosper economically and socially (Garcia, Fares 2008). If the labor force fails to absorb these numbers, however, other authors warn of the “youth bulge,” the fear of large numbers of disenfranchised youth resorting to unruly or dangerous behavior (Urdal 2004). While these two disparate modes of thought focus on youth as an impetus or a detriment neither truly engages with the subjects of the discussion. Youth in the developing world are dismally under researched, however the last few years have witnessed growing interest in and concern for the changing roles of youth as they transition to adulthood, specifically emphasizing the transition to work (Lloyd ed., 2005; Garcia, Fares 2008).

South Africa faces an extraordinarily high unemployment rate that has persistently grown since the end of apartheid. Young adults in South Africa are twice as likely to be unemployed as their adult counterparts, a troubling reality that will burden a new generation with the disadvantages of long-term unemployment, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty. Over the last thirty years, unemployment has grown so dramatically that it is now considered to be the definitive hallmark of the nation’s economy. While post-apartheid South Africa has made admirable strides in extending social services in attempts to mitigate the vast disparity in wealth within the country, for many South Africans residing in the townships this change has been slow to come to fruition.

The growing rate of youth unemployment is of significant concern. While the threat of a “lost generation” of youth was a prominent fear in the immediate post-apartheid years, the concept has returned if for new reasons. The youth of today have been compared to this “lost generation” as they face an overwhelming set of obstacles unique to those of their parents and older siblings, but related to and often deriving from the circumstances of years past. The rate of unemployment for young adults cannot be taken lightly as it is “one thing to have a ‘lost generation’ as a result of apartheid (but) quite another to generate a new generation of people who have little link into the economic and social participation offered by the world of work” (Altman in Habib 2003: 180). Reducing unemployment and creating new opportunities for young adults is perhaps the most difficult but

crucial challenge for South Africa's new government. This challenge has been widely acknowledged, however little is known about the way in which unemployment and subsequent poverty affect the attitudes and actions of contemporary young adults. This research aims to begin to fill these gaps, offering personal experiences from township youth regarding an issue that they themselves view as being of vital concern for their peers and communities.

The "everyday worlds of young people in contemporary Africa are poorly documented and poorly understood by scholars" and those who are fortunate to fall outside extreme categories – children in conflict, orphans, child witches – receive even less attention, and this is no different in South Africa (Seekings 2006:6). "What is striking about post-apartheid South Africa is the absence of moral panic over young people," which Seekings attributes not to a lack of concern but to a preoccupation with concern for society as a whole, currently suffering from high rates of crime, violence, unemployment and ruptures in traditional familial and social relationships (Seekings 2006:7). Young South Africans residing in the townships bear the brunt of these societal challenges yet are simultaneously influenced by coming of age issues that regularly affect young people throughout the world. "There have been few attempts to explain who young South Africans are and what they are about," and those that do exist are often not representative of mainstream young adults (Soudien 2007: 3). In 2002, research carried out by Bray showed that despite a decade's worth of research on young people, very little incorporated youth in a participatory fashion, somewhat depreciating the value of the research: "existing quantitative data... are limited in their ability to identify the full range of explanatory factors. It is therefore essential that insights gained through ethnographic and other forms of qualitative research are included in the analysis of any statistics" (Bray 2002:53).

Since that time, a growing body of literature has emerged through conversations examining various aspects of "ordinary" young lives. These conversations with young adults are a valuable tool for monitoring social development and gauging the well being of new generations. At present, researchers have learned a great deal from students regarding their perceptions of school, households and caregivers, sexual activity, HIV/AIDs etc. What has been shown is that the decisions of young adults are influenced by their environment and social context. Less is known about young adults once they have left secondary school, and begun the transition from school to work: "we have little understanding of how young people navigate their way into the labor market" (Seekings 2006:17). Extensive research has explored youth unemployment in a quantitative sense but without questioning how youth experience this issue and how these experiences influence their subsequent actions.

## **Defining the Research Question**

This study aims to investigate how young adults are influenced by the lack of opportunities – real or perceived – both within and outside their communities. Questions were intended to examine their current state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life; plans for the future; experiences with job searching; career planning; and the role of education in attaining objectives. Other concerns surrounded the relationship of crime and violence with unemployment.

The primary question asks how young adults experience unemployment within their communities. Findings show that the effects of unemployment on youth are twofold, and are discussed individually: The first analysis looks at the individual and how one is psychologically affected by the lack of opportunities and by recurrent rejection from opportunities and frustration in reaching their goals. The second considers the consequences of living in a community where unemployment is considered normal, and encouragement from adults and peers is minimal.

## **Methodology**

This research relies on secondary sources to provide the quantitative analysis discussed. There already exists rich statistical data that map the causes and predict the outcomes of unemployment. This information is irrefutably useful however it fails to humanize a problem that is at its core disaffecting a vast number of South African individuals. It is easy to analyze unemployment on a macro level, however a more telling indicator of a country's economic wellbeing is the perceived quality of life of its worse-off citizens who unfortunately maintain an unwarranted percentage of the present population. Despite awareness of and outrage regarding unemployment, little has been done to understand the complexities of life for those who exist daily under the duress of joblessness.

This issue has been considered at length in other societies, particularly in the West. This sociological literature and related ethnographic studies will be drawn upon to supplement quantitative data on youth unemployment in South Africa. Previously existing research offers useful insights into the effect of unemployment in the individual sense, while other studies place the individual in the context of the unemployed society.

Finally, personal interviews with young adults are invoked to ascertain the ways in which they perceive their surroundings and themselves in light of the extraordinary extent of unemployment

within their communities. The study considers if youth feel their lives to be hindered by unemployment; how they react to the lack of opportunity; how youth navigate the difficulties of peer pressure; why some are more successful; why some not only promote the power of education but also strive for educational success, while others discuss the merits of education but are absent from school more often than not. This research is meant to increase the depth of our knowledge and understanding of these issues so as to more astutely mitigate the consequences of poverty and unemployment on individuals.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The first chapter provides an introduction to the subject matter, highlighting the research question and methodology. Chapter Two serves primarily as a review of existing international and South African literature on studies and ethnographies of unemployment's effects on societies, as well as the individual difficulties one faces as a young adult maturing in a community where unemployment is pervasive and anticipated. Chapter Three looks specifically at the economic policies of South Africa's labor market in the last thirty years that resulted in the current rates of unemployment. The second half of Chapter Three considers youth unemployment within South Africa. Chapters Four and Five utilize the qualitative data collected from interviews with Cape-area township youth. Responses and research in Chapter Four reveal the individual psychological effects that poverty and unemployment can have on youth. Chapter Five places the unemployed individual in the context of the unemployed township community.

### **Data collection: Sample and research setting**

The data for this work was collected via nine individual interviews and two focus groups of five and six participants resulting in a total of twenty young African adults. All respondents were raised in the townships and all spent their young adult years in Cape Town's predominantly African townships in the Cape Flats. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 30. The majority were in their early to mid 20s. Having such a range was necessary to determine if one's views towards unemployment vary with age and/or unemployment duration. The participants were almost evenly divided between male (11) and female (9) young adults. This cross-section of ages and backgrounds realistically depicts the diverse experiences of young people in the township setting of the metropolitan Western Cape. An appendix providing the names, ages, and educational and work attainment is attached.

Participants were selected because of their association with one of three groups. Nine had previously participated in the South African Education and Environment Project's (SAEP) Bridging Year Internship program, which provides information on continuing education, career planning and life skills to young township adults ([www.saep.org](http://www.saep.org)). Due to their involvement many of these youth had been able to further their education or access employment opportunities. Prior to their association, however, all had attended school in the township and expressed sentiments not dissimilar from the other groups. Approximately half had migrated as children from rural areas of the Eastern Cape.

These were once-off interviews with each participant individually and occurred throughout July of 2009. As SAEP was simultaneously conducting an oral history project of its own, almost half of the interviews took place following an interview with another SAEP intern. I sat in on and recorded these interviews as well, as they covered school experience, family history and plans for the future. My interviews lasted from a half hour to an hour and the inclusion of the first interview was an additional half hour.

A group interview was done with young men who lived in or nearby the residential care home, the Homestead, in Khayelitsha. The interview took place one evening for approximately 2.5 hours. Homestead coordinators agreed to utilize this session to discuss jobs and joblessness (this group of young men meet weekly). These two coordinators were present during the discussion and helped to translate statements more easily expressed in Xhosa or Afrikaans. Following the group discussion I stayed after to talk briefly with some of the gentleman who were still in the meeting space and offered additional insights. These youth were the youngest of those interviewed (aged 16 to 24). Half of these young adults were still enrolled in secondary school and the others were out of school and currently unemployed. A new project in its early stages at the Homestead was beginning to match participants with volunteer jobs and internships in the service industry. At the time of these interviews two young men had recently begun their placements at restaurants.

A second group interview was carried out with participants of UCT-Shawco's self-employment program in Nyanga. These individuals were all from Nyanga and were marginally older than the other two groups (ranging from 23 to 30) and were evenly split between male and female participants. The group participants meet weekly with a Shawco volunteer to discuss employment, particularly the viability of self-employment and small business generation. They invited me to attend one session and agreed to let me hold my own discussion prior to that day's meeting. My

interview with the group lasted for an hour and a half, however I was at the community center from 10am until 5pm and had the opportunity to speak individually with most of the participants. I also sat in on their regularly scheduled group discussion where they further elucidated on their job searches, job prospects and shared ideas for other income generating activities.

Nineteen of these participants are quoted in this review (Sam is quoted just once and Neliswa not at all. These two did not offer enough input to be considered frequently quotable although their responses were in line with their peers and taken into consideration throughout the commentary). At the time of these interviews four were formally employed (Andile is a tertiary graduate and had been employed in a professional job for over a year; Siphso is employed at SAEP; Neliswa and Xoliswa both had been working for less than one month). Seven were enrolled in some sort of tertiary institution, all through the assistance SAEP (Zolani, Nhokaya, Phumzile, Vuyo, Nezile, Thandiwe and Nomsa). Of those, two had worked briefly while in secondary school (Thandiwe and Vuyo for a few months or less) and one had worked continuously in the same position at a grocery store for three years (Nezile). Of the other thirteen, the majority had finished secondary school but a few had not. Those who claimed never to have worked may have at one time or another done some sort of income generating activity, however none reported this as employment as these young adults generally do not see informal work as “real” work (ex. Bhoysi, Asanda, Themba, Luxolo). Finding work and the prevalence of unemployment was an issue of concern to all present, even those who had held a job previously. Struggle throughout childhood and young adulthood was pervasive and many confessed that they had been tempted to drop out of school, “give up”, or fall in with the “wrong crowd”, a group that young adults feel is growing and particularly influential in their communities.

### **Research Setting**

Respondents in the survey reside in the predominantly African townships of Nyanga, Khayelitsha and Philippi, informal settlement areas on the outskirts of Cape Town in South Africa’s Western Cape. As Africans make up the largest percentage of the South African population and the group most affected by unemployment, to interview those in African townships was fitting for the purpose of this research. These townships are part of the Cape Flats, an apartheid-era designated non-white area as established by the Group Areas Act of 1950 and these largely informal communities are representative of African townships in the Western Cape. Residents in these areas experience overcrowding, spatial marginalization from the city center and poor living conditions (City of Cape

Town, 2006). These low-income areas suffer from high rates of unemployment (around 50%) and nearly half of the residents live in informal homes. Health concerns continue to plague these areas; particularly growing rates of tuberculosis infection, increasing infant mortality and over 20% of residents in this area are thought to be infected with HIV/AIDS. These areas experience high levels of crime and violence, particularly burglary and premature death due to homicide (De Lannoy 2008).

### **Interviews**

Personal interviews, as well as the two focus groups were carried out in an informal and relaxed manner so as to encourage conversation. A questionnaire regarding expectations in the labor market, feelings towards unemployment, coping strategies and job-seeking activities was pre-prepared to spur dialogue. Interviews were recorded with the approval of the interviewee and transcribed following the interviews.

### **Limitations**

Although the participants are not self-selected per se, they are all associated to some degree (either currently or in the past) to a youth program or mentorship and therefore not representative. While it would have perhaps been more effective to select youth at random so as to widen the variety of experiences with unemployment, technical difficulties as well as my own time constraints did not allow this to happen. The selection was the result of my own involvement in or contact with these programs, ease of access, and assurance that participants would be vocal on the issues addressed. Most respondents associated with SAEP are all currently involved in higher education, as this is the goal of SAEP's program. This alone indicates that the group is not representative. Prior to their involvement with SAEP, however, they were "typical" township teens and fluctuated in their future ambitions and time-use activities.

Similarly, time constraints meant that interviews were pre-arranged, once-off meetings, as opposed to occurring from or resulting in long-standing relationships with the participants which would have allowed observation of one's motives and actions as well as changes over time.

### **Ethical considerations**

Written, informed consent was given by all participants in this research. One participant was under the age of 18, and consent was obtained by his caregiver at the Homestead. Participants were informed of the nature of this research and understood that they could refrain from answering

questions or end the interview at any time. They were also informed that the interviews were confidential in nature and that their responses would be presented under a pseudonym in the final dissertation. Full consent was given by the Department of Sociology at the University of Cape Town prior to this research being conducted.

University Of Cape Town

## **Chapter 2: Unemployment, an overview**

Although there is clearly awareness of and concern for young South Africans' propensity towards unemployment, there have been no in-depth studies investigating how this issue affects the day to day lives of young adults as they mature and plan for their futures. This fault lies not just with South Africa but reflects global trends. Youth unemployment is perhaps the most prominent issue in the developing world, however there is almost no research done that speaks to youth regarding their experiences. *Growing up Global*, published by the National Research Council in the United States highlighted the school to work transition as being instrumental in allowing youth to create lives and identities that they view as valuable (Lloyd ed. 2005). In 2008 the World Bank made youth unemployment a priority, with *Youth in Africa's Labor Market*, introducing the significance of this issue but revealing little about youth's perceptions of unemployment. In developed societies more attention has been paid to this matter, particularly as the 1980s and 1990s saw economic recessions in Europe and the United States that decreased employment opportunities for youth and altered the traditional rites of passage for entering adulthood. Further research probed the subject of unemployed communities, particularly in urban America where deep socioeconomic cleavages persist.

These investigations into the lived experiences of the unemployed reveal the psychological and social effects of unemployment both on impoverished communities at large as well as for the young adults who mature in a context in which joblessness is expected. This section offers a literature review of relevant qualitative investigations into the difficulties associated with life within a poor and unemployed community, as well as the potential psychological injuries for the individual.

### **The unemployed community**

The sampling of authors below reveals the shared malaise that occurs when the majority of those in the neighborhood are unemployed and social immobility if not outright failure is generally expected. Lacking examples of other possibilities, as well as access to the tools needed to attain an improved way of life new generations of unemployed experience socioeconomic stagnation. Research shows that the existence of a peer group experiencing unemployment and poverty reaffirms the normalcy of the condition, and can discourage those who might otherwise strive for more to maintain the status quo. This can catalyze disenfranchised peers to create a subversive culture at odds with the commonly held values of the community.

The first study of the effects of unemployment on a community level came from Jahoda, et al. (1933) in Marienthal, Austria during the 1930s. Jahoda's research was unique in that it considered the unemployed community at large, recognizing that an environment of lethargy, distress and joblessness could become a debilitating and even toxic one. The first study of long-term, universal unemployment, it used innovative methodology to gauge the slow deterioration of the human condition and the process by which the traditional social fabric of the community could slowly unravel. Interviewees developed a skewed sense of time, perceived loss of identity, and a listlessness that drained them of any desire to participate in recreational activity. There was a lack of urgency to everyday movement for most (with the exception of mothers whose responsibilities were heightened due to new difficulties in performing standard tasks). Unemployment became normalized, which reduced the social stigma commonly associated with the unemployed but did little to raise morale. Petty crime became commonplace but was seldom reported as everyone understood the desperation of some of their worse-off neighbors. The unemployed are not a homogeneous group, and households reported varying degrees of these symptoms which were dependent on savings, time out of work, and other household-specific characteristics.

The lack of opportunity would presumably have lasting emotional damage on youth, who see little hope for their futures. Researchers in Marienthal actively sought to gain information from young people in the community but were largely unsuccessful in attracting the teens that simply seemed to "hang around." Those who were enticed to participate expressed an enormous sense of apathy, unusual for their age group, and could not articulate plans or expectations for the future, particularly on a personal level. A small number of teenagers were fortunate to be involved in apprenticeships with local artisans. This minority was more adept at imagining and vocalizing their goals and could better articulate the process of attaining these goals (Jahoda et al. 1933). The majority, however, were despondent about their immediate futures and lacked specifics about long term plans, referring instead to an abstract future when unemployment was "over."

