Bannister, J. and Fraser, A. (2008) *Youth gang identification: learning and social development in restricted geographies.* Scottish Journal of Criminal Justice Studies, 14. pp. 96-114. ISSN 1360-4449

http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/40219

Deposited on: 21 October 2010

Youth Gang Identification: Learning and social development in restricted geographies

by Jon Bannister and Alistair Fraser of the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, University of Glasgow

Introduction

Delinquent youth groups, or gangs, have held a longstanding presence in Scotland as elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The behaviours of youth gangs, inclusive of violent conflict, are known to lead to a series of negative outcomes for participants (Bennett and Holloway, 2004; Bradshaw, 2005) and provoke anxiety in the wider community (Wood, 2004). Less well documented has been the impact of youth gangs on the majority of children and young people who do not directly participate in their behaviours, though there is some evidence that youth gangs provoke anxiety amongst this group also (Mori Scotland, 2003). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that youth gangs have prompted a concerted endeavour designed to eradicate their existence.[1] The longevity of youth gangs provokes a series of questions. What factors serve to influence children's identification with, and participation in, youth gangs? Specifically, to what extent are young people aware of the negative outcomes associated with participation in youth gangs? And, what factors serve to downplay the significance of these risks? Crucially, how do the majority of children and young people (who do not participate in youth gangs) identify with youth gangs? And, how do youth gangs impact upon their lives?

This paper, drawing on data gathered in Glasgow and generated in a wider study of young people and territoriality in British cities (Kintrea *et al*, 2008), offers some tentative insights into these questions. We observe that youth gang identification is learned. Moreover, that the nature and interpretation of this learning is framed by the young person's social development, and by their progression from childhood to adolescence. In Glasgow, youth

---

1 BBC News (2008) 'Gang members 'brothers in arms', 14/02/2008; available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/glasgow_and_west/7245264.stm; Scottish Government (2008) 'Tackling Scotland's gang culture'; available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/04/14095308 [both accessed 30/05/2008]

gangs have strong territorial identities that are closely tied to particular neighbourhoods. The consequent restricted geographies (of movement and resource) experienced by both gang members and non-gang members alike, further serve to shape the qualities of youth gang identification.

Gangs and gang identification in Scotland

The National Violence Reduction Unit estimate that over half of the 300 youth gangs thought to exist in Scotland are to be found in Glasgow (The Herald, 2008). Indeed, Glasgow has a long history of delinquent youth groups (Davies, 1998; Patrick, 1973). Recent research has evidenced that the existence of youth gangs provokes widespread concern amongst the majority of young people who do not directly participate in gang-related behaviours (Seaman *et al* 2006; Turner *et al* 2006). Despite these observations, there has been limited academic research exploring the longevity of gang phenomenon in Glasgow. Just why are successive generations of young people attracted to participate in youth gangs? And, how do the majority of young people appreciate the gang phenomenon?

But, just what constitutes a youth gang? There is little consensus in the international literature as to the meaning of this term. A spectrum of definitions exists, ranging from a largely benign peer-group of young teenagers (Thrasher, 1933) to a strictly hierarchical organised crime group (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991). Further, as Sanders (1994: 8) suggests, 'not only are there different definitions of gangs, but most researchers have defined different types of gang' that might be associated with each definition. As a result, there has been much debate as to the value of using the term youth gang, especially given that its use may potentially contribute to deviance amplification and reification (Esbensen *et al*, 2001; Youth Justice Board 2007; Aldridge, Medina and Ralphs, 2007)[2].

Nevertheless, and in order to frame the current investigation in relation to research on youth gangs taking place elsewhere in the United Kingdom and Europe, we recognise a strong resonance between the Eurogang Network definition of a youth gang, and our own observations. Thus, a youth gang can be conceived of as:

---

2   For a compelling account of how media attention to the gang phenomenon in Easterhouse in the 1960s increased the prevalence of gang behaviour, see Armstrong and Wilson (1973). For a thorough and concise overview of debates within the gang literature surrounding definition, see Ball and Curry (1995).

Any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity.

