

SIMON HARDING



THE STREET CASINO

Survival in violent street gangs

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For Anne and Bill

Glossary

Theoretical explanatory terms

Bonding social capital – exclusive, integrative and clannish, binds groups together and helps them to get by

Bridging social capital – essentially inclusive, bringing diverse people together and helping them to get on in society

Challengers – those occupying less privileged positions in the social field who may be disadvantaged by the status quo, relative to the incumbents, and thus may only wield slight influence over operations in the field.

Doxa – the conventional wisdom operating within a field

Field – a social terrain or structured social space where actors, with varying resources, engage in individual or collective strategic action to obtain some scarce resource or goal

Habitus – early socialisation of social conditions that over time have been internalised into a series of mental and bodily dispositions which then govern our actions

House advantage – a gambling term that denotes the predictable long-term advantage to the casino (house)

Incumbents – those who are already settled in the social field and enjoy positions of power; they seek to retain this advantage and to keep the favourable status quo

Independent operators – someone who is not affiliated to any specific gang but is criminally active and known to all gangs within the social field

Illusio – a shared principle or general acceptance (specific to the field itself) that the field goals are worth pursuing in the first place

Network – a social grouping of connections and relationships

The street casino

Proximate fields – fields that are linked but not geographically connected

Repertoire – the stock of specialised skills of a person or group

Sanction – a threatened or actual penalty for disobeying rules. While these are largely negative, they may on occasion be positive

Social field – *see* field

SNS – social networking sites

Strategic action field – a unit of collective action with a constructed social order whereby actors interact competitively but with a shared understanding of rules, goals, logic and legitimate action (*see also* field)

Strategic actor – someone operating within a social field or strategic action field

Gang terms

Baby mother – a young woman who has a child outside of marriage (may also mean single mother or previous girlfriend)

Badman – a notorious gang member who is generally considered dangerous

Beef – an argument/fight or ongoing conflict/vendetta

Blind moves – to engage in any action or business without being fully informed of all the current circumstances or current information on the issue

Boy(ed) – an insult referring to the individual as a boy (boi). This term also has connotations from the days of slavery as someone with no power who can be ordered about

Bredrin' – (brethren) a close companion, family or friend

Bruv – (brother) close friend but a commonly used term similar to pal or mate

Chicken cash – loose change which young people use to buy take-away food

Cook house – a place, often a domestic house, where drugs are boiled down and ‘stretched’ or cut in order to increase the quantity and dilute the quality. Such work involves dealing in kilos and considerable amounts of cash will be on the premises

Country – the provinces outside London (*see* going up country)

Deal – to sell illegal drugs

Dry snitching – to inadvertently or indirectly provide information about someone to a person in authority or to another person who is not privy to the information

Elders – a senior gang member

Endz – neighbourhood; also one’s own local neighbourhood

Falling – *see* slidin’

Fam (family) – close friend or buddy

Feds (federal agent) – the police

Fishing for strays – a hunting mission conducted by a gang for individual rivals who are isolated and alone on rival or disputed turf

Floater – an ‘independent operator’ who can move or ‘float’ between gangs without being affiliated to any specific gang

Going up country – out of London to the provinces, i.e. taking a consignment of drugs to another town or location

Honey trap – where a young woman is used to set up a young man, usually a rival gang member

Hood pass – an informal validation or permission to enter an area

Line up – sexual activity with one person after another

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Link(ing)- a casual sexual partner; offering regular sexual contact with another person

Macs – machine guns

ManDem – group of men/fellow gang members

Moist – soft, weak (indicating ripe for victimisation)

NFA – no further action (police term)

Olders – a gang member, probably in late teens, who had previously been a younger but not advanced

Playa' (player) – someone who is an active participant in gang life

Rep (representation) – to represent an area, gang or person

Rollin on a job – accompanying others on a job

Runners – those who help to sell drugs and run between the dealer and the buyer

Screwing – deliberately holding the stare of another individual without looking away; a dirty look

Set-up – to use guile or deceit to place someone in a dangerous or difficult situation

Shank(ed) – a knife/to be stabbed

Shooting – selling drugs illegally on the street

Sket – derogatory insult for a young woman with a perceived sexual reputation; a slut

Slidin' – to suffer a decline in one's respect and status

Slippin' – (to slip down an alleyway) to enter an area or neighbourhood that is not one's own

Snitch(in') – an informer, or grass; considered a traitor

Squeeze, the – a provocative and pre-emptive street encounter in the form of a direct challenge or confrontation

Steaming – where a large group of boys or gang members will run through a train/bus/market/shopping centre robbing or assaulting people as they go. A fast and frightening event that is over in seconds.

Stripes – acquired peer respect for achievements

Tinnies – young gang members aged 8-12

Wannabees – young people who emulate gang members' behaviours and attitudes

Wasteman – dispensable, unconnected, useless

Wifey – a serious girlfriend who is considered marriage material

Youngers – a young or subordinate gang member

About the author

Simon Harding is a senior lecturer in criminology in the School of Law at Middlesex University, north London. He has lived and worked in London for over 30 years as a market researcher, housing consultant, youth researcher, crime consultant, diversity trainer, community safety manager, local authority director, and lecturer. He co-devised acceptable behaviour contracts in 1999 shortly before joining the Home Office as regional crime adviser for London. Since 1999 he has been an independent adviser on hate crime, equalities and diversity to the London Metropolitan Police Commissioner.