With similar psychological findings to Jahoda, Moller's study of unemployment in South Africa in the late 1980s focused on unemployed individuals in Soweto, Durban and Mdantsane, with two waves of research in 1987 (predominantly qualitative) and 1989 (predominantly quantitative). The study's intent was to allow the unemployed to themselves describe the ways in which individuals and communities experience chronic unemployment. For participants the median time spent in unemployment was two years. Respondents reported that economic poverty was the primary concern

felt by all, but was often expressed in relation to feelings of depression, nervousness, anger, lack of concentration and an inability to sleep at night. Most agreed that nearly all of their problems were related to money and caused a sense of rejection, humiliation and often resulted in domestic disputes, crime or alcoholism. Moller elaborates, “Financial and non-financial hardship factors are intertwined and tend to reinforce one another” (Moller 1993:193).

This research illustrates the feelings of despair and failure associated with long-term unemployment and how these emotions result in inactivity. At the beginning of unemployment most actively sought work, maintained social activities and tried to be “useful,” but stopped these activities over time. The psychological stress associated with joblessness grew with the length of time the individual was out of work, and some internalized characteristics of the social stigma, adopting feelings of despair, apathy, loss of self-worth and resignation (Moller1993:191). As one respondent reported, “Everything is bad. Friendship is bad, love is bad, even your own thinking is bad” (Moller 1993:50).

Moller focused on the unemployed in a community in which unemployment was widespread and poverty ordinary even for those who were working. Evidence from interviews suggests that “poverty and unemployment are by and large synonymous in urban black society” (Moller 1993:60). Moller found that although the unemployed individual often feels useless and unwanted, the high numbers of unemployed in the community lessened the social isolation of the unemployed and actually proved to be a “social leveler” within the community: “When the unemployment rate reaches a certain level, unemployment becomes a societal rather than an individual problem. The blame for being unemployed is less likely to be placed on the individual ...the unemployed may perceive their situation to be part of a larger process and not one for their own failing for which they are alone responsible” (Moller 1993:58). The internal grief may remain but the social stigma is lessened.

This perceived transfer of fault is positive in the sense that less strain may be placed on the individual psyche, but could also lead to the unemployed failing to search for work actively, believing it to be a futile attempt. The accumulation of large groups of unemployed and depressed individuals normalizes and inadvertently reinforces the condition. In profiling neighborhoods in Chicago’s inner city in the late 1980s, Wilson concludes that poor inner-city areas are “experiencing a ‘crisis’... (as) joblessness and economic exclusion, having reached dramatic proportions, have triggered a process of hyperghettoization,” (Wilson 1993:26) whereby poverty and isolation are so extreme that remedial measures seem unfeasible. In such situations, societal issues such as crime, family dissolution, and

low levels of social organization are perpetuated by a lack of employment due to the geographic location of poor and unemployed neighborhoods. In areas with chronic structural unemployment an incessant search for a job that may not exist can become demoralizing and unsustainable. Residents are isolated from work opportunities in a physical sense because of poor infrastructure and transportation. In a social sense, they are isolated as their peers suffer from the same predicament (Wilson 1997:567). The lack of social capital is one of the most basic hindrances felt by the unemployed and underclass, and where social networks do exist, they are less valuable as none involved have access to outside knowledge or contacts.

Social networks consisting of peers suffering from similar difficulties can therefore be more hazardous than useful and has been studied extensively in the United States. Case et. al. consider poor neighborhoods in Boston in the 1980s in the midst of extraordinary unemployment levels, and found that where youth are involved, residence in neighborhoods with high levels of crime and violence is strongly associated with an individual's involvement in criminal activities. The neighborhoods in question are characterized by single parent homes (as well as growing numbers of child-headed households), high incidence of crime and violence, low school completion, high incidence of HIV/AIDs and de facto racial segregation. This survey reveals that for young residents the acceptability and inclination to follow suit demonstrates the probability of "collective socialization." Youth with neighbors, friends or relatives, who were involved in criminal activities, had been to prison, had dropped out of school etc., were more likely to do the same as compared to a young person for whom those activities were not "normal." Case et al. conclude with their finding that two inner-city youths "with the same personal characteristics may have quite different socioeconomic outcomes depending on family role models and peer influences in their neighborhoods...like begets like" (Case et al. 1997:23).

### **Youth and unemployment**

For young adults, the characteristics resulting from long-term unemployment can be particularly debilitating. Whether in communities where unemployment is new due to an economic recession or in areas where unemployment has always been a staple of the environment, youth are generally thought to suffer from higher rates of unemployment, and from the psychological stunting of their seemingly bleak future. While many factors associated with 'coming of age' have changed in the last thirty years, the one that predominantly hinders the lives of young people is the disappearance of

employment opportunities for youth, which are even more severely weakened by those affected by issues of gender, race, ethnicity or location (MacDonald 1997:43).

For the unemployed, youth is a time when “individuals may possess the requisite competence for adult work and family roles but are denied access to these roles... (and) alienated or marginalized in such a way that they cannot assume active, meaningful and productive roles in adult society” (Petersen 1994:3) Erikson describes the period of adolescence as a moratorium granted by societies, allowing youth an allotted time to experiment with various endeavors without fully encapsulating the responsibilities of adulthood. It is during this time that an individual’s sense of self and self-definition form (Erikson 1955; 1968 in Petersen 1994). This socially-sanctioned moratorium is becoming prolonged due to the inability of youth to fully take on the responsibilities of adulthood on account of their own lack of skills qualifications and a labor market that lacks opportunities conducive to the skill-sets of most youth. “Thus,” Petersen explains, “the period of adolescent uncertainty is moving further into ages that once were considered to be adult” (Petersen 1994:9) creating feelings of depression, loneliness and dissatisfaction.

Studies of young adults self-reporting experience with unemployment in developed nations confirm that those who are long-term unemployed are more prone to experience tearfulness, trouble sleeping, restlessness, irritability and general fatigue than their peers who were in school or working. Research confirms the correlation between unemployment and self-esteem, believing that unemployment in youth leads to later periods of unemployment, and can be debilitating for mental health. Authors also consider whether unemployment can directly lead to crime or risky or disruptive behavior, drug and alcohol abuse (Axelsson, Eijertsson 2002; Hammer 1993; Winefield 1993).

These studies done in Europe demonstrate that those unemployed young people who had strong social support networks of family and friends, reported fewer symptoms and were more adept at coping with their situation (Axelsson, Eijertsson 2002). Similarly, those without networks were more inclined to become isolated, excluded from opportunities to access information on employment or networking opportunities, as well as the development of greater levels of psychological distress (Hammer 1993:410). Young adults whose social networks consisted of other unemployed youths, however, were more prone to create an “anti-work culture,” becoming despondent towards looking for work and participating in disruptive behavior reinforcing the longevity of unemployment (ibid).

In the 1980s, Great Britain experienced an extraordinary growth in unemployment. The widespread nature of unemployment prompted a thorough sociological review of its effects. Job loss was most frequently occurring in the fields of manual and low to semi-skilled labor and one in-depth study was done to better understand the labor market influences on adolescents and young adults in this sector. In 1987 McRae published a complimentary report on the ways in which Britain's youth perceived conditions of unemployment, focusing on behaviors and attitudes towards job preferences, job searching, personal relations, and expectations. Hers is one of a minority of studies of youth unemployment that closely examines youth's thoughts and feelings, rather than a statistical overview of the issue.

When discussing job searches, most respondents expressed the disappointment of being turned down continuously, resulting in discouragement and an inclination to stop searching altogether (McRae 1987:15). Many also reported that finding a job was an expensive task, citing transportation costs, letters and stamps, and the preponderance of unemployed parents being unable to alleviate the financial strain. The majority were critical of the government's youth employment schemes, stating that short-term or low-wage employment was a waste of time and failed to deliver valuable skills or wages, preferring to continue with their own job searches rather than participate in work schemes. McRae's respondents expressed concern for their personal relationships, anxiety, depression, pessimism, and general frustration with their inability to move into a more "adult" role including marriage, home ownership and children. Many were frustrated by their inability to plan ahead, as disappointment and failure felt increasingly likely as time spent unemployed lengthened (McRae 1987:140)

Around the same time in the United States, MacLeod's ethnography of high school students in urban Clarendon Heights depicts a low-income, working class community experiencing high levels of unemployment, crime and violence and widespread alcohol and drug abuse. The inner-city community experienced these societal ills for generations, although conditions may have worsened with the economic downturn of the 1980s. MacLeod examines the thought processes and experiences of two peer groups living in the housing projects, and the vastly disparate ways they navigate their lives and define their aspirations.

The predominantly African American ‘Brothers,’ maintain positive views of their future, believing that through hard work and education they will attain livelihoods above what they have witnessed in the community. The Brothers attend school regularly and have plans to further their education. Most express that their parents and guardians are supportive and instill in them the importance of school for achievement. Their career paths are often vague as they know little of middle class work and MacLeod explains, “although some of the Brothers are unsure of their occupational aspirations, none seems to feel that nurturing an aspiration is a futile exercise...The Brothers have not resigned themselves to taking whatever they can get” (MacLeod 1995:75). Almost all of the Brothers are the first generation of their family to grow up in Clarendon Heights having moved from southern states, and feel that the opportunities available to them there are superior to those their parents had received, further motivating them to achieve.

Unlike the Brothers, the white working class ‘Hallway Hangers’ families have lived in Clarendon Heights for generations. The Hallway Hangers have observed parents and older family members “fail” either having worked hard without progressing past blue collar jobs, or ending up in jail because of crime, drugs and alcohol abuse. What they have experienced is hopelessness, immobility and stagnation. Their attitudes demonstrate the opposite of the Brothers’, enlisting instead in the “counter-culture” of drugs, drinking, violence and other risky behavior. Many drop out of school and make money dealing drugs or stealing. They are certain that regardless of their efforts, disappointment is the natural outcome for those in their community, and when they look towards the future they predict such things as death, jail time, poverty and disappointment. As one of the Hallway Hangers explained, “You’re kidding yourself to have any (aspirations)” (MacLeod 1995:69). In resisting the dominant social ideologies they feel empowered, and enlist peer pressure to maintain a sense of group solidarity that encourages the status quo and discourse of delinquency.

McRae (1987), Hammer (1993), and Winefield (1997) discuss the tendency for young people living in impoverished and unemployed conditions to take part in delinquency. Perhaps nowhere has the correlation between poverty and crime been studied so extensively as in urban America, frequently associated with compounding issues of race, poverty, crime and unemployment, heightened by the socioeconomic seclusion of inner city neighborhoods. Organized crime tends to occur in spaces where social institutions and infrastructure have depreciated, where segregation is omnipresent, and may have occurred at a rapid pace (Spergel 1995:111). Spergel finds that illicit behavior becomes an imperative social outlet for some young people in low-income, or otherwise unstable minority

communities, serving as a means of “physical protection, social support, solidarity, cultural identification, and more education as well as opportunities for self-esteem, honor and economic gain” (Spergel 1995:90). A sense of inclusion and acceptance from a peer group is particularly necessary for many who may not receive guidance and attention from parents or guardians. These peer groups serve as a rite of passage for those unable to achieve adult status through traditional means such as work, where school seems meaningless and where the establishment of personal families and households is economically unattainable.

The incapacitating effects of unemployment on the individual both in the psychological sense and in their interactions with peers and the community are evident. Chapters four and five reflect on these singular but associated issues as they are experienced by young adults in South Africa’s townships. The following chapter considers the economic context of the nation and the extent of youth unemployment in South Africa.

University Of Cape Town

### **Chapter3: South African Context: Labor market and youth unemployment trends**

South Africa has been characterized for decades as having a strong economy, but high unemployment and low job creation (McCord, Borat 2003:113). Over the last thirty years, unemployment in South Africa has grown so dramatically that it is now considered the definitive hallmark of the South Africa economy. Some authors argue that in fact, present-day South Africa does not have one labor market, but “a series of linked labor markets” with varying opportunities for inclusion that are dependent upon combinations of race, gender and education (McCord, Borat 2003: 134). The nation is an enigmatic one - middle-income and wealthy, as well as developing with many citizens entrenched in poverty. “Its sharp segmentation, high unemployment and low non-farm informal sector employment make it an international outlier” Kingdon and Knight describe (Kingdon, Knight 2007:2). This chapter discusses the economic policies of the last decades that spurred the macroeconomic basis for widespread unemployment, and subsequently looks more specifically at how youth fare in this fickle labor market.

In previous decades, South Africa experienced what appears to be ‘jobless growth:’ Gross domestic product (GDP) increased but employment either stagnated or declined, requiring both the informal and formal economies to grow in order to rectify this situation. Job creation has in fact occurred, but not in industries able to employ those at the skill-level of the majority of South Africa’s citizens. As Altman describes, “the misallocation of resource rents has left South Africa a highly distorted middle-income economy, with a cost structure and domestic market-oriented production sectors that reflect this middle-income status, but a human development index, skills level and export profile that is more reflective of a less developed country” (Altman 2003:177). In 2003, South Africa’s unemployment rate was higher than that of most developing countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, and remains considerably higher than unemployment rates in middle to high income countries (McCord, Borat 2003). The characteristics of the formal sector in South Africa mirror those of a middle-income country whereas the informal sector more closely resembles a developing country, but with a less inclusive informal market than is found in most developing countries (Kingdon, Knight 2007:8).

Specific policies over the last thirty years contributed to this current economic quagmire. In the 1970s, South Africa began a shift away from traditional labor intensive production to capital intensive production, reducing the number of low-skill jobs depended on by so many. Agriculture

and mining, the two sectors employing the majority of unskilled laborers, both saw a decrease in their share of GDP and their share of jobs, while growth occurred in the service sector. The emphasis on capital over labor – in a country rich in labor reserves – had and continues to have debilitating effects on the majority of South Africa’s population. Employment opportunities were and effectively are closely linked to race, with the overwhelming majority of South Africa’s black and coloured unskilled workers laboring in those sectors experiencing job loss. Since that time, total formal non-agricultural employment has fallen substantially every year, as has the mining sector, public employment and employment in the manufacturing sector, such that by the beginning of the 2000s, all non-agricultural employment was lower than it was twenty years ago (Natrass 2003).

While South Africa’s market hindered the human capital of potential workers, other laws created geographic enclaves of the poor and unemployed, undermining growth in social capital. Contributing factors included the restriction of the movement of Africans through pass laws disallowing access to jobs, as well as dividing families so as to maintain workers in the place of employment and dependents in “homeland” areas. Repercussions from apartheid-enforced segregation continue to be a burden. Legislation prohibited the formerly common practice of squatting on white-owned land, as well as the outlawing of informal income-generating techniques by Africans (Klasen 2005: 9).

In referencing the economic legacy of apartheid, Seekings and Natrass state, “no other capitalist state (in either the North or South) has sought to structure income inequalities as systematically and brutally as did South Africa under apartheid. Explicit racial discrimination affected earnings and income directly and blatantly” (Seekings, Natrass 2005:2). Despite partial dismantling of racist labor regulations in the late 1970s, and meager rises in black wages, the tradition of discrimination remained and access to sound education and skills development saw little change. The changes that occurred in the late 1970s, through the 1990s resulted in a situation whereby those with the best skills and highest education were fairly easily absorbed by the labor market, earning jobs requiring technological savvy and high-skills. When considered crudely, those most disenfranchised by these policies were African laborers (McCord 2003). Because employment was so severely hindered during the apartheid era, the economy now confronts a large “stock” of unemployed persons as well as new entrants every year. Currently, unemployment is the single most important factor maintaining levels of poverty - and cycles of intergenerational poverty – in South Africa.

## **Calculating unemployment**

Unemployment figures can be calculated in two ways. The first is the “official,” “narrow” or “strict” count which includes only workers above the age of fifteen who are actively looking for work, and who have not worked for more than one hour (for pay) in the week prior to being surveyed. The “broad” or “expanded” definition includes those individuals who are above fifteen and are available to work, who say that they would like to work but have become discouraged or stopped looking. Natrass cites the International Conference of Labor Statisticians (ICLS), which explains why the expanded definition is often a more useful count of the unemployed: “this broader definition may be appropriate in situations where the conventional means of seeking work are of limited relevance, where the labor market is largely unorganized or of limited scope, where labor absorption is, at the time, inadequate or where the labor force approach is largely self-employed” (Natrass 2002: 5; Altman 2006; O’Higgins 2002). Unemployment in South Africa is pervasive and long-term and is evidenced by the national Labor Force Survey of 2005 which indicates that in 2005, 40% of the unemployed had been unemployed for over three years and 59% had never previously been employed (Lam 2008:2). In such situations, it is more telling to consider all workers in the expanded rate, as excluding discouraged workers in such environments can result in a gross underestimation of the problem (Natrass 2002; Natrass, Walker 2005).