"Durability" means several months or more and refers to the group, which continues despite turnover of members.
"Street-oriented" means spending a lot of group time outside home, work and school – often on streets, in malls, in parks, in cars, and so on.
"Youth" refers to average ages in adolescence or early twenties or so.
"Illegal activity" generally means delinquent or criminal behavior, not just bothersome activity.
"Identity" refers to the group, not individual self-image; at minimum it includes acceptance of participation in illegal activities by group members.

(Eurogang Network 2004)

At this stage, we should note that the term gang retains a powerful meaning for young people themselves and the debates surrounding youth gang definitions should not ignore this fact. In this regard, there remains a dearth of, particularly qualitative, research that explores how (all) young people experience the gang phenomenon. In other words, we have very little understanding of how young people come to identify with youth gangs and how this process is framed.

Though research into the gang phenomenon in Scotland is relatively scarce, what evidence there is suggests that there are significant similarities (and some differences) with findings elsewhere in the world. In the United States, for example, research suggests that gangs tend to comprise teenage males resident in areas of significant urban deprivation, whose identity is associated with a particular territory, (Spergel 1990, Thornberry *et al* 2003). Territorialism in this context refers to either identification with a local territory, and the desire to defend this from outsiders, or a desire to control a territory for the purposes of drug distribution, or racketeering (Miller 1977: 23-5; Spergel 1990: 210). In Scotland, the concentration of individuals claiming gang-membership is also greatest in areas of deprivation (Smith and Bradshaw 2005: 12), and there is strong evidence of associations with particular territories (Bradshaw 2005), manifest in territory-based conflict (Patrick 1973: 93). As Patrick notes:

> From the very beginning the importance attached to territory had impressed itself. The gang knew its pitch and that of the other major gangs almost to the very last cul-de-sac. When crossing some other gang's territory, its members were only too aware of the fact. To violate the borders of another gang and daub your slogan or monogram on its walls was considered a major triumph.

These observations provoke the question as to how strong territorial affiliations are learned and what impact gang territories hold on the majority of young people who of do not participate (directly) in a youth gang.

In the United States the mean age of gang-membership is estimated as being 16 to 18 years old (Spergel 1990). The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (ESYTC), however, found self-identification with a gang was greatest at the age of 13, with decreases year-on-year thereafter (Smith and Bradshaw 2005: 9). In the United States, though there has been increasing attention paid to female involvement and the role of gender (Miller 2001), evidence suggests that an overwhelming majority of gang-members are male (Thornberry et al 2003: 34). The ESYTC, however, reported near-equality in gender membership, with a higher percentage of females claiming gang-membership at the age of 13 (21.5 percent girls versus 18.8 percent of boys), though by the age of 17 this pattern reverses (8.0% males; 3.5% females) (Smith and Bradshaw 2005: 9-11). This latter finding, however, contrasts sharply with a major qualitative study of girls and violence in Scotland, which reported that, 'not one of the 800 teenage girls that took part in the research claimed to be in a girl gang, nor did they know of anyone else who was a member' (Batchelor 2001: 248). Just as evidence suggests that gang identification alters during the life course, it follows that the nature of that identification and the processes that underpin this may also vary. This study seeks to grasp some of the nuances of gang identification, for participants and non-participants alike, through exploring the role of age and gender.

Finally, gang membership is associated with a range of problematic behaviours. Research in Scotland (Bradshaw, 2005; Smith and Bradshaw, 2005) echoing a central finding of gang research elsewhere in Britain (Bennett and Holloway, 2004; Sharp et al, 2006; Youth Justice Board, 2007), Europe (Klein *et al*, 2001; Decker and Weerman, 2005) and the United States (Thornberry *et al*, 2003), demonstrates that those claiming gang-membership are significantly more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour, and more serious and violent offending, than those who do not. Moreover,

those individuals claiming progressively higher levels of group cohesion or organisation (via a name, sign, or territory) were even more likely to engage in serious and frequent offending (Bradshaw 2005: 208-210; Smith and Bradshaw 2005). But how do young people appreciate and weight these risks?

Methodology

The data used to support this paper was generated as part of a broader study of young people and territoriality (Kintrea *et al*, 2008). Data collection took place in an area of Glasgow with a longstanding history of youth gangs with territorial affiliations. The area is one of the most socially and economically deprived areas in Scotland (SIMD 2004). Individual interviews were held with eight adults (some of whom had grown up in the area) with direct experience of working with children and young people in the area, inclusive of those engaged in gang-related activities.