He obtained his doctorate in youth justice from University of Bedfordshire having previously earned an MA (Hons) from Edinburgh University, an MA from Middlesex University, a BTP (Bachelor Town Planning) from London South Bank University and a Diploma in Marketing from London Metropolitan University. His current research interests include gangs and group offending, street cultures, hate crime, policing and community safety.

He has recently published a second edition of *Unleashed: The phenomena of status dogs and weapon dogs* (Policy Press, 2014). This publication has led to numerous media appearances on TV, radio and in print.

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In particular I offer my admiration and thanks to the all the young people interviewed for this work, for their time, their knowledge, their experience and I offer my sincere admiration for their spirit of survival.

Preface:

living and working in the social field

My interest in the world of gangs dates back almost 30 years through a long history of living and working in Lambeth, London SW9.

I first worked in Brixton, SW9, in 1981, covering the April riots for my university newspaper. From 1982–85, I was a frequent visitor to many of the multiple squats in and around Brixton before finally moving to Brixton in 1985. I was then to live and/or work in Lambeth until 2012, including five years living on Loughborough Estate, SW9. The estate is home to over 3,000 families and consists of two separate parts: Old Loughborough, which is brick built 1940s former London County Council (LCC) properties, up to five storeys in height; and New Loughborough, comprising six 11-storey tower blocks dating from the 1950s and 1960s, interspersed with some flat-roofed, low-rise properties. The tower blocks were brick-built rather than concrete slab prefabricated system-built and reputed to resemble ocean liners when viewed from a certain angle. Although I lived in one I never did find that angle. In immediate proximity to this estate was Angell town – a low-rise, 1970s brick-built warren of interlocking streets and cul-de-sacs, which by 1985 had developed a notorious reputation. One hundred yards away were Coldharbour Lane and Southwyck House, an eight-storey, neo-brutalist, deck-access block built in the 1970s and often mistakenly thought to be Brixton prison. Built in a horseshoe-shaped crescent, it was called the barrier block, as it was planned to act as a sound barrier to an adjacent motorway. The crescent shape faced away from Brixton town centre such that the edifice presented a cliff-face rising out of the street, with tiny windows in place for soundproofing against motorway traffic. The motorway was never built. Rumour had it that the Danish architect killed herself shortly after the block was completed as it was ‘facing the wrong way’. Within a few years of completion, Southwyck House, along with Angell town, became dumping grounds for poor black families. An invisible line between them constituted the infamous Brixton ‘frontline’, a line that could not be seen, but could often be smelt by virtue of the cannabis smoke which pervaded the air at every corner. Here young and middle-aged African Caribbeans often openly sold drugs to the young, middle-aged white professionals, artists and leftwing squatters who lived in Brixton town centre. Following the riots of 1981, this romantic image was increasingly replaced by the grimmer reality of heroin and crack dealing, of muggings and gun crime.

During this time, I became keenly aware of the privations of the local community, especially those in receipt, as I was for a time, of unemployment benefits. I became knowledgeable about how the estate, and local underground economy, functioned; who committed the vandalism and petty crime; where to buy stolen goods; how to buy drugs from the basement of the local taxi office; when to buy drugs down at the 'frontline'; the 'wall of silence' following a crime; the imperative of not grassing. I became increasingly aware of the local gang, the 28s, later known as the PDC.

During proposals to regenerate the estate via a Housing Action Trust in the late 1980s, I observed the local matriarch using the youth from the estate to organise stiff resistance and noticed PDC members moving freely around the estate into areas that became increasingly 'off limits' to me. I observed them monitoring closely any tenants voting for estate regeneration during their watchful presence at council tenants meetings. Slowly I became aware of how it all worked; I was living in a crime hotspot; the young men slouched in stairwells and walkways were observing and reporting on police movements; my neighbour's 'boyfriend' was actually her pimp; my movements were monitored and I was burgled four times; there were gangs in the neighbourhood.

Throughout this period, two key events had a strong impact on me personally: first, being caught up in the 1985 Brixton riots (triggered by the police accidentally shooting a black woman while raiding her house to arrest her gang-affiliated son) and second, having a verbal altercation with two young female neighbours and subsequently being violently attacked by their brother, leading to my taking several weeks off work. Slowly the fog began to lift and I began to view things differently. Although I moved away from the Loughborough Estate, I continued to live and work in Lambeth until 2012, travelling through SW9 daily. From 2005-08, I was Assistant Director for Community Safety in Lambeth. Gang issues had by then emerged as a serious community concern and I quickly became immersed in managing London's most extensive gun and gang project; convening and managing a multi-agency Gangs Commission for Lambeth; participating in the multi-agency Five-borough Gang Alliance in London and funding a series of multi-agency interventions for gang-affiliated young people.

It is this lived experience that fired my interest in better understanding the complex set of relationships I witnessed daily.

*Simon Harding
January 2014*

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