To lack formal paid work and to desire it is generally considered to be “joblessness” (Natrass 2002: 1). There is often a distinct difference between people’s perceptions of their status as employed or unemployed and the official definition used to statistically calculate unemployment. Calculating unemployment accurately can therefore be difficult, as it frequently relies on the self-reporting of surveys. Often, individuals report themselves as being unemployed when they are, in fact, employed by the strict definition of the term. Those who are not employed in a formal job often do some sort of income-generating activity that they may not consider to be a proper “job.” This misunderstanding is not surprising considering the examples of “employment” Statistics South Africa offers: any work of any kind for any pay; unpaid “help” in a household or business; work land or a garden or the keeping of animals for food purposes on one’s own land; perform any work or maintenance on one’s own home or business; catch fish, shells, or wild animals for personal consumption or sale (Statistics SA 2010). These temporary or low paying jobs can be considered ‘underemployment,’ but still put the individual in the category of ‘employed’ despite the individual’s belief that they are jobless (Seekings, Natrass 2005).

Unemployment in South Africa is particularly high for a multitude of reasons, most prominently the following: an expansion of jobs in sectors in which the majority of unskilled laborers cannot participate; growth in participation rates; and barriers to the informal market that in other developing nations would absorb surplus laborers.

### **Job creation**

South Africa experiences “structural” unemployment such that there is a mismatch between the types of workers available and those that the economy requires, and the skills shortage in South Africa has been responsible for maintaining conditions of structural unemployment (Pauw, Oosthuizen, van der Westhuizen 2006). Despite misconceptions about the state of South Africa’s economy, the country has actually not experienced ‘jobless growth’ in the last decade, there have simply not been enough jobs created in the necessary sectors to meet the growing numbers of labor entrants. Aforementioned changes in technology and the emphasis on capital-intensive production favor those with the highest skills (ibid). Job creation has occurred but on far too small a scale to provide for the millions of jobless workers. Unemployment has risen since 1995, but as of 2004 employment had grown by 17%, which equals only thirty two jobs created for every 100 economically active South Africans (Bhorat 2004:8).

### **Labor force participation**

In addition to a burgeoning youth population, South Africa still holds a substantial surplus of unemployed –and typically low-skilled – workers from previous generations. Unemployment is rising because of the rapid growth of the labor force and an economy that is unable to absorb such high numbers of new entrants. From 1995 to 2003, the labor force grew by 4.6 million workers, and if the non-searching unemployed were included in these numbers the broad labor force would have equaled 6.3 million (Kingdon, Knight 2004:2). Between 1995 and 2000, 60% of the growth in the labor force was between the ages of 15 and 34 (Pauw et al. 2006:6). The growth in the labor force is a result of in-migration, a rapid natural increase in the number of working age people as well as increased participation with the highest levels of growth amongst Africans, as the end of apartheid allowed movement to urban areas and access that was previously restricted. Furthermore, access to education has perceptibly increased educational attainment, and traditionally participation rates increase with educational levels (Kingdon, Knight 2007). For youth particularly, participation rates

have spurred upwards, due in part to growing female participation as well as growing numbers of educated young adults.

### **The informal market**

In developing countries where unemployment is similar to South Africa, informal employment tends to take the place of official employment in the wage-earning sector (Kingdon, Knight 2004:395). Informal work includes all those who work casually, in domestic service, or any type of self-employment (Kingdon, Knight 2004:395). The duration of unemployment for out of work South Africans is uncannily long, with most spending roughly three years looking for work, a reality that theoretically should prompt individuals to create job opportunities for themselves. South Africa, alternatively, retains a small informal sector considering the extent of joblessness (ibid). The informal sector fails to absorb participants because of high barriers to entry, namely: crime against small business owners, lack of access to credit, lack of access to infrastructure and services and a dearth of training on entrepreneurship and business (Kingdon, Knight 2004, 2007). Kingdon and Knight purport that the lack of African self-employment is largely due to the legacy of apartheid which severely restricted the economic activities of Africans, as well as curtailing their entrepreneurial skills and networks (Kingdon, Knight 2007:14). Those South Africans who do manage to partake in informal employment enjoy a higher standard of living than the unemployed, but often still live in poverty. While informal jobs can help where unemployment is rife, wage earnings in the formal sector are higher, such that a worker with primary or secondary education who in the informal sector earns roughly one half of what those with the same education make in the formal economy. Thus a shift to the informal economy could result in less productive labor, with the labor force contributing less to household incomes and consequently the economy in general (Altman 2003). Regardless, those working informally have higher incomes than those who are unemployed, and Kingdon and Knight find that unemployment in South Africa is anything but voluntary.

### **Voluntary unemployment**

Other authors have questioned whether the unemployed are actually “pricing themselves out” of the job market by setting reservation wages that are unrealistically high. While Natrass and Walker find that reservation wages are difficult to determine through surveying – as people respond differently depending on how the question is phrased – it is generally agreed that the working class unemployed do not have inflated reservation wages and more frequently undervalue their human capital. The authors explain that the longer time spent in unemployment can further skew one’s perception of

their own labor market value, causing them to either over or underestimate their wage earning potential. Walker's earlier research in Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plain further clarifies, "There is no evidence that the unemployed are out of work due to excessive wage aspirations, in relation to the wage they could command in employment...those who are deeper in unemployment (i.e. more discouraged) ...are least likely to have a reservation wage above their predicted wage...people are responding rationally to the adverse labor market conditions. Unemployment is a result of the low availability of jobs for unskilled people rather than unrealistic wage expectations" (Walker 2003:52).

The causes of unemployment combined with the inability of the jobless to create sufficient earnings plagues this country for which so many citizens are entrenched in poverty. Being widespread and long-term in nature, unemployment is particularly problematic as it intensifies difficulties on a household level. Household poverty and unemployment are inextricably linked. Poor households with one or no wage-earner become dependent on state provided pensions, most frequently in the form of an old-age pensioner, disability and child-support grant. It is for this reason that the inability of young adults to earn wages that contribute to the household is cause for concern.

### **Youth in South Africa's labor market**

As the demographic of South Africa becomes increasingly youthful, young adults are disproportionately affected by unemployment. Due to the extensive quantitative data available regarding youth unemployment, this study relies on secondary sources to describe the causes, depth and breadth of this issue and is outlined below. The understudied psychosocial implications of unemployment on young adults will be depicted in subsequent chapters.

The category of youth encompasses a wide range of years throughout Africa, and in South Africa the definition is particularly inclusive. The National Youth Commission Act of 1996 defined youth as including all individuals between the ages of 14 and 35 to incorporate those who were unable to go to school, gain employment or were otherwise disadvantaged by the effects of the liberation movement. While this categorization was useful two decades ago it is impractical at present. Young people today have little or no memory of the apartheid years, and clearly, the needs and capabilities of a 14 year old are enormously different from those of a 35 year old. Those in the higher end of this category maintain unemployment statistics that more closely resemble the national average (Altman 2007).

Youth in South Africa are twice as likely to be unemployed as their adult counterparts, with 58% of young people aged 15-19 and 50% aged 20-24 unemployed as of 2005 (Altman 2007:1). Approximately three quarters of the four million officially unemployed were below the age of 35 in 2004, and 77% of those aged 15-30 who are looking for work have never had a job and that more than half of those strictly defined as unemployed have been looking for one to three years (Altman 2006:3). Those who are young and job-searching are not only disadvantaged by their lack of social and human capitals, but are also exempt from the welfare pensions, grants and cash transfers the government provides to the poor, further encumbering their job search process.

Macro factors abetting unemployment for young adults are the aforementioned labor market trends over the last decade (participation, lack of low-skill jobs, lack of access to informal market). On a micro level, obstacles to finding employment stem from a dearth of skills, inefficient schooling or inefficient time spent in school, and malnourished township social networks hindering information and access to jobs in an unfriendly job market

### **Trends in education and unemployment**

Education plays a critical role in regards to youth unemployment, and the importance of understanding apartheid-era differences in services provided for each racial population group is crucial to understanding the present state of education in South Africa. For decades white students enjoyed privileged access to well-funded schools, favoritism in the labor market as well as preferential social services. African youth were severely restricted by their educational institutions and post-school employment options, while coloured students maintained a position in between the two extremes (Lam, Seekings 2005). Currently, young Africans are staying in school longer and reaching higher grade levels with most completing secondary school and many going on to tertiary education. Their level of schooling gives them skills that make them more employable, however high levels of unemployment among such cadres indicates that youth may be too selective about what jobs they will take. Concurrently, the quality of education they receive, and the skills that are acquired may not be attractive to potential employers.

Due to high levels of grade repetition and school absence, many young adults remain in secondary school into their early 20s (Lam 2007, 2008; Morrow 2005). Researchers speculate that approximately one million young South Africans per year leave school to enter the labor market and only 270,000 of these are thought to have reached Grade 12, with even fewer passing their matric

exam (Cloete in Marock, 2008). Marock states that 58.5% of those who drop out of school before completing Grade 12 experience from one to three years of unemployment, and represent 40.3% of the unemployed youth population in South Africa (Altman 2007; Marock 2008). Despite high levels of unemployment for those who have finished secondary school, there is a correlation between years spent in school and job acquisition (Moleke 2006; Pauw et al. 2006; Lam 2008). In fact, it is becoming increasingly imperative that young people complete secondary school and some tertiary education as well (Lam 2008: 4). Findings show that although Africans have a high rate of school enrolment (86% of females and 89% of males ages 16-17), their attainment levels are significantly lower than their white, and coloured peers (Lam 2008: 8). Despite the growing necessity to complete school, many young people leave before attaining graduate status, most commonly due to inability to pay school fees or the need to contribute to the household income (a situation that is frequently counterproductive as the individual is then both out of school and out of work).

Those who do go on to higher education still experience frustrations associated with unemployment. There are currently more graduates with degrees than there are degree-level jobs in the fields that students are pursuing. Moleke asks if African learners are studying the “wrong subjects.” Moleke has looked closely at issues of education and unemployment in South Africa and found that those learners graduating with a humanities background were the least likely to find a job directly related to their studies, suggesting either that this field is not preparing graduates for the job market, or that those graduates were unwilling to accept available offers of employment. Some humanities graduates indicated that the jobs they did secure required a lower level ability than their education had prepared them for (Moleke 2006). Students who studied hard sciences, particularly engineering and medicine were able to find employment more quickly than those who studied the social sciences (ibid). What one can surmise is that the lack of career counseling available in schools sincerely thwarts a learner’s ability to make well-informed decisions regarding their higher education and career paths (Altman 2007; Marock 2008). On an individual level, however, learners who have succeeded in reaching tertiary may be unwilling to lower their expectations and accept jobs that are obtainable, putting them in the category of voluntary unemployed. It is clear that, “the second segment of the unemployed consists of better-educated and younger participants. It is these individuals whose current labor supply characteristics, marked most obviously by their formal qualification, do not match with the labor demand needs of the economy” (Bhorat 2004).

### **Shortage of skills**

Pauw, Oosthuizen and van der Westuizen (2006) confirm that unemployment has grown amongst those with “more” education but who are not among the “highest” educated, in light of the shift towards a demand for skilled labor. Many young Africans are indeed attaining tertiary education, however still lack the necessary skills to fill jobs that are available. The majority of young, tertiary educated and unemployed are those with diplomas and certificates rather than full degrees. Graduate unemployment still remains meager when compared to overall unemployment (Pauw et al. 2006:10).

While higher education does seem to be increasing, it may be doing little to mitigate the skills shortage South Africa is experiencing. The growth of an educated workforce is undoubtedly necessary, however too few are becoming skilled in the engineering and artisanal techniques most conducive to the demands of the present economy. In 2006 there were two university students for every Further Education & Training (FET) college student, problematic in a country where technical skills are increasingly attractive to employers (Pauw et al. 2006:16). Mlatsheni (2005) explains, however, that FET colleges are often under-resourced and not easily accessible to those who would be most inclined to use them. Furthermore, some employers prefer a university degree over an FET diploma (Mlatsheni 2005:53). Even on a low or semi-skilled level for those with less education and less training, inefficient skills hinder many. The lack of basic work experience for secondary school leavers entering the job market is a serious weakness, and employers are reluctant to hire young and inexperienced workers (Marock 2008:17). Marock cited communication skills especially in English (also Lam 2008), computer training, and entrepreneurship and business skills as being particularly beneficial to young jobseekers. In terms of job searching, CV creation, knowledge of job referral services, and interview practice would also be of help to those who may lack career guidance in schools (ibid).

### **Weak social networks**

Young adults are particularly susceptible to the restricted social world of the township, and suffer from a dearth of support as well as poor social capital necessary to access outside information and find appropriate means of employment. The issue of young adults in poor and isolated communities has previously been discussed in looking at the work of Wilson, Spergel and others in Chapter 2. Wilson depicts neighborhoods that foster malnourished social and familial relationships in terms of love and support, as well as weak relationships in terms of the quality of information and material help they provide (Wilson 1993).

The HSRC reports that the majority of township workers find their first job through means of social capital, using networks of acquaintances rather than a CV or formal job application process. “For black students in particular,” Morrow explains, “there is a lack of available career information. Career guidance programs in public schools are weak, and given their history of isolation and disadvantage, family and social networks in most black families and communities tend to be inexperienced in giving advice on career and business opportunities” (Morrow 2005: 9). Social networks are especially important for young workers who generally lack prior work experience and therefore have similar credentials to their peers. Mlatsheni finds that although 55% of Cape Town area residents in one survey found employment through social networks, only 10% of those aged 15-30 utilized social network in such a way (Mlatsheni 2007). This is most likely because their networks are not well developed, not because they choose not to utilize this method. Altman shows that urban African youth are becoming increasingly disassociated from social and community organizations. The number of African youth who self-reported to belong to any sort of church, sport or community organization dropped from 78% in 1992 to 43% in 2000 (Altman 2007: 12). This deterioration of social capital for township youth can only contribute to what is for many, economic and societal stagnation.

The following chapters delve into both the individual and the societal causes and consequences of youth unemployment and depict the thoughts and experiences of young townships adult as they navigate issues of poverty, unemployment and uncertainty in their own lives.

#### **Chapter 4: Unemployment and the Individual – the psychological effects of failing to find work**

This chapter depicts the various ways that young adults grapple emotionally with unemployment and how their experiences in finding or failing to find work influence their future goals. Evident in the responses of the young adults in this sample is a paradoxical view of the future, highlighting the difference between their aspirations and their expectations. Their goals are high, and they display an enormous amount of confidence in their own ability to make good decisions that will guide them to a positive future as well as the benefits of education to assist them in realizing these dreams. In contradiction, they are very much aware of the difficulties intrinsic in their environment that foster struggle and heighten the potential for failure. These dueling modes of thought create confusion and unease for those in this study.

As other research has found, coupled with their youthful optimism and ambition is a consistent understanding that their lives, possessions and existence are continuously under threat and that danger and disappointment are a way of life (Soudien 2007; De Lannoy 2007, 2008; Swartz 2007). Inherent therefore are feelings of depression, frustration, and anxiety that result in apathy and anger, sentiments that are consistent with previous qualitative studies of unemployment (Jahoda, 1933; Moller, 1993; McRae 1987 etc.). Simultaneously, youth in the post-apartheid era have high hopes in light of the new opportunities their generation can access. These expectations reveal optimism for some, but also unwillingness to accept available job offers that are not the “right” kind of work. One can discern the duality of these competing ideologies in the responses of the township youth interviewed below.

##### **Optimism for future**

Young adults in post-apartheid South Africa seem well aware of the opportunities available to them that were unavailable during their parents’ youth, and many feel pressure to dream broadly and achieve accordingly. Despite the squalor of their schools, familial relationships and neighborhoods, these young adults believe that their personal agency will shape their futures, resulting in personal success. In employing the dual combination of good choices and education, youth feel they can navigate their difficult lives and chaotic communities. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating similar results (De Lannoy 2007, 2008; Swartz 2007; Roberts 2009).

Now, we have education, not like our parents. If you have education, no one can take that away from you. Life is harder without education. (Thandiwe, 21)

Yah, we are so lucky now. We can do things, achieve things that they (older people) never could. It's all up to me now, ndiyabona? (Vincent, 16)

My parents were not educated, but they wanted better for me. They say university is the only way to succeed. (Sipho, 23)

I know I can do it. I just make my choices, do it alone. (Nezile, 21)

My parents are not educated. Mom is a domestic worker and my dad, he is a business man. He always worked, sold things, had a shebeen, worked for himself. I am the first one in my family to go to secondary school. We have much better chances than our parents now. (Zolani, 20)

It is harder out there for young people than for older people because you're expected to "be something." We have more opportunities than our parents and there is pressure to do better. (Nomsa, 21)

Young adults express an ardent belief in the benefits of education often without having seen educational attainment come to fruition. "Interestingly, yet perhaps not surprisingly given the context of low literacy levels among the elder generation in many of these young adults' lives," De Lannoy states, "the positive belief that education is the route to such success, is not always constructed on positive examples in the youngsters' environment" (De Lannoy 2007:13). Swartz's findings reiterate the invincibility of youth's self-perception, and the notion that by doing that which is "right" and "good" and avoiding that which is "bad" and "wrong," one can succeed despite the difficulties of their environments. Swartz explains: "Views such as 'apartheid hasn't affected my life. I live on a freedom world now. I will have a house like yours if I work hard' were common with youth equating hard work and education, and seeing both as the panacea to achieving socioeconomic mobility" (Swartz 2007:297). Finishing school and finding employment was their ultimate goal believing such accomplishment to be "at once empowering, inspirational and potentially diversionary (Swartz 2007:303)."