The most significant element of the data collection process, however, entailed a series of group interviews with children living in the research area. There were 5 group interviews in total. Each group held between 7 and 12 participants and contained a mixture of boys/young men and girls/ young women. There were 40 participants in total. The interviews were held in a primary and a secondary school, which the children attended. The interview groups were structured according to school year and comprised children aged 10 to 15 years old (no 12 year old children were interviewed). Two researchers facilitated the group interviews and school observers were present in each instance except the group comprising 15-year-old children.

The interviews were based around a mapping exercise. Interviewees were presented with a street map of the catchment area surrounding the school (primary school respondents, predominantly aged 10 and 11) or of a portion of the catchment area, where the child resided, surrounding the school (secondary school respondents, predominantly aged 13, 14 or 15). Those for whom no appropriate map was available were asked to create their own, focusing on key landmarks. Interviewees were asked to identify on the map their home, the homes of their friends and family (where appropriate), the areas in which they played or socialised and the facilities that they used.

Ultimately, interviewees were asked to draw a boundary line (if such a distinction occurred) between the area they considered safe and could move freely about in and that which they considered dangerous. The focus of

the interviews progressed to explore those factors that children drew upon in order to draw a particular boundary. This task drew respondents into a discussion of gang related behaviours. At this stage the interviews progressed to consider the perceived attractions of participation in such behaviour as well as the potential consequences or dangers of doing so.

It should be noted that the methodology adopted did not set out to counsel the insights of gang participants in particular. Rather, the approach was designed to elicit views from a random sample of children residing in areas where youth gangs with strong territorial identities were known to exist. It transpired that the children interviewed in this study had varying degrees of direct and indirect involvement in and with youth gangs. In the remainder of the paper, we present the major findings from the research.

An intertwining of neighbourhood and gang identities

Gang and neighbourhood territories, indeed identities, are seemingly synonymous. Adult interviewees noted that there were 15 distinct neighbourhoods (each with its own place name) in the research setting. A similar number of gangs were identified as existing, their territories matching those of the neighbourhoods. Adult interviewees reported that that if you asked a resident of the research setting where they lived, they would be quite likely to refer to the gang name associated with the neighbourhood rather than its official place name. The adult interviewees commented that this behaviour was common amongst the children living in the research setting and was a simple consequence of the children observing the behaviour of their older siblings, parents and even grandparents. Thus,

It's passed down through generations…People use gang names rather than area names to identify where they are from. (Youth worker)

A 5 year old doesn't know where they come from, they are told by their parents. (Youth worker)

We did not observe gang names being used to identify neighbourhoods amongst the group of 10 year olds, but it was evident in every other age group interviewed. When the group of 11 year olds were asked to explain their use of gang names to identify neighbourhoods, it was apparent that it was considered acceptable to use a gang name in certain social settings (with particular groups of people) but not in others. Thus, one child offered,

I wouldn't say it (the gang name) *in front of the teachers and that, because teachers don't like using gang names*. (Boy, 11)

They progressed to qualify this statement by pointing out that other members of their family including their parents and grandparents referred to neighbourhoods by their gang names. The following interview segment emphasizes the extent to which gang and neighbourhood identities are intertwined,

Boy A, 11: *The gang name is JUST a name for a place. The proper name doesn't sound right. I like the name* (gang name) *it's where I'm from.*
Girl A, 11: *You shouldn't use that name, because it's a gang name.*
Boy A, 11: *We don't call it* (the gang name) *because of the gangs, it's just a shorter name than* (the place name).
Boy B, 11: *It's just where I'm from and I'm proud of it.*

For children, gang territories and identities are clearly enmeshed with neighbourhood spaces and identities. Gangs are not from a neighbourhood: they are a defining quality of that neighbourhood. Adult interviewees perceived that this intertwining was learnt from older siblings and relatives. In the following section we explore the nature of this learning experience, and in particular how an appreciation of gang territories serves to restrict all children's geographies.