There is a marked difference between what young adults think will happen and what they hope will happen, and yet – not surprisingly - they fail to make this differentiation themselves when discussing their future. In his ethnography of youth in Clarendon Heights, MacLeod distinguishes between the two: “In articulating one’s aspirations, an individual weighs his or her preferences more heavily; expectations are tempered by perceived capabilities and available opportunities. Aspirations are one’s preferences relatively unsullied by anticipated constraints; expectations take these constraints squarely into account.” (MacLeod 1995:61) Despite the apparent obstacles and continuous frustration, this research finds that youth do not see their futures as bleak: “These ambitions allow them to maintain their belief in a ‘better future’ – shaped in stark contrast to the concrete experience of life in deprivation of their lower educated parents...One such strategy implies a long-term focus on success...Another rests on a more short-term wish for the same type of success, however with little or no concrete plans on how to reach that” (De Lannoy 2008: 37).

Success is thus largely considered two fold. On one level it is bold, the dream of a big house, a career that requires business suits and an office, a life that appears devoid of suffering and hardship.

Yah, I picture three kids, big house. Maybe I’ll work my way up and have an office, a car. Like that. (Vincent, 16)

I’m gonna get my PhD and teach at university. Then I’m gonna go to the Eastern Cape and start an NGO. (Sipho, 23)

I’m moving out of the township. I might work on cruise ships, travel the world, make lots of money. (Vuyo, 20)

...An office, I want to work in an office like those white guys. I think I can do it. (Bhoysi, 23)

### **Reality of township life**

While a few respondents alluded to these sometimes grandiose life plans, they also displayed a grounded sense of realism. On a more modest level many young adults view success as a job offering

consistent and reliable wages and the opportunity to earn enough to have their own shack and raise a family with fewer hardships than they endured.

In her own discussions with young adults, De Lannoy was surprised to find that while youth projected almost ostentatious careers and homes, they just as offhandedly predicted adversity and loss in their futures. Alongside lofty goals for big houses, children and professional jobs were “almost casually interjected references” to hardship and suffering such as “HIV/AIDS, poverty, crime, rape, success, 2010 World Cup, husband and kids” (De Lannoy 2008:7). Such difficulties were understood not only as a possibility but as an expected reality. Respondents associated most suffering as stemming from poverty, indicating that the majority of the problems within the township would be solved if poverty were mitigated.

Although poverty, death, crime, rape and unemployment elicited feelings of normalcy, young adults admitted that incessant interaction with these issues was disheartening. This inherent vulnerability instills in many young adults a melancholy sense of reality as seen below.

Everyone in my family is an alcoholic. I think maybe everyone in Khayelitsha. There is so much sadness, you need to escape...In my family no one reached Standard 10. They didn't care if I went or if I dropped out. I knew it was important, I had to get education. Just so maybe I could get a job, get away from them. (Vuyo, 18)

Here you cannot expand your mind. There is no knowledge, no opportunities. If you are ambitious you will get out so you can learn more. (Nomsa, 21)

In the township you always fail but I don't want to fail. (Phumzile 20)

Most people are told that they'll never be good enough. Like there is no need to try. (Nomsa, 21)

Growing up in the township not everyone was going to school and most people don't work. It was difficult for awhile to have dreams of becoming a lawyer or doctor, and people discourage you and don't see...that you can be what you want to be...even if you

go to school they discourage you. But if you do have that...dream that you will do something then you can be. (Andile, 23)

The above comments reveal the perceptions youth have of their homes. There are many adults in the townships who do work, and certainly not all have substance abuse problems. Several in this survey mentioned having had positive adult influences in their lives. Youth may not see many role models in terms of the jobs they aspire to, but there are certainly adults who work and provide for their households. The general sentiment these young adults express is their inability to access encouragement and support.

Ramphela's experiences with young adults in New Crossroads much earlier in the decade reiterate the ways in which youth struggle not just to succeed but to survive in their chaotic environments. She describes a community in disrepair, with deeply-inflicted wounds that will not be quick to mend and a preponderance of distorted identities and gender relations, failing physical infrastructure, embedded mistrust and entire communities that view instability as ordinary. "The full extent of the impact of apartheid on society needs to be accepted," she explains, "Families are in crisis. Schools are in crisis. Communities are in crisis" (Ramphela 2002:162). She describes unemployment as "the biggest thief of hope amongst young people," and finds in them an anguished and nihilistic response to chronic unemployment and general dissatisfaction with their own lack of skills that prevents them from achieving more (ibid).

### **Frustration with a lack of skills**

Regardless of educational attainment, when questioned regarding work, all young adults interviewed expressed frustration regarding potential employers' expectations of previous work experience. A lack of work experience contributes to youth unemployment exceeding adult unemployment (Mlatsheni, Rospabe 2002). Those who were not in school believed that because they were not hired for anything upon leaving school they had never gained new skills and were therefore still unemployable. Those still in school stated that they "could not" gain qualification while they were studying.

Research carried out in the Western Cape indicates that white students and school leavers (male and female) are considerably more successful in finding work than their African and coloured peers, and generally boast not only the highest levels of achievement in school, but the greatest amount of work

experience done while in school, making them more marketable in the school-to-work transition (Lam, Seekings 2005). Forty-five percent of white male learners work while in school compared with 5% of black male learners (this could be over school breaks so does not necessarily indicate the combination of school and work), and Lam suggests this is due in part to spatial segregation permitting black South Africans from accessing jobs (Lam et al. 2008: 11). Whether black learners' inability to work is due to a lack of trying, a perception that there are no part-time jobs and thus it is useless to look, or an actual dearth of part-time work in areas they can access, the majority of African township kids do not combine school with work, thus lowering their employability upon leaving school.

Finding jobs is hard for everyone, young, old, everyone. No one has experience. Older people have never had a job before so they are the same. It is so much competition to get the few jobs that are there. (Sipho, 23)

I finished matric in 2006. I couldn't find a job so I took a cashier course, cause yah, I thought that would make it easier. But I still found nothing...I got discouraged! It was hard hey? Every interview, they wanted me to have experience. I thought the course would be good enough. My mom made me (keep looking)...I got bored (looking for work) and I was frustrated. I just stopped looking. What was the point? (Zolani, 20)

Me, mna, I'd like to do marketing. I took a workshop a few years ago in marketing. There are jobs, I have seen them (in the paper). But you need qualification. I have no qualification and I can't get any because I can't get a job. I don't see how we supposed to get experience. We can do a course, many courses. But if you don't have experience, it doesn't matter, it doesn't count. (Nana, 30)

The jobs want young people because they are young. But young people don't have qualifications. No one wins. (Nezile, 21)

But jobs, jobs in the paper are for those they want experience. What if you have no experience? (Bhoysi, 23)

What I think is there are many jobs out there but that people can't be employed because they don't have the skills. So there are jobs, yah. I think it's the government and people to blame for unemployment. Government is not doing enough to give education to people so they can have skills to get jobs. (Andile, 23)

Andile notes an important issue in the South African labor market - the mis-match of appropriate jobs with available skill levels (Altman 2007:11). The majority of respondents expressed that they could not work while in school because studying took precedence over working and also because there were "no jobs". These statements can be called in to question as three respondents (and presumably many youth not in this sample) diligently sought out jobs while in school and worked part time while studying (as many young adults do throughout South Africa and the world).

In Standard 7 I tried to find a job. I need it, ya know? My dad is gone, my mom and auntie, poor. We had nothing. So either I go to bed hungry every night and go to school hungry every day or I work. The manager of the Shoprite goes to my church, yah? So I begged and I begged for a job and he finally agreed. And I didn't mess it up. I worked every day after school until I finished Grade 12. It was hard, I was always tired...Kids do nothing at home while I was at work. They failed school when they had time to study! I didn't even have time to study. It was hard to learn but I managed to pass. After work, I get home, I lock myself up to study. I was determined. (Nezile, 21)

In Grade 10 I decided to get a job so I could have some small things. I looked for awhile but found nothing. There was nothing. So finally, my brother's girlfriend, she worked at Nando's. She got me a job there. They wanted girls who could speak Afrikaans and didn't even want a CV. (Vuyo, 18)

I had to work for everything. My mom was working but she always said she didn't have money. She wouldn't even give me R2. I was working and I wanted to save the money but I couldn't because I had to pay everything for myself. I just want to work and save money and get my own small shack where I can be alone...It is so hard to study. You cannot concentrate you have to wait until everyone else goes to sleep before you can even study! And then I'm always tired. I'm tired all the time. (Thandiwe, 21) (Thandiwe worked at Woolworth's in high school.)

While these students found jobs through social networks (a trend discussed at greater length in the following chapter) their desperation to work and their persistence in finding work shows that it is possible to find income earning activities when necessary.

### **Dissatisfaction with school**

Some young adults who feel that they have been dedicated to their education express extreme frustration regarding their inability to gain work experience. They feel that they have done the “right thing” by staying in school and did not expect to finish only to be met with demands for previous work experience.

It is too hard if you aren't qualified. And if you don't have your matric, then you cannot get a job. But even if you pass matric and don't have work experience, you still can't get a job. (Zolani, 20)

Zolani was unemployed for one year after matriculating. Her inability to find work most likely stems from her desire to do work of a more professional nature and her unwillingness to do low-skill work. She admits to becoming discouraged and slowing her job search when she was initially unsuccessful.

Unemployment is a big problem. The majority of us as matrics, matric is nothing. It is supposed to mean something but now they want, what is qualification and you don't have that. And they're not giving us any chance and they don't offer us any chance to train us. They want qualified people and the majority of us are studying, and so we won't have any qualification or any experience...So if they gave us a chance, they might see...that we can do a job as much as someone with experience. (Nhokaya, 19)

The year after matriculating Nhokaya did get a job, however it was temporary in nature, and she was unable to continue working there once she started her tertiary studies. She frustratedly explained that if she wanted to work there again she would have to wait until December when they hired additional temporary workers, and was unsure if her previous experience there would increase her chances of winning a position. Some students such as Nhokaya are thus realizing that simply passing the matric exam is not enough to be successful in the job market.

Their inability to gain ‘experience’ while in school is proving to be debilitating for school leavers.

The thing is, it doesn’t matter either way. Matric or no matric we all do the same thing. No one has jobs they sit at their parents’ house. (Sipho, 23)

Despite evidence that finishing secondary school *does* matter (Lam et al. 2008; Borat 2004 etc.), and that unemployment is higher for those without at least Grade 12 (Moleke 2006; Pauw et al. 2006) the disappointment expressed by these respondents suggests that there could be a potential backlash towards school. Those who cannot find work and are generally without skills internalize their inabilities, believing themselves to be less worthy of success than their white counterparts - “the burden of failure” becomes unbearable and inescapable (Ramphele 2002:164). It is the collaborative and cyclically reinforcing issues of deep psychological distress and economic inopportunity that maintain poor communities. Altman voices similar concerns stating, “a very large portion of African school leavers struggle to find work. Although ...education does improve labor market chances it would be difficult for the individual to see this given that unemployment is so high” amongst peers (Altman 2007:8).

Respondents observed a vicious cycle: they could not gain employment without previous work experience, and could not gain experience until they were employed. Job seekers were reluctant to gain experience through volunteering or government programs, believing them to be ineffectual (a number of respondents were not aware that such opportunities existed in keeping with other research showing that African youth are less informed of such schemes such as Braehmer 2000). Government schemes and short term projects were dismissed as providing inadequate skills that would not be useful in terms of a career, and therefore the “wrong” kind of experience. These jobs lacked the stability and long-term financial security that respondents felt was necessary to take care of a family and plan for the future.

What government does is they create short term jobs, just six months. So, it does nothing. No, government jobs are projects. Like cleaning the streets, building things. It’s no good. It’s not the kind of experience you need to get a real job. Who wants a one year job? What will that do? You work for one year, next year you are back on the street. Then you have to look again. (Asanda, 24)

It is hard to get jobs with a CV. You need to have experience, and where will you get experience, you know? Because you have to work first before you get experience. How can you get a job? How do you get experience? The government wants you to volunteer. Yah, you can volunteer but that is the thing we don't want to do. They send you to crèche, they send you to primary school, they send you to high school, they send you to tertiary school. And now it's like more school, volunteer school. You work but you don't get paid. (Bhoysi, 23)

Why would I do a short term? I need to plan ahead for my future. I need a job I can do for life. (Nana, 30)

### **“Real” Jobs**

The desire to have a job “I can do for life” was consistently expressed and respondents reiterated the desire to have a “real job,” which at its simplest form meant a position where their employer knew their name and paid them an established and agreed upon wage.

All respondents, however, expressed the desire to “become someone,” a sentiment echoed in previous research (De Lannoy 2007; Swartz 2007). The tendency to see success as a long-term and professional job was demonstrated by De Lannoy's respondents: “A ‘good job’ is mostly perceived as one that offers some form of stability and that does not involve hard manual work...success is described often in material terms... as well as a sense of independence” (De Lannoy 2007:12). Young adults felt that the informal work done by their parents wasn't “real” and personally aspired to professional jobs.

“For these young people,” Swartz reiterates, “completing school and securing a job was the key to leaving behind substance use, crime, and to provide a better life for mothers and younger sibling” (Swartz 2007:303). The desire to provide for families was alluded to in this sample as well. Nezile's job throughout high school was to help out his poor aunt with whom he lived. Phumzile similarly sought to work hard so that she could support her younger sister: “It is because I struggled so much, I don't want to see the people around me struggle. I would do anything, any job to help them” (Phumzile, 20).

## Employment reservations

While some respondents initially stated that they would do “anything” to earn a wage, this statement was followed a list of exceptions. Most were disinclined do unskilled labor and were reluctant to work in the informal sector (the informal sector in South Africa is particularly difficult to enter, as discussed by Kingdon and Knight 2004). A number had tried working in either sub-contract construction jobs or as cashiers but were unhappy and quit. Nearly all respondents claimed that there were “no jobs,” however it is more likely that the caliber of jobs are not in line with what these individuals would like to do. These responses often varied according to educational attainment. No respondents were willing to do manual work such as cleaning or construction. Those with the highest levels of education were reluctant to do cashier jobs, while those with lower education were looking for this type of work.

I just want to work and save money and get my own small shack where I can be alone... I worked at Woolies My friend worked there and I gave her my CV. I didn't like it though and was just there one month. *I made money but yah, it wasn't a career.* (Thandiwe, 21)

I just want a job, any job. You know, to pay for things...(but) *I don't want to be like my parents. I want to do what I have passion for, not just a job to do a job.* (Zolani, 20)

I've been looking for years. I was doing my matric and then I started looking for a job the next year. My friends aren't working. We are all not. I would do anything, any kind of work. Well, not some. *Yah, like not wash the floors. I want a real job.* (Nomnikelo, 22)

Yah, I'll look for any job. I'll do anything, in any shop. But not you know, like the cleaning. Or the subcontracts. *I want a real job.* (Themba, 23)

There are people who come from Eastern Cape. All they think is job, job! Any type of job! Anything, he'll do it. And if he loses that job, he'll get another one. They just want to work, save their money. Does education help? Depends... If you get matric you might. But some people who finish Grade 12, they don't have money to go further. They do their third year in the shebeen...us born in Cape Town, we want to go to school and we want a good job. A real job in an office like those white guys. I think I can do it. (Bhoysi, 23)

It is hard because jobs want more experience or more education. Even if you do find a job it is low skill. We all want something better. (Nomisa, 21)

The desire to do a “real” job is sometimes not merely due to vanity or pride. Respondents expressed that many of the jobs available to them - either subcontract jobs or other unskilled jobs – were not just low-paying, but also unreliable or dangerous, providing no sense of job security. Feeling ostracized from their work, there is little incentive to perform or to show up at all. There is also a perception that it is easy for employers to cheat their workers when there are so many other candidates with the same qualifications clamoring for jobs.

Me, mna, I've worked (construction) three times. But I wasn't interested...I worked there for two months, up on the roof. If I get a job like this, from the first day I work there I tell myself okay, I will work there for two months. That's all. Yah, you see, this building, it is not my type of job. You can fall up there...The other (contract job) was nice because the guy who was supervisor, that guy didn't know anything. I stayed for like three months but when I count up those days I only worked for like one month. I was cheating that job. I saw how to cheat. I would wake up every morning and go to the job. I stay 'til ten o'clock and then go home. He never knew. (Bhoysi, 23)

When you look for a job it is because you really need some (money). But if you work all day, you don't want to make R20 for the day. At least R100 you need. Cause sometimes they don't want to give you much and then you think, well why did I work all day? There are a lot of hard jobs for small money. I don't like that. (Luxolo, 19)

I don't consider myself employed if I go to the job and they don't even know my name. Like the contracting. I just arrive and do the work and it's not a proper job. Cause you could lose the job, and maybe you don't go if you don't feel like it. Cause if I don't show up, they can find someone else. I'm not comfortable with that. (Kwezi, 24)

Ugh contract. I hate those contract jobs. It is so hard. White people won't do those jobs. Why aren't there black people in the offices? Why? I can't get those jobs. (Themba, 23)

When surveyed, those who do some sort of income-generating activity do not always report themselves as being employed, as they do not consider this to be a proper job (Seekings, Natrass 2005:279). Swartz's study confirmed that informal income-generating activities were not considered to be valid for similar reasons, such as the irregularity of hours and the aversion to manual work.

### **Searching for jobs**

While it has been shown that searching for work can be too expensive to maintain regularly (Knight, Kingdon 2004; Marock 2008; Seekings 2005), some young adults feel that their unemployed peers are simply being lazy. They insist that there are jobs available but their peers simply don't try to find work, or are unwilling to take menial jobs (peer "othering" is discussed in the following chapter). Those who were most likely to accuse peers of laziness (quoted below) were those with the highest education, while those with less education insisted that looking was useless.

People DO have a choice...they could find some work. It is pride. They don't want to do manual jobs, they expect more. (Phumzile, 20)

It is not the government's fault that there is unemployment. The government has been good. They have lots of projects: building, making improvements in the roads. There are lots of jobs out there. People don't work hard enough to find them, or they don't want them. (Sipho, 23)

People say they can't do it (succeed) because they don't have the money. They are too lazy, you can get loans if you try. (Nezile, 21)

People are lazy...they want everything for free. It makes me sad. (Vuyo, 18)

People need to do more to show interest in education and do more for themselves. (Andile, 23)

Despite the aversion to manual labor, surveys looking at reservation wages amongst working class township dwellers indicate that unemployment is not voluntary and that most unemployed do not hold unrealistically high reservation wages. Natrass and Walker (2005) use survey data and

modeling from Khayelitsha/Mitchell's Plain to find that there is no evidence that unemployed township dwellers are "pricing themselves out" of the job market. They do find, however, that the "duration of unemployment" affects reservation wages, noting that "the longer people stay out of wage employment, the less able they become to ascertain their market value correctly. They may thus set unrealistically high reservation wages" (Natrass, Walker 2005:504).

This concept could be applicable to young adults who have never worked and therefore know little about what "normal" wages would be with regard to their own human capital. Walker in 2003 describes: "While those in wage-employment report a reservation wage based more on perceived labor market value, those in unemployment report a reservation wage influenced strongly by substance requirements" (Walker 2003:1). Those surveyed in KMP generally reported reservation wages well below what they could expect to earn, suggesting voluntary unemployment to be inapplicable. Walker did find, however, that those with least education have reservation wages that are perhaps too high, and that "those with some post-school education have a far higher mean predicted wage than those with no post-school education but comparable schooling," which is the category that many in this research fall into (Walker 2003:49), confirming that those surveyed may be ignoring job opportunities they consider to be less than desirable.

### **Higher achievers and uncertainty**

Particularly for those who feel they have made the "right" decisions, the lack of appropriate jobs can be dispiriting. Those respondents who were enrolled in a tertiary institution were more articulate in describing the lives and jobs that they hoped to achieve. A number, however, only cautiously stated their hopes, knowing that their current status was a fragile one and could be eradicated if they were to lose their bursaries, fail to do well in their courses, or drop out for personal reasons. While confident in their own abilities, they realized that the world around them was anything but stable and the environment could unhinge even the most dedicated. There is a deeply entrenched feeling of vulnerability within the township, and a sense that every small success could be temporary. One might think that for those who had reached the tertiary level this sense of susceptibility would have lessened, but the idea that failure is imminent is heightened because they have more to lose and will experience a more public failure if this occurs.

De Lannoy expands upon Henderson's (1999) discussion of fragility in the lives of township youth. Although youth may plan for their lives, the environment and support systems are often too weak to

uphold the realization of these goals. De Lannoy's expanded definition is the "compound of 'fluid' social relationships, economic pressures and inequalities, crime and violence, and the temptations, influences and frustrations caused by a globalised, materialistically oriented society that offers young people today a myriad of choices, yet in the absence of strong guidance and evidence on the outcomes of such choices" (De Lannoy 2007: 11).

Those in tertiary had overcome many challenges already and found ways of garnering information that generally failed to reach the township. Their knowledge of university application procedures, the process of finding and applying for loans and bursaries and the act of physically moving out of the township - either just to attend class or to live semi-permanently - set them apart from their peers in their communities. The understanding that this could be taken away was felt by many. Uncertainty thus has an enormous impact on the lives of young adults (Lam et al. 2008).

Goals? For my future? First get a job, any job. I want to go to school. Then I want a house. I want to graduate and look for a better job... (but) maybe my skills won't be enough. Maybe there will be no jobs. I don't know. (Thandiwe, 21)

Yah, I have goals but you know, these goals need money to achieve. Maybe I can get a bursary or maybe a job for small money. I have plans but yah, I don't know. I want to be a nurse, have a big house, two kids. It will not be hard if I work hard but I need the money. (Vuyo, 18)

I always ask, what's the point? I'm just going to fail. I get pissed off and then I hate myself. I want to do well but it is so hard. Its fine, I'll keep on trying. I struggle but its fine. (Thandiwe, 21)

Money is my obstacle. Sometimes it is hard to have money for transport to work and to university. I have a loan and a bursary so I must work hard not to lose them. Yah, most teens probably wish they were better. But it is just too hard, no one knows how. (Zolani, 20)

Money. Money is always a worry. (Sipho, 20)

A respondent from De Lannoy's research succinctly reiterates: "... Even if I, I think of 'okay, tomorrow I'm gonna wake up and do something productive, I always think that there might be something that will prevent me from doing that..." (De Lannoy 2008:16).

### **The demoralizing effects of rejection**

Moller's study highlighted the attitudes of unemployed township dwellers, citing them as anxious and dejected. Low self esteem, cynicism and the decline of relationships were common (Moller 1993). Because this was not a long-term study, there is no evidence as to how their opinions of themselves and their situation changed over time, if this caused long-term stress, or if they eventually lowered expectations. The older youth in this study had been out of work for a number of years and expressed depression and despair as a result. Younger respondents were more likely to express frustration from their own experiences and concern for the community at large. Higher achievers seemed to become frustrated and dejected quickly, as they had believed they would progress more quickly to the goals they had prescribed to.

Continuous rejection in an environment in which joblessness is the norm can result in a sense that every attempt will be unsuccessful, and thus there is no point in trying. As job searches wore on, respondents saw them as time consuming, and cost ineffective, and felt it less agonizing to stop rather than continue seemingly fruitless attempts at finding work. Even those who continued to look did so halfheartedly.

So yah, when I was looking for a job, every day I go looking. But I stay in Khayelitsha, ya know? Cause to go into town, it's like R20, ndiyabona? It is expensive. So maybe I go to town once. But yah, you must not rush when you look for work. Yah, cause if you rush, you won't find it. You just wake up and stay in your house and then you go slowly. If you rush, you're gonna get tired. You can't go here and here and here. Just go slowly...not rush. (Themba, 23)

I look in the paper (for jobs). Maybe you look there, maybe you see something. Then you go to that place. Then if there is nothing there then you wait until you buy another paper. (Kwezi, 24)

There should be a grant for the unemployed. So we can have some encouragement. Why is there no assistance from the government? We have grants for the old age and the babies, but nothing for people like us who need money. If they just gave us a little, R200, it would not be enough to live but it would be encouragement. It would help, like with transport to look, to print your CV, use internet. It all costs money. Buy a newspaper, it costs money. You need money to look and we don't have. (Nana, 30)

So, say there is a job out there. But you go to get it, and no qualifications. So you say, okay, and go back, sit in the township and go with the flow. If you hang in the township, you'll see there are lots of plans of making money. You can steal from your neighbor, steal from the line. Shoplifting. Go rob the guys coming from school. And good ways, like go around and ask for scrap, recycling, selling food and cigarettes. Work on the taxi. (Bhoysi, 23)

When you finish Grade 12 you feel there are possibilities. But then there aren't. (Xoliswa, 27)

I used to go door to door, go into town, bring my CV. But you don't find things. So then you stay in the township just say, "Hey have you heard of a job?" Wait for someone to bring news. (Bhoysi, 23)

I have no job. I look some days. Most, I sit at home and watch TV all day. Do my hair. Go to friends and gossip. No, it's not fun, it's not good. What else can I do? Last week I did the CV thing, went to one place. I'm still waiting for a call. I go in and ask if they have vacancy and give them a CV. Maybe I try another place this week. I'm tired of it all. (Nomnikelo, 22)

Being out of school and out of work creates "enormous amounts of free time" (Swartz 2007:321) which can result in boredom and depression. One female respondent in Moses' study remarked about the scarcity of opportunities for young people in the township of Ocean View: "there is nothing for a girl to do... I don't know what to do with myself...I don't want this stupid life anymore,"

exemplifying the feelings of listlessness and depression associated with unemployment (Moses 2006: 121).

As previously discussed, young adults perceive education as a conduit to social mobility. Without seeing overt changes in the lives of those who have matriculated, a few respondents seemed disillusioned with education.

Yooh. There is so much disappointment. Because they tell you if you do your matric of course you will get work. Like in high school... you think there will be jobs but then you get there and there is nothing. Some people get upset, some people are like yah, I don't care, whatever. They don't want to work anyways. But I mean, I've been studying, they tell us to study and if I do I'll find a job and then there's nothing. There's nothing when you finish. It doesn't matter that you studied. (Nhokaya, 19)

Even those guys that get degrees. They go to school but they still looking for job, maybe two, three years. Still looking. I don't know about this, they go to school for ten years. But now they are not working but they passed their matric...they work the contract too (subcontracting jobs). They are not happy. They want to be a doctor, a teacher, but they can't, they not qualified. So maybe you do this job because you're desperate. You don't want it, but you desperate. (Themba, 23)

Themba is relating what he believes has been the experience for others, as he had only finished secondary school. His sentiments are useful, however, as they reveal how the perceived value of education could be changing without success stories to reinforce its benefits. Some unemployed youth feel that they should be eligible for more job opportunities, and thus feel that education is failing them. A small number of respondents felt that they were being discriminated against due to race.

You know it's a matter of race. There is a perception (from employers) that black kids don't get a good education and so if you hire them, they will not do a good work in the job you give them...white kids get better education so they will get better jobs (Nomsa, 21)

When you are black it is harder. I have experienced this. You see, you can go to Shoprite. You can go there and ask a job, they will say there is no job. But then maybe some guy who is coloured, he goes in too and asks a job. And the guy he goes to the same Shoprite and he gets it. It happened to me. Color counts. Or maybe you get the same job but other guys in the job, white guys, they won't treat you right. They won't pay you the same. Why do I try if I know this will happen? (Vincent, 16)

Here in Cape Town, they look color, you know? Say I go to eWaterfront and ask the job, they will say no. They don't trust township people...they think I'm a gangster. They think I'm going to steal. So then, I think, okay. If you think I'm going to steal, maybe I should rob that thing. When there is no eyes watching you, you gonna steal...If you put a dog on a chain, it will make it strong, it will eat these people. So yah that is how I feel. (Themba, 23)

Nomsa's comment corresponds with research done by Moleke (2006) who considers graduate unemployment in South Africa. That employers refrain from hiring black kids because they "won't do a good job" is inaccurate, however Moleke noted that students graduating from historically black institutions experienced longer terms of unemployment, as formerly white institutions were better funded and may better prepare students for employment. This constitutes not overt racism, merely logical hiring of the most qualified candidates.

Themba and Vincent's comments reflect their own frustration in finding work while observing that those in higher paid professional jobs have historically been white. While their statements are generalizations, the rate of unemployment is overwhelmingly comprised of black workers and it is understandable that they should feel this way.

Frustration was expressed by many, whether regarding their personal situation or the conditions of their environment. Despair was alluded to, although not overtly demonstrated. Throughout interviews respondents indicated that because joblessness was so entrenched within their communities that it seems insurmountable. They are aware of it at all times, but because it is not something with a clear or feasible solution it is reluctantly accepted. There is no sense of urgency regarding their job searches even for those who express the most dissatisfaction with their situation. Desperation does not necessarily result in action. The idea of leaving the township to find a job is unlikely due to the

costs associated and the uninformed nature of such a venture. To stay in the township and “make do” seemed to be a more likely short and long term solution in that it would provide that which is necessary for survival, but not that which would allow for upward mobility.

I got bored and I was frustrated. I just stopped looking. What was the point? (Zolani, 20)

Yah, I’m looking. I’m not liking it. I had one interview and now I wait. It is too frustrating. (Asanda, 24)

You see, yeah, is unemployment a problem? Okay. Yeah it is a problem, it is not a problem. Why? There are people that are looking for jobs, for them it’s a problem. There are people who are not looking for jobs, for them it’s not a problem. Yah, there are ways to survive, I don’t want to go into details, but you can survive. (Kwezi, 24)

Everyone is frustrated. No one dreams of growing up and doing nothing, becoming nothing. (Phumzile, 20)

There are a lot of young people that don’t have job. Many young people walking around. They don’t think about that, about jobs. They think they’ll make money by rob. Maybe in three years when they still don’t have a job, maybe then they’ll be worried but not now. (Vincent, 16)

Sometimes I want to give up so much. And everyone tells me ‘it will be fine’ but they cannot help me. Like, you know it is going to be fine, maybe, some day. But you just want to hear something else, anything else, something better than that. It pisses me off. When is it going to be fine? I need this now I need options. I go crazy. (Thandiwe, 20)

Unemployment is a big huge problem. But no one can solve it. Like when you don’t work and you don’t have someone to support you with clothes, food, anything, that becomes a problem. Others become gangsters, others become whatever. You get into bad stuff. Maybe you get into drugs, get into the wrong kind of people. Maybe you become a drunk master, you just drink all the time, forget your worries. (Bhoysi, 23)

When I'm not looking for work, it's not about giving up. It's taking a break. I'm tired of looking, I'm tired. You need a break sometimes. You despair. You think there is nothing and there will never be something. (Asanda, 24)

While respondents expressed varying degrees of discontent, they had also presumably exerted different levels of effort in their job search techniques and had differing expectations. What must be noted however is a collective sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with their surroundings which they view as stifling. The following chapter looks at the social issues associated with having so many demoralized young people in an environment in which failure is expected.

University Of Cape Town

## **Ch. 5: The consequences of living in unemployed neighborhoods**

### **The township environment: an overview**

This chapter places the unemployed individual in the context of the township and considers the consequences of maturing in a community where unemployment is so common amongst peers and neighbors that there are substantial economic and social consequences. The township environment is one that respondents described as being a source of corruption and malaise, and these youth felt stunted by the chaotic and dangerous nature of the community. Added pressure comes in the form of their peers who struggle under the same circumstances but may find irresponsible methods for grappling with their issues. Respondents reported that with excessive free time due to unemployment and a lack of recreational activities, the tendency to “hang around” on the streets increases the potential for drinking, drug use, criminal activity and violence. Stilted social networks and absent sources of information regarding employment and education opportunities further inhibits youth’s ability to ‘get ahead’ or even see a way forward.

“A neighborhood in which people are poor but employed is different from a neighborhood in which people are poor and jobless,” (Wilson 1997:567). As of 2002, 24 million South Africans live below the poverty line (McCord 2003). Studies show that there is a clear link between poverty, inequality and the presence or absence of wage earners in a household (Leibbrandt 2005; Seekings, Natrass 2005). The townships involved in this study – Nyanga, Philippi and Khayelitsha – are included in the Cape Flats which experience high unemployment rates, low household income, and minimal access to services as well as high rates of HIV/AIDS and violent crime. Perhaps more influential than the physical characteristics of the township is the general mood of township dwellers. The township itself is characterized first and foremost as unemployed, both in positive and negative ways. The scarcity of jobs permits that friends, family and neighbors are free to socialize and interact throughout the day, creating a community that to some is comfortable and appealing. Others note that this daytime idleness leads to excessive drinking, chronic laziness and complacency in action as well as anger and helplessness. Akin to unemployed communities presented in previous chapters, the isolation of these townships hinders the development of social capital; fosters schools and infrastructure that dampen human capital; and stunts development by an historical and ongoing scarcity of financial capital necessary to progress socioeconomically.

### **‘It’s hard to be good in a bad place’**

Young adults are perceptively aware of the conditions of their surroundings and are deeply affected by the poverty and suffering they see on a regular basis. Youth are vulnerable to these influences, however Swartz finds that “...despite public and government representations of young people as out of control and immoral, the youth (in this study) - despite being surrounded by crime and poverty – nevertheless demonstrate a sophisticated moral code. They clearly distinguish between right and wrong using reasonably consistent boundaries...but they also hint at how being linked to a specific location determines one’s morality,” (Swartz 2007:316) suggesting that merely by living in the townships, one’s moral decision making is inherently jeopardized. Young adults are therefore challenged with the question of how to remain “good” in a place that is “bad” (ibid).