Gang territories, learned and bounded geographies

The mapping exercise required the children to plot a boundary line between the area they considered safe and the area(s) they considered dangerous. Having completed this task, they were then asked to explain why they regarded the area(s) outside the boundary as dangerous. Significantly, the boundary lines drawn by each age group were similar in nature, and tended to encompass the identified gang territory (smaller than or equal to the official neighbourhood planning boundary) surrounding each child's home. However, in explaining the specification of these boundaries a significant distinction between the age groups was observed. The older age groups were able to qualify the boundaries they drew in terms of specific geographical features and events (sometimes conflicts with neighbouring gangs) that they had experienced (as participant or observer). In contrast, the younger age groups were less able to identify features and events as qualities of the boundaries between safe and dangerous areas, as they held smaller personal geographies of direct experience. The 10 and 11 years old children tended

to socialise and play in the immediate areas around their homes. Some commented that their parents forbade them from going further afield.

In the interviews, the youngest children (the groups of 10 and 11 year olds) suggested that on the dangerous side of the boundary a gang was known to exist that might threaten them as it had been in conflict with the gang from their area. Some were able to name the areas they would not go to, whereas others were less able to do so. Some distinguished between being able to travel to these areas during the day but not in the evening, when fights were suggested as taking place. All the children tended to frame these observations in relation to what others had told them to be the case, rather than through direct experiences.

When pressed to justify the boundaries they had drawn, a remarkable story emerged amongst the group of 11 year olds, and one that each child in the group contributed to. The dangerous places outwith their neighbourhood, or gang territory, were the domain of the Chelsea Clowns. There is no known gang in the broader area called the Chelsea Clowns and the only adult interviewee to have heard of the Chelsea Clowns described it as an 'old wives tale' that had been around when he was growing up. For the children, however, the Chelsea Clowns were very real and they were discussed in an animated fashion. The Chelsea Clowns were described as having sharpened teeth, to live in the woods (behind the housing estate), drive white vans and, if they caught you, give you a Chelsea 'smile'. A Chelsea 'smile' being given as a consequence of having a credit card forced into your mouth and then being punched, resulting in a badly cut mouth.

This fable, possibly invented (or reinvented) by older siblings or parents of the children, serves as a cautionary tale. Without reference to a particular gang (or territory) it warns children not to stray out of their own neighbourhood; to be caught in the 'wrong' neighbourhood might hold the risk of significant physical harm. But, why would the Chelsea Clowns do such a thing? '*Because it's their territory, that's what they say*', explained one of the children.

In summary, it is evident that gang territories, or the bounded geographies of children are learned. Moreover, that the nature of this learning is shaped by the stage of social development in the young person's life. Thus, younger children engage with a story to help specify the boundaries of gang territories, whereas children probe these boundaries through direct experiences. What

then are the dangers and attractions of gang membership? And, how then do children identify with, and interpret, gang-related behaviours?

Dangers of gang identification

All the children interviewed were able to articulate the dangers associated with participating in gangs. Once again, the qualities of these accounts were influenced by their experiences. The younger age groups relied more on indirect knowledge, the older age groups on direct experiences. Thus, the 10 and 11-year-old children tended to refer to those who engaged in gang-related behaviours as 'they'. This is not to say that some of the children in these younger groups had not directly engaged in such behaviours, just that it was rare for them to do so. In contrast, 8 out of 10 children in the group of 15 year olds claimed to have had some level of involvement in gang fighting. This ranged from the observation of fighting, through engagement at the fringes to direct involvement.

Physical harm and other risks

The risk of physical harm, ranging from 'getting a doing' to serious injury or death, was recognised by all those interviewed as the primary danger of involvement in gang fighting. Most of the younger children placed the blame for such outcomes on the participants themselves. For example, one of the boys offered,

It's their fault, because they want to fight and they get a doin' (Boy 11)

This was not always the case. One of the 11-year-old boys, for example, talked of participating in fights and being attacked on two occasions, once with a bottle and a second time with an axe. With some pride, he presented his scars to prove it. This type of account, however, was more common amongst the older age groups. There was much discussion of the risk of getting stabbed or slashed in a fight. One 13-year-old boy stated,

Look at my leg (points at scar), *a nasty thing. That's a pure belter.* (Then pointing to a scar on his head) *Scar right in the middle of my nut, that's a pure belter too.* (Boy 13)

Some of the children recognised that the ultimate risk of engaging in gang fighting was that of death and that this could impact on their wider family. A 13-year-old boy succinctly illustrated this insight,

Your Ma gets pure heavy gutted. The police have to come to your door and tell your Mum that her son's just been murdered and then your MA bursts out greetin' and all that. (Boy 13)

That participation in gang fighting was associated with a range of other negative behaviours (as judged by the children interviewed) such as smoking, drinking and taking drugs, and that taken as a whole participation could lead to other negative outcomes such as '*getting lifted by the police*', '*spending some time in jail*', '*getting a criminal record*' and not being able to get a job, was appreciated across all age groups.