Philippi, yah, it is not good. It’s in very bad shape, you know? We have big problems. Drug abuse, alcohol, crime. And it is always so loud and crowded, you cannot focus or think. It’s not a good place if you want to do something. (Sipho, 23)

All townships are corrupt. They all have crime. They all have problems. (Zolani, 20)

Growing up in the townships, these respondents felt they faced an almost anticipated sense of failure, noting the difficulty in having dreams in an environment that offers so little encouragement, and in which disappointment seems unavoidable. “These young people are preoccupied by the questions of survival,” (Soudien 2007:100) and paint a bleak picture of a community that fails to foster ambition.

Yah, I live in Khayelitsha. It’s not nice, we live in the shacks. The roofs leak...there are no toilets. People use buckets so there are flies, stuff in the street, it smells...Crime is so bad. I don’t wear my earrings in the township, you could be dead because of them or because of your cell phone. People kill each other for anything...And like, if you do something for your community, people look down on you...The teens, after matric, they look for jobs but nothing comes up and they give up. Others don’t even begin to try. The environment, it is so bad. People are not motivated. No one is optimistic. It is easy to fall into that. People there, they are not sad or happy. They smile at you but you don’t know what’s eating you inside. People don’t want to share their sadness. (Thandiwe, 21)

In the township though, there are no goals. People, they say they will do things but look out there, everyone is just sitting on the street, drinking. (Vuyo, 18)

Government should do more in the schools, get young people involved. Have things in the community. Young people, they are so bored, they have nothing to do so they do crime. And they don't think education gives possibility, there is nothing after. (Asanda, 24)

These descriptions of a chaotic place that's "not good" are given in an uncomplaining manner. Youth do not use their homes as an excuse but seem to understand that beneath their hardship lies the reality of their deprivation, a result of where they were born. "Unemployment, poverty and inadequate resources, compounded by the geographical isolation of the community" combine to diminish opportunities that are available and instead provide a multitude of reasons for letting go of aspirations (Moses 2006: 118).

The feeling that there are no jobs hampers one's ambition. Because so many neighbors are "sitting around" there is a perception that there are no jobs to be had. To look may seem futile, encouraging idleness. These young adults have matured in un- or underemployed households and see that it is possible to survive without a steady job, diluting a sense of urgency in finding work. Furthermore, the emotional and financial stress associated with the job search, when coupled with the belief that failure is expected maintains the status quo for many. It appears that only a small few who are particularly disciplined and resourceful are successful.

Unemployment is a big problem. A big one. Like today, go outside, go to Nyanga. The sun is shining, people are sitting outside, chatting the day away. Just sitting there. No one works... If you spend your time with people who do nothing you will probably do nothing. In the township you always fail. People want a better life but can't get it. If people say you're going nowhere people start to believe it. If you live in a positive society, you'll be positive too. (Phumzile, 20)

Like me, I don't have a family, so it's just me. So maybe I don't need much. Cause I just buy my food and that's it. Or maybe you still live with your parents, you still eating your parents' money, then you don't care. Maybe you won't work at all. (Luxolo, 19)

Instead of waking up at 6am they wake up at ten, they watch TV, they play cards, play games, talk to friends, yah. Yah, it's rare for people in the township to look for jobs like go out there, go to the city. What they do is they sit there and wait for things to come to them. When we (employed people) come back from work they ask us "have you heard anything, have you know someone who needs someone?". Yah, they don't go there and look for jobs. They just wait there, maybe write their CVs and wait. (Andile, 23)

If you grow up in this place we all have the same challenges but it can turn out very different. Even if you have good influences you could turn out badly. I have friends with good parents and they fail. You have to be strong and determined and try every single day. Every single day. (Phumzile, 20)

The statement that "no one works" is incorrect, however youth seek jobs that they consider "better" than how their parents made a living and are often disappointed to find that the growth in such jobs has not matched the growth in educated individuals in the country. The economy is slowly creating low skilled jobs which youth are qualified for but either cannot access do not wish to (Altman 2007:9).

### **The influence of peers**

Fluctuating households, due largely to adult unemployment, poverty and illness, mean that youth often possess excessive unsupervised time. A trend that emerged in this and previous research is the lack of parental or adult supervision afforded to young adults as they mature in the townships. De Lannoy highlights the multiplicity of choices available to young people and the lack of guidance from parents and caregivers (De Lannoy 2007:12). Peers thus become enormously influential with potentially demoralizing results. For these youth, "fitting in" is a serious concern and can influence the choices that one makes.

## Peer culture

Respondents (inaccurately) claimed that amongst their peers “everyone” was unemployed and that “a lot” of their peers could not afford to leave their parents’ home. Most common means of making money included stealing and falling pregnant to collect the government’s monthly child support grant. Respondents acknowledged that to do so is the easiest way to get by.

A lot of people drop out of school, they don’t finish. They start smoking, they don’t care. Cause it doesn’t matter. If you finish you still can’t find jobs. You struggle even if you finish school, at the end of the day, you struggle. (Nomnikelo, 22)

Most of my friends are too lazy, they think it is too hard. So they don’t even try. Maybe they tried at first but then, nah. (Zolani, 20)

How do you expect to get a job if you don’t have Grade 12? People don’t want to look for a job, everyone is lazy. It is easier to just rob people. My friend always asked why I worked so hard, why I cared about school. He said, “What’s the use if you just die anyways?” (Nezile, 21)

One girl in my class she was so smart. She matriculated but now has no job and sits at home, does nothing. Another, she had a baby and now gets the grant. Yah, she’s happy I think...she’s okay. (Sipho, 23)

In Khayelitsha, kids don’t care about school...they just hang around, doing bad stuff, smoking and drinking. My best friend, yah she went bad. She was so smart, so good. She fell pregnant in grade 11 and dropped out of school. Now she has two babies and no job, she can’t find work. But now she gets the grant, so you know, she’s okay. She might have another (baby) so she gets more. The problem with these girls now, they don’t care about themselves. They just want to enjoy life hang around at home or on the street. They don’t care. They’ll fall pregnant just to get the grant and use the money for themselves. Or maybe steal some money. I almost did that, it is just easier. (Vuyo, 18)

But teens with no jobs, they seem happy to me. Just hanging around, there is no stress. You just live off your parents until they kick you out. (Zolani, 20)

These youth realize that struggle is a natural part of life in their community and come to understand that every fragile accomplishment is the result of both individual perseverance and sometimes luck. They find culpability with both the environment as well as the individuals who failed to make more of themselves. Most are dismayed by their intelligent and “good” peers, whose goals lie derelict at 20 or 24 years of age, knowing that they themselves could be close to the same fate.

### **“Othering” and deflecting peer pressure**

“Peers” in this research were often represented as being reckless, lazy and focused on “living for today” rather than seriously considering their lives and their future. For the young adults in this sample the “othering” of peers came naturally, with statements suggesting that although “the young people” do this, they – the respondent – does not, disassociating themselves from their peer group. As in research done by De Lannoy and Swartz, these respondents see themselves as the exceptions.

De Lannoy’s participants comment on their peers as those who consciously choose to “do stupid things” including deciding to “join a gang and thereby run the risk of getting shot or killing others; or go to clubs, drink and smoke and thereby risk being raped or killed; or to give in to peer pressure to ‘have a baby’ and thereby forgetting the risks of unprotected sex” (De Lannoy 2008:10). While describing themselves as exceptions to the adverse “risk culture,” respondents felt - as felt by teens and young adults everywhere - peer pressure to fit in. Township youth discussed the difficulties navigating between a desire to “be cool” and an ambition to succeed through dedication to school work and good behavior.

The guys, yah they do the crime. The girls, they get pregnant. They think this is the answer. They think that either they will get the child support grant, or that their boyfriend will have to take care of them and give them money for things. They think it is the way out, but they end up just the same. (Sipho, 23)

Yooh there are so many challenges to being young. Like if you don’t date you’re not cool. Stuff like that. All of the bad things are cool. So yah, if you do the good things, you’re boring and you have no friends. If your friend is like, “hey, let’s go to a party, lets smoke” and you’re like “no” they’re like “huh??” (Nhokaya, 19)

Yah the peer pressure. It is hard to avoid. You have to be strong and no one will bother you. You have to learn to say a big NO. Some people, they don't have dreams. So they don't care. They are motivated by what they see, by how easy it is. They don't care if they die or go to jail. Or they think that will not happen to them. (Thandiwe, 21)

For some youth, their aspirations supersede their desire for short-term fulfillment. Their dedication to getting ahead can ostracize them from their colleagues often increasing feelings of isolation and grief. Those that are successful can be further snubbed by their peers and community.

My life, I would describe it as hard. Very hard. I had lots of challenges. There is lots of crime in Nyanga. You see it wherever you go. I didn't get involved but a lot of young people did. I told myself I wanted to be something in life. I had goals and I motivated myself...My friends they all smoke and drink. Some are gangsters. We aren't really friends anymore. (Nezile, 21)

Most of my classmates are not working, a lot have babies, live in the township, do nothing. Some of them have died. Yah so I have friends who won't talk to me anymore. When I said I wanted to go (to university), no one supported me, they thought I wouldn't make it. When I got in, everyone thought that I thought that I was better than them (Phumzile, 20)

I'm fortunate because I'm different from other kids. Like them, they think I'm distant. But I know the importance of study. I want to give up all the time, but I know that education is the key so I have to do it. (Vuyo, 18)

The need to distance oneself from peers and former friends in order to stay focused has been discussed by other authors as well. Swartz's discussion highlights the differences between "good" friends and "wrong" friends and avoiding those who promote drugs, drink, school absence etc. (Swartz 2007). De Lannoy's respondents also express evading friends who could "corrupt" them (De Lannoy 2007). "If you're doing something good for yourself and then there will be people judging you, saying that, ok, you think you're better than us," one respondent explains (ibid). Moses recounts those young people who are "high achievers" and who struggle with unsupportive peers and

community members whose jealousy or sense of competition result in negativity towards those who succeed. One teenage girl called her classmates and neighbors “vision killers” whose comments and actions undermine the acquisition of goals (Moses 2006). Fierce competition for jobs and meager opportunities mean that those who are successful become ostracized: “if you have the guts to go somewhere in life, then other people always want to put you down” (respondent in Moses 2006: 117).

### **Peers and crime**

The topic of crime and violence arose almost immediately when discussing township life for young adults. The majority of respondents overtly stated that crime was endemic and inescapable, and that there was overt pressure to participate whether that pressure be economic or social. “Crime” ran the gamut of definitions and purposes. At one extreme was the use of crime because of poverty i.e. stealing in order to feed one’s family. At the other extreme was the skollie or gangster. Respondents admitted that much more common than either of these was petty crime as means of gaining notoriety amongst friends, attaining money with which to buy commodities, or simply to assuage boredom. Respondents claimed that most of their peers were involved in this type of crime, although none admitted to participating themselves (the lack of admitted participants could either stem from a wish to avoid incrimination, or could signal that fewer numbers are actually participating in these activities than youth perceive there to be).

The first type of crime was necessitated by survival for the unemployed who were not being aided by the government by means of a child support grant or old age pension.

There is not enough education. We cannot get jobs because we have no skills. Of course there is crime, there is nothing else to do. (Vuyo, 18)

Unemployment depresses societies. It is very stressful. You end up doing things you don’t want to do. You need to eat before you go to sleep so you commit a crime to get food or to get money. (Phumzile, 20)

Maybe they need to support their family and they cannot. It is sad. At some point crime is related (to unemployment). Even if you see something is wrong, sometimes you do it anyways. Some people do it because they don’t have a choice. (Thandiwe, 21)

Everyone does shoplifting. It is the easiest way. They cannot pay for these things...they become desperate. It is common. Every person does it. But you know, no one gets hurt. (Nana, 30)

Most of the people who is unemployed is the youth. So they make the money for themselves to rob or steal something...older people get the grants. So they do get income at the end of the day. They do not need a job or to rob. But the young can't get income. (Nomnikelo, 22)

The majority agreed that crime was the easiest way of getting “small money” but that gangsters were involved in a different, more serious type of crime than their peers were in league with. Youth in this survey felt that only a very small number of their peers were involved in gangsterism.

It's easy...You walk around and you see that car there and there's no one around. It's not yours. But there's nobody in that house. Your mind is gonna say “I could get that and it would be a lot of money”. (Sam, 23)

Gangsters have nothing to do with unemployment. There's a difference between being a gangster and not. If you stealing to survive, you are not a gangster. A gangster is beyond beyond beyond that. (Bhoysi, 23)

### **Materialism and fun**

It was more frequently admitted that crime was a means of gaining notoriety. The majority of social interactions – both positive and negative – take place while “hanging out on the street,” frequently involving drinking, drug use and general misbehavior. Those that identified crime as a social issue rather than an economic one admitted it was largely practiced because there was nothing else to do.

Amongst peers, distinction could come from association with a “cool” group or by gaining the capital to purchase clothes and material goods that identified the individual favorably. Perhaps in light of the enormous inequality of Cape Town's populations, township youth place a high premium on consumer goods and brand labels. Cooper's research with Xhosa teens in Dunoon in 2009

underscored the emphasis placed on acquiring “commodities of the middle class” as township teens view themselves as modern, urban citizens of the new South Africa and strive to differentiate themselves from the poverty associated with their parents’ generation. Cooper posits that their high expectations for themselves in the new democracy and their “hunger” for televisions, mobile phones, laptops and designer clothes is an impetus for crime and violence, and was largely responsible for the violence and looting in the country during the 2008 xenophobic attacks (Cooper 2009).

As a teen you need clothes, you need to look good. It is so hard. Teens now, there is so much pressure to be bad. To do drugs, to drink, to go to shebeens, do crime. If you don’t do it, they don’t want to know you. (Thandiwe, 21)

I think unemployment, that’s an excuse for crime. People say you know we don’t have any jobs, that’s why we rob. That’s an excuse. All the negative things are the coolest things. Like if you do *Life (LoveLife)*, ooh you lame. Like crime, it’s in fashion. Like swiping cars. People who don’t get jobs, they gonna do the swiping cars. And that’s cool because at the end of the day you buy everything that you want. You buy the label you want and the clothing, and yah, you’re cool! We don’t care what you do. You do it and you look good. We’re fine with that. (Nhokaya, 19)

Teens do crime because of peer pressure. And to impress girls. Gun shooters get the girls. It is for status, not for money. And young people think school is a waste of time. Crime is easier and faster. Rob that guy, one minute, money in your pocket. But yah, if they on drugs, like tik man, if you smoke that you can do anything. (Nezile, 21)

Yah, I think sometimes kids do the crime for fun. For instance people doing crime, they don’t do crime to do good things. They use it for drugs or alcohol and to satisfy other things. They don’t give it to their parents, they don’t build houses or (buy) food and they just spend money on useless things. (Andile, 23)

Salo’s extensive research with young people in Manenberg (a predominantly coloured township) highlights similar anxieties caused by a growing culture of materialism in a community where affluence by legal means is unlikely. The proximity to the wealth of downtown Cape Town along with images from television heightens frustrations for youth who face inopportunities for social

mobility. The lack of employment forces some young people to find criminal means of gaining financial independence, establishing identity, and in doing so distancing themselves from the lingering apartheid-era stigma of their neighborhood. To mitigate these frustrations and gain status amongst peers, Salo's female respondents sought out the friendship of gang members and taxi drivers to make contacts outside of the township and gain material possessions (Salo 2003:13). Male respondents saw gang membership as a rite of passage in their community where unemployment threatened masculinity and disenfranchised their households (Salo 2004:218).

Respondents in Swartz's study responded correspondingly, placing high significance on fashion and materialism and noted that "being cool" was a priority (Swartz 2007:260). Emphasis was placed on clothes, shoes and cell phones to show rank, and some mentioned that the desire to have these things can result in them doing "things they would not otherwise do (like shoplifting, stealing, lying to get money ...)" (Swartz 2007:261). Material possessions such as these are thought to enhance one's social standing and distinction, and yet dishonest means must generally be taken in order to acquire these goods, threatening one's moral code. Respondents in this survey had varying levels of concern over crime. A few female respondents were most upset by it, stating that it made them scared that they would be victimized. Most brushed it off as an unfortunate consequence of boredom and poverty.

Unemployment in Philippi? Yah, it is the cause of crime. But people also do crime for fun. It's cool to be a gangster. I mean, you would not rob if you did not have to because you wouldn't think of it. But the kids think it is a cool life, that maybe they will be famous. (Zolani, 20)

Yah young people, it's cause of the drugs and drinking. They get drunk and do some crime. It's like fun, you know? (Xoliswa, 27)

They are sitting in the township doing nothing....yes, people get depressed, they have no purpose. That's not what you want for your life. When people get depressed they try to forget so they get in gangs or do drugs. For money, to forget their problems. In the gangs they feel accepted so you feel like you're making something of your life even if it is negative. (Nomsa, 21)

It's not like if I go to school I can grow up to be president. I can maybe do some small thing for myself, make some small money. To survive, there are lots of ways. Like here in Khayelitsha, some of these guys are rich. But these guys that are rich are gangsters. To be a gangster, the money is easy. Most guys, guys on the street, they don't think about working, they think how can I make money, be rich like that, ndiyabona? So see you can go to work and work for a month and make some money. But if I go to work for this guy (a gangster), maybe three seconds, I get the money. Now now. Why make a car wash when you can get the money in three seconds? (Themba, 23)

There is perhaps a blurring of lines between the majority of young adults on the street who are socializing with peers and the minority who are using this venue to be unlawful. The multi-purpose nature of this locale may lead youth to believe that more of their peers are offenders than actually are. Reinforcing this is the notion that "all the negative things are the coolest things," and young adults may wish to appear associated with some aspects of these "negative" things in order to be admired by peers. Projecting an image of a fashionable lifestyle is often as important as actually partaking in that lifestyle.

The township environment is an enabling one in which to commit crime, and yet the vast majority of young people still adhere to legal and conventional norms. Because all of those interviewed negated their involvement in "bad behavior," this research cannot indicate the motivation for and extent of youth participation in criminal activity. By all accounts here, it seems that despite estimations that "most" youth are involved, this cross-section of township youth rejects this lifestyle as immoral and counterproductive, if tempting. It is apparent that the mainstream belief in the value of education and the promise of success through hard work and personal merit are still aspired to.

### **Inhibiting characteristics of the township**

South Africa's poor and unemployed (though not all unemployed) arguably constitute an underclass, an echelon of underprivileged lacking access to employment, skills and means of increasing employment potential. These conditions are compounded by the social and physical isolation of their communities. Young adults in South Africa's unstable and uninviting labor market are at greatest risk of contributing to the underclass due to the naturally weak social and human capital capabilities customary to youth. Seekings and Natrass highlight six factors that reinforce unemployment and poverty for the underclass, to which young adults are particularly susceptible: unemployability due to

a lack of skills required by employers; lack of social capital on a household level; lack of social capital in terms of having no employed friends or relatives to help acquire employment; residence in a location that is far from employment opportunities; and a prolonged duration of unemployment (Seekings, Natrass 2005). Social, financial and human capital as pertaining to youth are discussed below.

### **Social capital**

As demonstrated, the social networks of young adults are largely comprised of other young, unemployed adults. Caregivers have been described as largely absent and similarly challenged by the difficult job market. In this “limited social world,” young adults suffer from deficiencies in guidance as well as poor social capital necessary to access outside information and find appropriate employment.

Due to the meager opportunities of previous generations, there is the shortage of people from the township participating in professional jobs. This not only prevents young individuals from seeing what opportunities may be available, but also permits new information from reaching the township. Those interviewed either stated outright that they did not know any professionals or know of professional jobs while growing up, or explained that they did not want to do unskilled work but *could not think of other options*. The formation of communities of low-skilled workers creates a dormant knowledge pool from which young job seekers can glean information. Aspirations are curtailed without the awareness of possible vocations and the applicable steps for career acquisition.

You see, in the township, there are no professional people. How can you imagine to be something that you don't even know exists? And okay so maybe you know that a doctor exists but you don't know there are these other things, other jobs. Maybe I will not be a doctor but maybe I don't have to work the contracts either. (Andile, 23)

It is hard, you know? In township, we have no role models. There is no positive. It is very hard to find these people. (Vuyo, 18)

In the township, we don't even know what jobs are out there. So it is too hard. You look and then give up. (Sipho, 23)

In the township there are no jobs. Yah there is some in some places but they're really bad. You have to go to city centers. (Nhokaya, 19)

Most people in Philippi are...well they are self-employed. Not like a real job. You see them, they have little shops, they cut hair or sell things. That is how people make money. (Zolani, 20)

In an area where jobs are generally found through social connections there is a "systemic disadvantage" for the poor and unemployed as "employers rely on informal channels in part because they face huge numbers of equally qualified potential applicants" (Seekings, Natrass 2005:281). Networks of young adults consist of others in the same circumstances. Morrow notes that the social networks of the young have diminished in the last decade, as fewer are participating in formal social activities (Morrow 2005). Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the majority of their neighbors found jobs through connections and that this was, in fact, the "only" way to find work. More than educational attainment or even previous work experience, connections were one's most powerful asset when looking for employment (Altman, 2007; Seekings, Natrass 2005).

Most kids don't pass matric. When they finish, they find employment or do nothing...When it comes to jobs, people get jobs through other people. If your friend or your brother has a job, yah, maybe you'll get one too. Cause maybe their boss needs more people. But that's it. (Zolani, 20)

For these jobs, yah they are always looking for guys but they don't want just anyone. You need to know someone who is working already and then they hire you. Not strangers. (Bhoysi, 23)

Everything is corrupt. For instance, the community center. That is there so people can go, find a job, find an opportunity. But you know how it is? If I work there, and I see this job, I call up my friends and my cousins and I make sure they get it. If you don't know people, you won't get anything. (Phumzile, 20)

You might not have experience but if you know someone you can get a job easy, like that (snaps). I hate that. That's the reason the majority of people don't get job and no,

they give up. You go look, you say, hey I'm looking for a job. They say no vacancy, but actually they do (have vacancy)...they're looking for someone that they know already. They'll interview you but hey they know already they not going to hire you. (Nhokaya, 19)

People find their jobs through friends, family. They...network. It's not a good thing because when there are jobs it's not fair. I may be better than him but he knows something, so he gets the job. Nepotism...it rules everything. It is corrupt. (Nana, 30)

### **Financial Capital**

Further hindering the ability of young unemployed adults to find work is a lack of financial capital. Financial capital is instrumental to a successful job search in that it allows one movement to look for jobs, and access to resources such as newspapers or the internet to discover opportunities (Marock 2008:19; Seekings, Natrass 2005:285). Lack of financial capital also prevents many from becoming self-employed, as South Africa has high barriers to entry in the informal market and few known options for loans or credit (Kingdon, Knight 2004). Numerous youth in this sample felt poverty was preventing them from being able to access job opportunities.

There are no jobs. I already looked. It is too hard and too expensive to look every day. We have no money and you need money to look. You have to take the transport, to print your CV, to fax or something, to make a phone call. You lose money when you look. (Asanda, 24)

You can't just go look for a job, just wake up and go look. I never did this, there's already like enough workers. It's nicer to meet people and maybe they can make a plan for me, find me a job. (Bhoysi, 23)

I look but I can't look everyday because I have to have money for the transport, you know. So I go once a week or maybe skip a few weeks. There aren't (jobs in Nyanga). Because you have to know someone who is working in a place to get jobs that are there. (Nomnikelo, 22)

Kingdon and Knight report that only 9% of those strictly unemployed search for employment full time, whereas 68% spend only ten hours per week on average looking for work. Evidence has shown that poverty increases unemployment duration by hampering one's ability to search (Kingdon, Knight 2004). As previously stated, high barriers to the informal market as well as realistic reservation wages, prove that for the unemployed, unemployment is far from voluntary.

### **Human capital**

Perhaps the biggest hindrance to reducing unemployment is the previously discussed mismatch of skills to jobs. While today's young adults are better educated than past generations, they are often still unqualified for opportunities in sectors that have seen growth in recent years. The historical condition of their schools and communities diminishes the value of the education that they receive, prohibiting them from developing their skills to the degree that those in advantaged communities are able to.

All of the youth in this sample expressed belief in the value of education and saw it as intrinsic to social mobility. However, success associated with education can be debased by the institutions that are meant to provide it. Numerous respondents reported schools as being unsafe, overcrowded, dilapidated, and lacking the resources necessary to keep them in school and prepare them for life after school as well as insufficient encouragement and instruction from teachers. The same observances have been articulated by previous sources (Richter et al. 2005; Swartz 2007; Soudien 2007).

Alternatively, students themselves are notorious for excessive absence from schools, taking years off and choosing not to work diligently while in school (Lam 2008; Swartz 2007) indicating that the institution and instructors cannot be exclusively to blame for learners' failings in school. Learners seem reluctant to take initiative and search out new opportunities. The fact that increasing numbers of township students are going on to higher education and finding employment (some in this study for example) indicates that success can be attained from within township schools, and that the failure of some can be attributed to their own indolence.

Yah, I went to school but it was so dangerous. So dangerous. It was far, I took the train but the trains were dangerous. I switched schools to a closer one later...I mean yah, there were gangsters there. But yah, we grew up with that so it was not so hard. We knew it

would be there...(but)A lot of kids drop out (of school) because of gangs and violence. Just to go to school you risk your life. In my school there were two gangs who fought each other and made everyone scared. They do it for power...they wanted the territory. (Zolani, 20)

At school gangsters come in and start fights. On Fridays there were always attacks. Kids come to school with guns, with alcohol and you couldn't say anything to a teacher or anyone. (Nezile, 21)

Our township schools they are not good...No one is there to tell us what careers there are, we don't have money. There is no time to think about what you want to do. There is no encouragement. (Andile, 23)

In Philippi conditions are so bad. The classrooms are very full. I had 50 learners in my maths! I could NOT concentrate. All the tables went right up to the board, there was so much noise, so many people...Yach, the teachers at school, they are not encouraging us. They didn't make us feel like we could do more. Sometimes they didn't even show up for lessons. Only learners who are very very determined will succeed...we don't always have books. People don't take us seriously, they don't give us what we need to succeed. So sometimes, you don't take it seriously either. The (having) no books, no stationary discourages you. Teachers don't care but some of us scrape through. I had one teacher who was so hard. So hard! But yah, it made us work and learn. I'm grateful. (Nomsa, 21)

Me, I used to be so negative. ..In Grade 10 I wanted to quit. I did not feel clever...I was so depressed, didn't know what to do. 'Why am I going to school?' I think I didn't have money, so what is the point? Yah, sometimes I know I should have ended up in jail. It is just so easy to do negative stuff. I don't do that now. (Sipho, 23)

School does not prepare you for work or university. I was so tired all the time and there was so much corruption in school. I almost got shot once and so I was going to quit but I didn't. I passed matric well, but I didn't plan to apply to university. What was the point? I didn't even know how (to apply to university). No one ever told me the way. Like you

must do this, you must do that. To succeed, ya know? No one tells us, no one cares.  
(Nezile, 21)

While students fail to take their own actions into account when criticizing their schools, they do voice some legitimate concerns regarding their inability to access valuable information. Township schools are (predominantly) underfunded. One in four schools does not have water, while 57% lack electricity and 52% rely on pit latrines and 13% lack any toilets at all (Makiwane, Kwizera 2008:11). Over half of youth victims of theft claim they were victimized at school, as well as 26% of assaulted youth. Overall, 15.3% of all South African learners have experienced violence in school (Pelser, 2008:2).

The appropriateness of curriculum is also called into question. Learners should be taught skills for problem solving and decision making as well as basic arithmetic and communication, especially in English for success in the job market (Marock 2008:13). Proper lessons as well as consistency from teachers were missing for most of those interviewed. Those in this study and others have expressed a dearth of support, which they don't immediately tie to joblessness but the correlation becomes clear when they discuss the lack of teacher encouragement in schools and varying degrees of attention from parents and family members (many report having been raised by a number of caregivers throughout their lives, reinforcing a sense of instability). A recurring theme throughout these discussions was the void of resources available to young adults. Whether this was information about potential careers, how to create a CV or apply for a loan, or simply news about the nation and the world, young adults felt they were missing crucial knowledge that would have been valuable to their growth and development.

In the township we aren't aware what is going on in the world and in the country. We don't think it has anything to do with us. No one talks to us about this. (Nomsa, 21)

I think we have so many opportunities, more than our parents. It's just for us we do have them but we do not know we do not have that much information that's where we get lost. (Nhokaya, 19)

It is because no one knows (about opportunities). There is no information. How can I know this thing exists if no one tells me? ...But, young people have many opportunities – people just don't know where to look or how to get a job. If you know where to look you will probably get it. (Phumzile, 20)

Teachers in school, they only care if you pass your matric. Matric, matric, matric. We never talk about what happens after. They want us to pass and leave the system...When you are young you think about university but those technical things (how to apply for loans) we don't know. So you think it is impossible. (Nomisa, 21)

I always dreamed about university, but I didn't think I would go. People in the township don't know about things like bursaries or loans. We just didn't know. I always thought only rich people, white people go to university, that is what we think here. In the township, you don't know these things...I was always curious, but how could I go if I couldn't pay? In the township we go to school, but we only do what they tell us, we don't think about what I like or what I want to learn or to be. (Zolani, 20)

I always wanted to go to university but I didn't know how to apply. I only thought about passing matric. I didn't even think about university...In Philippi we aren't exposed to different jobs. You only hear about being a doctor or a lawyer. You think it is that or work at Shoprite. We don't know that there are other jobs out there, in between jobs. (Nomisa, 21)

If you want to find work you must have a CV. Maybe you have worked but you don't have a CV. Like, what is this, a CV? What do I do? Or maybe you went to school. You have nothing to put on the CV because you went through matric, you didn't work. Or maybe you worked but you never knew about the CV. You see? We just don't know. (Themba, 23)

## **Conclusion**

The call for research on “average” young adults in this period of South Africa’s evolution is not new. Post-apartheid South Africa saw “a general decline in priority attached to the problems of specifically young people” (Seekings 2006:6) and Rachel Bray’s review of the literature on youth well-being from throughout the 1990s showed early in the last decade that despite research there were still gaps in what this research was uncovering. Bray called for improvements in the quality, extent and content of research regarding children and youth, urging researchers to better incorporate youth as active participants in these studies. She encouraged research that didn’t objectify young adults but worked with them to more fully understand and contextualize their thoughts: “we need to continue asking questions about the relationships between the physical, economic, social and psychological components of child well-being, and the factors that influence the resilience and adaptiveness of children to adverse situations,” (Bray 2002:54)

In this vein Ramphele’s study of youth in New Crossroads (2002) as well as Henderson’s work with the same group of young adults (1999) initiated conversations about their experiences at home, in school and in their communities. Both emphasized the prominent and potentially destructive environment of the township. Henderson prefaced the research to come with her discussion of fragility, introducing the prominent role of uncertainty in young adults’ lives. This uncertainty has been echoed by other authors as they probed various topics: Sex and reproductive health (Bakilana 2003; Kahn 2006), relationships with caregivers (Shelmerdine 2006), attitudes towards education, individual mortality (De Lannoy 2006, 2006, 2008), HIV/AIDs, wealth and identity (Salo 2003, 2004; Cooper 2009) and community dynamics (Moses 2005, 2006; Gooskens 2006) among others. Along with uncertainty, studies reveal that many young adults are impressively resilient in light of these factors and do not necessarily dwell on this aspect of their lives but are occupied by factors that are “ordinarily” associated with youth. They exert personal agency and though they may know the “right” decisions to make, they do not always do so (Swartz 2007). Moreover as new voices lend themselves to this dialogue, it becomes evident that despite commonalities in surroundings and influences, young adults’ experiences and reactions are varied and wide-ranging. We are slowly gaining a more holistic view of the way youth feel about their lives and surroundings. These contributions are invaluable, but youth are not static. They are growing and changing as are their environments and therefore must be more monitored and readdressed as they mature.

An area that has yet to be explored at length is the transition to work for township youth. The majority of work on youth reflects the attitudes of learners in schools. This research sought to understand young adult's thoughts about and experiences with unemployment after they had left secondary school. The responses from this study were by and large in sync with lessons learned from previous discussions with young adults by other researchers, particularly De Lannoy (2007, 2008) Swartz (2007) and Moses (2005, 2006). Despite misconceptions that all young people in the townships are destructive, unlawful, lazy or indifferent about their futures, conversations with youth reveal that while some may exhibit those tendencies, it cannot be assumed that all do.

The characteristics and motives of youth cannot be easily categorized. Those in this sample want to be "good" people with the "real" jobs they feel they have earned. They are "normal" young adults as one would find in any area of the world, meaning that while their thoughts, actions, inspirations may be diverse they are influenced by the same set of criteria: their peers and community, the role models in their lives, their hopes for the future and their challenges in the present.

The young men and women in this sample have high ambitions and express youthful optimism, believing they have the potential to be successful - they just wish it wasn't so hard. The smallest accomplishment has the potential to entail unforeseen setbacks, and long-term goals are set without understanding of the processes necessary to reach them. They are continuously obstructed by their communities, plagued by chaos and uncertainty. These young adults want to feel that they are going somewhere and yearn for a better life than they have experienced growing up.

Participants ranged in age from 16 to 30, though the majority of those surveyed were in their early to mid-twenties. Having been out of school for a few years, these young adults have experienced both success and failure in the job market and have seen peers grapple with the same issues. The unemployed are not a homogeneous group and suffer to varying degrees depending on their circumstances, past experience and current social and familial networks. Their responses were dependent on such factors as gender, household income, education level and the educational attainment of parents or caregivers.