Restricted mobility

A further negative consequence of territorial youth gangs is the potential impact that they can hold upon the mobility of all children. Adult and child interviewees suggested that those who directly participated in youth gang activities faced the most significant restrictions of movement. Those children who held no direct involvement in the youth gang were felt to have a greater freedom of movement. Having said this, however, the children related several stories of not being able to travel to another area and of the dangers of beings in caught in the wrong area.

In the mapping exercise, for example, two 11-year-old boys who were sitting next to one another and were clearly friends drew maps that were direct opposites of each other. Thus, the area identified as safe by one boy was regarded as unsafe by the other and vice versa. Whilst friends, the boys explained that they were unable to see each other outside of school because of where they lived. It is possible, of course that 11-year-old children in areas without youth gangs might face similar restrictions of movement imposed by their parents. What is certain here, are that these two boys rationalised this restriction in terms of being unable to cross a gang boundary. This story provoked another boy in the group to relate his experience of visiting a friend who lived in another neighbourhood. When they were together he was safe, but when alone he was approached by a group of older boys who confronted, chased and attacked him.   A girl (11) responded to this story by stating

If you don't recognise them (children), they're not from your area. If you ask someone where they're from and they don't answer or run away, you know they're not from your area.

The older groups of children interviewed were much more explicit in their account of the risks of travelling to another area, and were clearer as to who faced the greatest risk

I'd get my head kicked in. (Boy 13)
If you've got a name for yourself like, if you're always out gang-fighting, obviously people will batter you if you're in their scheme (Boy 13)
I'm safe in this wee area here (Boy 14)
I'm only safe in my house (Boy 14)
Everybody looks at you, giving you growlers, and just stare at you, ask you where you are from and do you fight? (Girl 14)
You need to start running, you're a dead man walking (Boy 14)

Those that did not engage in fighting, and girls in particular, felt more mobile

I go into all different schemes 'cos I don't fight, I'm alright (Girl 13)

To which a boy replied

She's a lassie but. Boys willnae touch lassies. (Boy 13)

Thus young men who participate in gang-related behaviours are perceived to face the greatest restrictions to their mobility. However, it is evident that the presence of bounded gang territories provokes an anxiety amongst many children about travelling across, and being caught in, neighbourhoods (gang territories) other than their own. Once more, we are able to delineate a progression from indirect to direct learning experiences that serve to shape children's appreciations of the risks, and restricted geographies, arising out of gang identification.

The seductions of gang identification

As is evident from the preceding discussion, those children interviewed held a clear awareness of the negative consequences of gang fighting. Given that some claimed, quite convincingly, to have participated in such behaviour (as observers or combatants), it seems plausible to suggest that an appreciation of the potential dangers of gang identification does not act as a deterrent to participation. Why then do some children continue to engage in such behaviour? No single answer emerged; rather numerous motivations were cited and clearly interwoven with each other. Participation

was thus about protection, excitement and identity. The interpretation of these themes was tempered by direct experiences and framed (for some) by the intergenerational transmission of the validity of gang fighting as a childhood experience.

The role of older generations

All adult interviewees perceived that children took their lead from older siblings and parents. In other words, gang identities inclusive of fighting were passed down form generation to generation. The following interview segments are illustrative of this point, which recurred frequently.

The children nowadays are taking the lead from some of their older siblings or parents. The youngsters of 20 years ago are now parents. The generational issue is key. (Teacher)

Older generations fought for the schemes. It becomes a badge of honour that is passed down the generations. A young person might say, 'my dad used to fight. He does not encourage it, but says that you should defend your scheme'. (Police Officer)

The longevity of gang fighting and the role of older siblings and parents were recognised by the children themselves. Thus the group of 15 year olds noted that gang fighting was taking place before they were born, that they had witnessed it as small children, and that some of their parents had participated in such fights and bore the scars to prove it. In the following sections we present the motivations for participation as expressed by children themselves.