The household income of the participants was unknown, although there were a few within the SAEP group whose responses and described experiences indicated that they might be better-off than some of their peers (approximately half participated in SAEP's Bridging Year internship program, focusing

on increasing access to education and employment opportunities). The majority of the SAEP individuals, as well as the others mentioned struggling financially giving examples such as trouble paying for transportation, clothes and household food. Responses were more apt to fall along lines of educational attainment, rather than gender. The group could be divided almost in half in terms of educational attainment, with the SAEP-associated respondents being on the higher end and the other respondents having received less education.

Regardless of gender, class or educational attainment, respondents agreed that the township environment could be detrimental to the development of healthy relationships, economic enterprise and personal growth. They described their neighborhoods as encouraging crime and corruption, laziness and poverty. Respondents often failed to differentiate between the effects of poverty and the effects of unemployment and discussed the two interchangeably, indicating unemployment to be inherent to poverty and vice versa. They see their communities as poor and view unemployment as the cause of this poverty. Despite their brightness, young adults are tired of coping and scraping by. Most participants implied that they came from households where income is derived from a combination of small informal earnings and government grants to other household members. From the responses of these young adults it would seem that there is little difference in well-being for those who are earning some small wage to those who are unemployed by the strict definition. Participants implied that it was more “normal” to be out of work – or in and out of work - than it was to be doing “real” work. While unemployment carries great stigma in some societies, unemployment in the townships is not grounds for isolation as it remains customary in the broad sense, however is still a source of emotional dejection for many.

Despite the chaos around them, all those interviewed initially expressed optimism for their futures. They make almost no connection between their current circumstances and the apartheid years that created the neighborhoods they live in, but instead see promise in the opportunities that came with democracy. They have a strong belief in succeeding by their own accord, through positive living and good decision making. They feel that they have control over their lives and that through pragmatism they will prevail. This optimism, however, is not extended towards their peers or others in the community. Participants expressed cynicism for their peers’ ability to make decisions wisely.

Optimism, as well as the societal reiteration of new opportunities reinforces youth’s aspirations to become “someone”. Their ambitions are not altogether unreasonable. A young person in any

circumstance will have loftier visions of the future than someone with more life experience and it is much harder to articulately explain that which you have never seen. Aspirations may, therefore, be more ostentatious coming from a young adult due to naiveté and inexperience. Youth do, however, clearly see the world around them which they agree is challenging to navigate. For these reasons their true expectations are muted in comparison to their initial aspirations. What young adults ultimately want is for their actions and decisions to yield upward mobility including job security, consistent wages and a home of their own. They would love a lifestyle like that of their more affluent countrymen outside of the townships. They look forward to this personal future in which their days of struggling are over, believing that the decisions they make now will propel them forward.

Young adults have been told that education is the answer to a life out of poverty, to the jobs that will offer a new lifestyle and for this reason they have faith in the power of education. On the flipside of this, young Africans miss school frequently (for varying reasons), repeat grades and fail to garner the skills and knowledge that school is meant to provide. Higher achievers were unsurprisingly advocates of education; however a few tertiary-educated female respondents expressed the most frustration with their inability to find “suitable” work and admitted this made them doubt the value of their education. Respondents who were still in secondary school agreed to the importance of education whereas those older respondents who had finished secondary school and had been unemployed for over a year felt that education was less valuable when compared to work experience and connections

A key component to emerge when pressed about issues of poverty and unemployment was the participants’ general disillusionment with the country as well as with their own ability to succeed within the parameters in which they are confined. They repeatedly reference the new country and its new opportunities – of which there are many – but the purported success from these advantages fails to match up with the realities around them. These youth are of the first generation to experience their country under these new circumstances and thus lack guidance as few have gone before them. They expect to have a life that does not so closely resemble that of their parents and grandparents and are dissatisfied to find that upward mobility is not as likely as they had expected. Although they acknowledge that their community enhances the difficulty of their lives, they can’t help but internalize their inability to traverse inequality.

While all claimed to be ‘getting by’ their overall perceived well-being was low. Optimism was less apparent when asked about specific aspects of job searching as well as the immediate future to which the majority expressed aggravation and uncertainty after experiencing rejection. Those enrolled in school were hesitantly hopeful for their prospects upon finishing school and a few mentioned difficulties in finding part time work. Those who were out of school and had been unemployed felt there “would never be anything” and strongly believed that only those with connections could get jobs. Those with higher education were more likely to refer to peers and neighbors as being “lazy” in their inability to find work, or in their disinclination for taking manual work (though when asked about personal preferences admitted they would be disinclined as well). In regards to jobs and job reservations, it was unanimous that there were certain jobs that were undesirable, despite economic hardship. Those interviewed were hesitant when it came to the types of positions they would be willing to take, and – unsurprisingly - their desired jobs fluctuated in conjunction with the level of education they had achieved. Tertiary learners admitted to quitting cashier jobs saying that it “wasn’t a career.” Meanwhile, those who had completed secondary school were looking for cashier jobs but wouldn’t take a job that involved cleaning or construction. Some admitted to feeling all alone, assured that there would never be opportunities for them. The cost and frustration associated with looking for work was unbearable for some who experienced growing listlessness as they failed to see their efforts materialize.

All those who participated displayed enormous amounts of resilience in coping with difficulties. While all respondents expressed ambition, they had varying levels of conviction. Those who are “succeeding” are truly are battling the elements of their environment – they lose friends, forfeit leisure activities, spend money and spare time in pursuit or in transit. They may lose face amongst peers or neighbors who think they are either doomed to fail, or egotistical in their pursuits. The majority of youth it seems are also locked in conflict with their surroundings but take a more defensive stance. They do want success but are less ambitious, and may lack motivation. The difficulties associated with each potential venture nurture inaction. Young adults see that it is feasible to live and marginally enjoy life by “going with the flow” with others in the township, even if this prevents the greatly sought-after social mobility. While they feel entitled to the type of life that the more privileged enjoy, the efforts and sacrifice associated with acquiring that lifestyle seem baffling and unfamiliar, and they are discouraged from trying.

At the time of the interviews, those who were the most successful were participants of SAEP's Bridging Year program. It is important to note, however, that prior to their involvement these young adults were "regular" township learners and not necessarily "over achievers." Most admitted that they were initially reluctant to partake in SAEP's activities but grew more excited as they saw how beneficial the program could be. The program provides information and resources to young adults - in the form of tutoring, mentorship and life skills development and assistance with application processes - but maintains that the participants are responsible for themselves. These youth are examples of how a small amount of guidance, information and support can have an enormous impact in a young adult's productivity and self-esteem. As described, most youth have little and varying knowledge of the options that are available to them and have even less understanding of the way in which to attain these end results. Through this NGO they also found a peer group with similar desires who were working in a positive way to achieve their goals. This support, respondents agreed, was instrumental in helping them to maintain their focus, helping them to work through periods of struggle and helping them ignore old friends who might distract them from success.

As seen in other research, for most young adults, peers are enormously influential and can often fill a void where adult guidance and support should be (De Lannoy 2007; Swartz 2007). Peers remain a prominent authority from childhood into early adulthood. Peers provide a lens for self-definition, establish tastes and standards, and provide entertainment and a pool of knowledge (with varying degrees of accuracy). While admitting to difficulty and discussing personal experiences with poverty and economic struggle, the majority of participants appeared to be well-fed, fashionably dressed touting label names and displaying mobile phones, iPods and mp3 players, etc. Even self-described loners appeared to subscribe to the trends and priorities of their peer group. The priorities established by this group emphasize material culture, "risky" behavior and "being cool." The degree to which all youth truly participate in these activities is unknown. All interviewees denied involvement in crime or "bad" behavior (without being pressed on the topic as that was not the goal of this research). What youth admit is that petty crime is increasingly seen as a fast and not entirely frowned upon means of mobility. Despite admittance that it was not uncommon for "youth" to take part in risky behavior, it was apparent that a "risk culture" was not dominating their communities. The activities they described seemed in accordance with the actions of young adults generally, and it seems that the consequences of these actions in this context may be more harmful than in others. Thus, it is not the young adults being particularly subversive, but young adults being young in a less than friendly environment.

This research shed light on the opinions that youth have about the jobs they would like, the issues they face acquiring them, and how they feel various components of their lives and environments either hinder or help them through this process. While these responses are insightful, the study would benefit from a long-term relationship with these interviewees, tracking their changes in attitude and action over a period of time. It would similarly be useful to gain further knowledge of their job search processes to see what skills they possess regarding CV creation and search tactics, how social networks are used and how their searches ebb and wane with the longevity of unemployment. It would also be enlightening to speak with employers both within the township and in downtown Cape Town to uncover what skills they look for in potential employees, as well as their experiences hiring or interviewing young adults from various socio-economic backgrounds.

Further research would also be improved by attaining greater knowledge of the household and background of the individuals. While these respondents are all “township youth,” this is a broad category and participants experienced their childhood and youth in different ways, with varying degrees of support. The question of support and guidance became a prominent issue both in this research as in other studies that primarily seek to uncover information of a different nature (attitudes towards HIV/AIDS, reproduction, death, crime etc.). Positive adult examples - for providing guidance, as well as serving as role models for the next generation - are proving to be conspicuously absent in the lives of young adults. Exploring this issue of role models and adult influences would be invaluable

Regardless of their upbringing or influences, township kids are not all “bad” - most are not criminals, gangster or child soldiers and they are not all orphans or HIV-infected, nor are they all helpless victims of their surroundings. If anything they should be scrutinized as young adults growing up anywhere in the ever globalizing world, grappling with interpersonal relationships, new responsibilities, planning for their futures, and making decisions some of which are good and others less so. Their experiences are unique and their thought processes are sometimes at odds with one another. Their surroundings offer an added sense of duress. They do have choices they are just not always the best informed to make those choices. When youth do things that are “bad” it is often in response to a social and political environment that has failed to make more advantageous options available. The country has enhanced prospects for growth and development for its poor populations but as of yet has not laid the infrastructure to make them accessible for those most in need. Theory

and policy need to more astutely understand and reflect the needs of young people, by appreciating their perceptions of their environment, their lives and themselves.

This research is a small contribution to what needs to be a growing dialogue with township youth who are multi-faceted in their needs, desires and backgrounds. Youth need to be considered not simply in regards to crime, violence, and HIV/AIDS, as there are other issues that affect their lives just as deeply and are demanding attention. Further research must reach out to individuals who are not “special” but average individuals who are most intimately subject to the socio-economic changes South Africa currently undergoes. In many ways South Africa is a model for other developing nations and has the unique opportunity to transgress inequalities and take advantage of its many citizens who most ardently want to be useful contributors. Youth must not be thought of pessimistically as a hindrance to the social order but as a valuable asset that with recognition, guidance and support could impressively impact their communities and nation.

University Of Cape Town

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Appendix 1: Participant Information

| Name     | Education Achieved   | Gender | Age | Bio   |
|----------|----------------------|--------|-----|---|
| Zolani   | enrolled in tertiary | Female | 20  | Association: SAEP. Zolani passed her matric and could not find work. She took a cashier course and a computer course before joining SAEP and subsequently going to university.                  |
| Nhokaya  | enrolled in tertiary | Female | 19  | Association: SAEP. After matriculating Nhokaya found work through the help of SAEP. She worked there for one year before beginning tertiary but could not continue to work while at university. |
| Phumzile | enrolled in tertiary | Female | 20  | Association: SAEP. After matriculating Phumzile joined SAEP and applied to UCT. She is now in her third year.   |
| Vuyo     | enrolled in tertiary | Female | 18  | Association: SAEP. Vuyo worked briefly while in secondary school. A friend got her a job at Nando's. She worked there for a few months but quit because she did not like the work.              |
| Sipho    | completed secondary  | Male   | 20  | Association: SAEP. Sipho matriculated and wants to go to university. He is employed at SAEP.  |
| Nezile   | enrolled in tertiary | Male   | 21  | Association: SAEP. Nezile found work at a grocery store and worked every day for three years during secondary school. He is now enrolled at Cape Tech.  |
| Thandiwe | enrolled in tertiary | Female | 21  | Associate: SAEP. Thandiwe worked for one month at Woolworths after secondary school. She is now enrolled at UWC and looking for work.   |
| Nomsa    | enrolled in tertiary | Female | 21  | Association: SAEP. Nomsa matriculated and is now studying media in tertiary. She has never worked.  |
| Andile   | completed tertiary   | Male   | 23  | Association: SAEP. Andile completed a degree at a technikron and has worked as a reporter for over a year.  |

Appendix 1: Participant Information

|           |                              |        |    |   |
|-----------|------------------------------|--------|----|---|
| Nomnikelo | completed secondary          | Female | 22 | Association: Shawco. Nomnikelo completed secondary school one year ago. She did not pass her matric and she has never worked, though she sometimes helps her neighbor sell "small things" from her house. |
| Xoliswa   | completed secondary school   | Female | 27 | Association: Shawco. Xoliswa was unemployed for "many years." She recently became employed at a health clinic in Nyanga.  |
| Vincent   | enrolled in secondary school | Male   | 16 | Association: Homestead. Vincent is currently in secondary school. He has lived at Homestead for most of his life. He has never worked   |
| Nana      | completed secondary school   | Male   | 30 | Association: Shawco. Nana finished secondary school and took a course in advertising. He is frustrated by his inability to find a job in this line of work.   |
| Asanda    | completed secondary school   | Male   | 24 | Association: Shawco. Asanda finished secondary school a few years ago and has never worked in a "proper job".   |
| Luxolo    | enrolled in secondary school | Male   | 19 | Association: Homestead. Luxolo says that he has never worked but he has earned money helping neighbors and doing short-term jobs.   |
| Themba    | attended secondary school    | Male   | 23 | Association: Homestead. Themba's only work experience has been assisting the taxi drivers which he did for two days before quitting because it "wasn't real."   |
| Kwezi     | attended secondary school    | Male   | 24 | Association: Homestead. Kwezi has never worked.   |
| Bhoysi    | attended secondary school    | Male   | 23 | Association: Homestead. Bhoysi has worked on three subcontract construction jobs but does not want to again.  |

Appendix 1: Participant Information

|         |                            |        |    |   |
|---------|----------------------------|--------|----|---|
| Neliswa | completed secondary school | Female | 22 | Association: Shawco. Neliswa recently started a job in the bakery section of Shoprite. She was happy to have a job that was not domestic work. She is not quoted in the text. |
| Sam     | attended secondary school  | Male   | 23 | Association: Shawco. Sam had held short term work previously. At the time of the interview he was planning to start his own business selling clothing.                        |

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Appendix 2: Participant Interview Schedule

| July 2009 |   |  |  |  |          |        |
|-----------|---|--|--|--|----------|--------|
| MONDAY    | TUESDAY   | WEDNESDAY  | THURSDAY   | FRIDAY   | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|           |   | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4        | 5      |
| 6         | 7   | 8  | 9  | 10   | 11       | 12     |
| 13        | 14 Interview 1:<br>Location:<br>Rondebosch<br>SAEP participant<br>2:30-3:30PM                           | 15 Interview 2:<br>Location:<br>Rondebosch<br>SAEP participant<br>2:30-3:30PM  | 16 Interview 3:<br>Location:<br>Rondebosch<br>SAEP participant<br>12:30 – 1:30PM | 17 Interview 4,5, 6:<br>Location: Rondebosch<br>SAEP participants<br>11:00AM-12:00PM<br>1:00-2:00PM<br>2:30-3:30PM | 18       | 19     |
| 20        | 21 Interview 7:<br>Location:<br>Rondebosch<br>SAEP participant<br>11:30AM-12:30PM                       | 22 Shawco Interview:<br>Location: Nyanga<br>6 participants<br>10:00AM – 4:00 PM<br>Interview; Regular<br>group meeting | 23   | 24 Interview 8 & 9:<br>SAEP participant<br>Location: Rondebosch<br>2:30-3:30PM<br>3:30-4:30PM                      | 25       | 26     |
| 27        | 28 Homestead<br>Interview:<br>Location: Khayelitsha<br>5 quoted (8 present<br>at interview)<br>4-6:30PM | 29   | 30   | 31   |          |        |

\*Transcription, analysis and write-up occurred in the weeks following the interviews as interviews were close-set due to time constraints.



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University of Cape Town, Department of Sociology, MPhil, Development Studies

**Researcher:** Erin Barrar, BRRERI003 ([ebarrar@gmail.com](mailto:ebarrar@gmail.com))

**Title:** *Youth Perceptions of Structural Unemployment in South Africa*

I have agreed to participate in this research project. I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and the interview. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

I am aware the data will be used for a minor-dissertation for the University of Cape Town's Department of Sociology. I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected, and know that I will not be personally identifiable in the final report.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher. I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview (if I am under the age of 18 I have had a parent or guardian sign this form).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date