Protection

The theme of protection can be viewed from several perspectives. Children claimed to be motivated to join a gang, and engage in conflict to protect themselves, their friends and their neighbourhood. Thus children from the group of 10 year olds suggested that, '*some people think that if they go in a gang they'll be safe',* and '*you won't get battered by them if you join them'.* Similarly, an 11 year old offered, '*everyone else is scared and won't start a fight with them'.* Being part of a gang was perceived, at least in part, as a way of promoting personal safety. Other children were less certain and were concerned about being bullied (by older children/gang members) into fighting children (including their friends) from other neighbourhoods.

A significant aspect of protection was related to the safety of friends. The older children interviewed (13 to 15 years old) suggested that you could be drawn in to a fight to, '*back up your pals if they're getting a doin'*,*' and *'at the end of the day, you're going to have it on your conscience* (if) *you didn't back them* (your friends) *up enough'*. Amongst the oldest group (15 years old), the desire to protect the 'scheme' or neighbourhood from others was cited as a significant motivating factor. Thus, '*you don't want another scheme coming through'*,* and '*aye, it's your right, like if you walk down there* (another neighbourhood) *you would get a tanking, so why should they be able to walk through yours?'* Adult interviewees also noted this aspect of protection. A youth charity co-ordinator suggested that from a young person's perspective,

You're trying to protect your own territory, to prevent others coming in without your say so. Most young people don't leave this area. There is nowhere else to go, there are no other choices. This is all they've got. It is something for them to do. If young people from another area come to this area and spray paint the walls, the response is no different to older residents who come together to try to fight a development. Each in their own way is trying to look after the area.

Excitement

A second theme to emerge was that gang conflict was allied to the pursuit of excitement. Children in all age groups talked of their boredom within their (variously) restricted geographies. All but the youngest age group complained of the lack of facilities available to them. The lack of legitimate leisure pursuits may help mould the circumstances in which the thrall and excitement of fighting becomes seen as a form of leisure (Katz 1988; Suzuki 2007). The following quotes help illustrate this theme,

They LIKE fighting (Boy 11)
For a buzz, something to do (Boy 13)
Crazy mate, you just go mental and you run into another scheme and you get caught and get battered and you batter them and it's brilliant (Boy 13)
Definitely exciting isn't it? A pure heavy buzz (Boy 13)
People do it because the adrenalin pumps through them (Boy 14)
If it's boring, then people just start fights don't they! (Boy 15)

These quotes are drawn exclusively from male interviewees, an observation that certainly chimes with the existing American literature on youth gangs

(Thornberry *et al*, 2003), which suggests that young teenage males are most likely to participate in violent conflict. In this study, young women were more likely to be present as girlfriends (see discussion of identity, below) and observers. Observing gang fighting should also be recognised as a source of excitement. Thus,

It's always hunners of fights, but it's good cos' it entertains…you hang out yir window (laughs, Girl 15)
How often does that happen? (interviewer)
Every weekend basically, mostly on a Friday or Saturday (Girl 15)

Identity

A final theme to emerge in the interviews was that of identity. Younger children suggested that boys joined gangs to '*act hard*' and '*to get a reputation*'. In a sense, and in addition to the pursuit of safety (however false that pursuit might be) and/or excitement, participation appears to be a means through which young men attempt to express their identity. That the expression of identity is manifest through physical conflict may be reflective of the young males' ideas of masculinity *per se*. Alternatively, the emphasis on physical conflict may be a consequence of the limited alternate routes through which young males are able to express themselves (Totten 2003, Messerschmidt 2000).

In the accounts afforded by the older age groups, there was a slight shift in emphasis. Here, fighting took place in front of females. The powerful expression of masculinity (fighting) was seen as being provoked by a powerful femininity (Miller 2001). Young women start fights. A family support worker attached to a local charity stated that,

Girls can feed it through wanting to have a boyfriend who is the biggest baddest guy in the scheme, through wanting to make boys in their area jealous by deliberately cultivating friendships with guys from other areas. There are some negative aspects to girl power and that is one of them.

Similarly, a local police officer suggested

If your boyfriend has plugged (stabbed) *someone, then you've got a real catch.*

These observations were corroborated be the young women themselves. During an interview a girl (15) stated that

The lassies start it. Even though I'm a lassie, I'm admitting it. A lassie starts it by nipping (kissing) *another lassie's boyfriend in front of her.*

The following interview segment, similarly serves to illustrate how gang fighting comes to form the backdrop to courtship in this research setting.

Some people respect them (boys who fight) *but I don't* (Boy A15)
Lassies don't respect them, lassies all fancy them. That's what it's all about. That's why lassies hang about the gangs (Girl A 15)
And that's how they (young males) *end up getting into fights* (Girl B 15)
All the nicest boys are in gangs. It's a bad thing (fighting) *but they're nice looking* (Girl A 15)
You've got to be hard in front of your bird (Boy B 15)

Despite children being keenly aware of the consequences of participation in gangs, the seductions of gangs (for participants and the majority who might observe gang-related behaviours at the fringes) appear to eventually outweigh these concerns. As sexual and gender identities develop, the restricted (and in the children's view under-resourced) geographies that children experience may serve to channel some toward gang identification, whilst the majority observe it as theatre.

Conclusion

In the area of Glasgow covered by this study, gang identities and neighbourhood identities were enmeshed. The appreciation of the shape of a neighbourhood (of the gang territory), of the opportunities that can be taken within and outwith its boundaries, requires a young person to take account of the gang's territorial identity. All children learn these identities, whether gang participants or not. Our research suggests the importance of indirect learning, of the intergenerational transmission of gang identification. However, it also points to the importance of the young person's own (bounded) experiences that ultimately lead to the interpretation of, and significance placed upon, these messages.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to address, in any meaningful way, those factors that serve to shape or channel the learning process of some children so that they directly engage in gang-related behaviours, though the lack

of resources within the bounded geographies of children would appear a fruitful avenue of investigation. Certainly, this research took place in an area of Glasgow characterised by high levels of social and economic deprivation, and we know that participation in gangs is more pronounced in areas of this type (Smith and Bradshaw 2005: 12). We can state, however, that we were able to observe gang identification as being deeply ingrained in all children at an early age. Children are not ignorant of the dangers of gangs. Some of those children that we interviewed experienced severe physical harm; all knew it to be a risk. Significantly, though to differing extents depending on the degree of gang identification, most children interviewed felt that their mobility was restricted because of gangs.

Nevertheless, children appear drawn toward youth gang identification. The weighting given to the dangers associated with youth gang participation in comparison to its seductions appear to change in line with children's social development. The attractions of gangs seem more compelling as children grow older and enter adolescence. Gangs identified in stories of grotesque and dangerous (possibly mythical) Chelsea Clowns give way to gangs as the theatrical and exciting backdrop to courtship. Masculine and feminine identities are formed, at least in part, in relation to performances in and around gangs. All the children we interviewed, inclusive of those who did not directly participate in gangs, were able to discuss gang identification in relation to the pursuit of excitement in general, and of courtship in particular. In this sense individual, neighbourhood and gang identities are closely interwoven.

Bibliography

Aldridge, J., Medina, J. and Ralphs, R. (2007) 'Youth Gangs in an English City: Social Exclusion, Drugs and Violence' (ongoing research, presentations linked at: http://www.law.manchester.ac.uk/research/centres/ccsls/gangunit/presentations.html)

Armstrong, G. and Wilson, M. (1973) 'City Politics and Deviance Amplification' in I. Taylor and L. Taylor (eds.) *Politics and Deviance: Papers from the National Deviance Conference*, Middlesex: Pelican.

Ball, R. & Curry, G. (1995), 'The Logic of Definition in Criminology: Purposes and Methods for Defining "Gangs"', *Criminology* 33(2): 225-245.

Batchelor, S. (2001) 'The Myth of Girl Gangs' in *Criminal Justice Matters* 43: 26-27; Reprinted in Y. Jewkes and G. Letherby (eds.) (2002) *Criminology: A Reader*. London: Sage.

Bennett, T. & Holloway, K. (2004), 'Gang Membership, Drugs and Crime in the UK', *British Journal of Criminology* 44(3): 305-323.

Bradshaw, P. (2005) 'Terrors and Young Teams: Youth Gangs and Delinquency in Edinburgh', in Scott H. Decker and Frank M. Weerman (eds.) *European street gangs and troublesome youth groups*; AltaMira Press: Oxford.

Cohen, A. (1955), *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, Glencoe: Free Press.

Davies, A. (1998a), 'Street gangs, crime and policing in Glasgow during the 1930s: the case of the Beehive Boys', *Journal of Social History* 23(3): 251-267.

Decker, S. and Weerman., F. W. (2005) *European Street Gangs and Troublesome Youth Groups*; Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Esbensen, F-A., Winfree, T.W. and Taylor, T.J. (2001) 'Youth Gangs and Definitional Issues: When is a Gang a Gang, and Why Does it Matter?' *Crime and Delinquency*, 47(1): 105-130.

Eurogang Network (2004) 'Eurogang Expert Survey', page 1 ; available via request from : http://www.umsl.edu/~ccj/eurogang/euroganghome.htm

Katz, J. (1988) *Seductions of crime : moral and sensual attractions in doing evil*, New York, N.Y.: Basic Books.

Kintrea, K., Bannister, J., Pickering, J., Reid, M. and Suzuki, N. (2008) *It's An Area-We All Represent It: Young People and Territoriality in British Cities,* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

Klein, W. (1995), *The American Street Gang: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Control*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Klein, W., Kerner, H., Maxson, C. & Weitekamp, E. (eds.) (2001), *The Eurogang Paradox: Street Gangs and Youth Groups in the U.S. and Europe*, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Messerschmidt, J. (2000) *Nine Lives: adolescent masculinities, the body and violence*, Oxford: Westview Press.

Miller, J. (2001), *One of the Guys: Girls, Gangs, and Gender*, New York/ Oxford: OUP.

Miller, W. (1977) *Conceptions, Definitions, and Images of Youth Gangs*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Law School, Center for Criminal Justice.

Mori Scotland (2003) *Glasgow Youth Survey 2003*; Glasgow City Council: Glasgow

Patrick, J. (1973), *A Glasgow Gang Observed*, Wiltshire: Redwood Press.

Sanchez-Jankowski, M. (1991), *Islands in the Street: Gangs and American Urban Society*, California: University of California Press.

Sanders, W. (1994), *Gangbangs and Drive-bys: Grounded Culture and Juvenile Gang Violence*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Scottish Executive (2005) *Measurement of the Extent of Youth Crime in Scotland*; available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/37428/0009796.pdf

Seaman, P., Turner, K., Hill, M., Stafford, A., & Walker, M. (2005), *Parenting and Children's Resilience in Disadvantaged Communities*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Sharp, C., Aldridge, J. and Medina, J. (2006) *Delinquent Youth Groups and Offending Behaviour: Findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey*; Home Office: London. (Available at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/rdsolr1406.pdf).

Smith, D.J. and Bradshaw, P. (2005) 'Gang Membership and Teenage Offending', Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime; Publication Number 8; available at: http://www.law.ed.ac.uk/cls/esytc/findings/digest8.pdf [accessed 30/07/2007]

Spergel, I. (1990), 'Youth gangs: continuity and change', *Crime and Justice* 12: 171-275.

Suzuki, N. (2007) *Sport and Neighbourhood Regeneration: Exploring the Mechanisms of Social Inclusion through Sport*, unpublished PhD thesis: University of Glasgow.

Thornberry, T., Krohn, M., Lizotte, A. & Smith, C. (2003), *Gangs and Delinquency in a Developmental Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thrasher, F. (1936) [1927] *The gang: A study of 1,313 gangs in Chicago* (2nd edn), Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.

The Herald (2008) *300 'booze and blade' gangs blighting Scotland: numbers revealed for first time*, Tuesday March 1st, 1.

Totten, M. (2003) Girlfriend Abuse as a Form of Masculinity Construction among Violent, Marginal Male Youth; *Men and Masculinities*, 7(6): 70 - 92.

Turner, K. M., Hill, M., Stafford, A., and Walker, M. (2006) How children from disadvantaged areas keep safe, *Health Education*, Volume 106, Number 6, 2006, pp. 450-464(15)

Wood, M. (2004) *Perceptions and experience of anti-social behaviour: findings from the 2003/2004 British crime Survey*, Online Report 49/04, Home Office, London.

Youth Justice Board (2007) *Guns, Gangs and Weapons*; YJB: London.