

## **Introduction**

Whilst remaining a long-standing stable component of interpersonal violence and gang behaviours, robbery, in all its forms, remains a comparatively under-researched element of criminal activity in the United Kingdom, with a few notable exceptions. Scholarly analysis of street robbery has mostly focused on the victim profiles, offender motivations or type of violence employed. Such specifics have perhaps obscured closer examination of how both victims and offenders are ordered in social space and how methods of robbery are variably employed. This apparent gap in research is even more evident when one considers the utilisation of robbery within a street gang context where variable employment of robbery might be determinant upon status within a gang hierarchy. Setting aside opportunistic robberies conducted by individuals (e.g., robberies by drug misusers seeking to fund a habit), we set out to specifically consider the relationship between street robbery and street gangs. To inform this paper, we conducted in-depth interviews with 42 current and ex-street offenders (aged 16–35), thereby producing a short typology of gang organisation and street robbery. Prior to getting into the data, this manuscript begins by situating this study in the extant literature on street robbery and its utilisation as part of street gang repertoire of violence.

### **Existing Research on Robbery**

In English law, robbery is defined under Section 8(1) of the Theft Act 1968. According to the law, ‘A person is guilty of robbery if he steals, and immediately before or at the time of doing so, and in order to do so, he uses force on any person, or puts or seeks to put any person in fear of being then and there subjected to force’ (Smith 2003). Street robbery, street crime, and mugging are often considered to be synonymous with robbery despite having a different application (Stockdale and Gresham 1998). For example, Hall et al.’s (1978: 327) classic study, *Policing the Crisis*, explored the construction of the moral panic around ‘predatory’ young

black males and ‘mugging’. Informed by the labelling theories of Howard Becker and Edwin Lemert, Hall et al. concluded that the term ‘mugging’ and the epithet ‘mugger’ themselves functioned as a disturbing reductionism for ‘black crime’ created by the law-and-order institutions tasked with controlling it.

Beyond the construction of street robbery, however, Jacobs and Wright (1999) consider the motivations for committing it, setting their research against the backdrop of anomie, labelling, and structural factors of unemployment, drug abuse, and limited opportunities arising from deprivation. For disadvantaged youth, legal work or ‘legitimate employment is not a realistic solution’, neither is borrowing (157). Instead, street robbery becomes a solution—an easy and accessible way to get cash that is inherently less risky than burglary, which itself often provides only goods which then must be traded. Street robbery is over quickly and getting caught becomes a ‘remote and improbable contingency’ (Shover 1996: 102).

Jacobs and Wright (1999: 156) suggest that robbers seek fast cash and must keep up appearances by displaying ‘the fetishized consumption of personal, nonessential, status-enhancing items’, which Anderson (1999) validates by noting that street culture calls for the bold display of the latest status symbols (see also, Katz 1988). According to Jacobs and Wright (1999), street life, with its fast paced, hedonistic, expressive and self-indulgent norms, presents a cycle of behaviour which traps some young men in an ever-present need for cash, often leading to ‘desperation’. Lofland (1969) notes that when people operate under pressure they seek to alleviate that pressure as soon as possible. Robbery is therefore adopted to provide relief from this ‘pressure’.

Shover (1996) however adds that such relief is only ever temporary because the proceeds gained by robbery only ‘enable’ further action. Jacobs and Wright (1999) term this reinforcing behaviour, the Etiological Cycle of Robbery. Linking back to identifiable risk factors, they argue that offenders are ‘overwhelmed by their own predicament – emotional,

financial, pharmacological and otherwise – and see robbery as the only way out’ (167). This argument implies a form of emotional desperation to which robbery is a logical crisis relief. Drug abuse is certainly correlated with robbery, which in many cases is undertaken by an opportunistic individual. In England, the Joint Inspection of the Street Crime Initiative identified that ‘that many of the most prolific adult S[treet] C[rime] offenders were indeed misusers of Class A drugs’ (Home Office 2003).

In the UK, where scholarship on robbery has often focused on serious armed robbery (Wright et al. 2006) and scholarship on low-level street robbery is scarce, we acknowledge the contribution of Smith and his Home Office review of 2003. Smith (2003) noted that personal robbery victims were mostly male (76 per cent), as were suspects (94 per cent). Most robberies were conducted using two or more suspects (62 per cent). The younger the victim, moreover, the larger the group of offenders involved. Smith also identified five distinct types of street robbery offending: Blitz (dramatic overwhelming of the victim to control or stun); Confrontation (a demand for property using threats); Con (where victims are deceived into a form of street interaction); Snatch (where property is grabbed without any prior interaction); and Victim-initiated (where the victim initiates contact with the suspect such as via a drug deal or to procure sex).

Also in the UK, Hallsworth’s (2005) purview of street robbery followed the key arguments of Routine Activities Theory inasmuch that robbery occurred where motivated offenders and suitable targets converged and capable guardians were absent (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson and Clarke 1998). Much lauded by the Home Office, related opportunity perspectives have been central to how Britain has sought to reduce street robbery (see Stockdale and Gresham, 1998; Burrows et al, 2003; Tilley et al 2004; Curran et al 2005; Home Office, 2006).

Wright et al. (2006) suggest the motivations of UK street robbers match those of the US, but they also identify the shortcomings of rational choice theory as an explanation for the crime, arguing it oversimplifies a highly complex process (Shover 1991; Wright and Decker 1994) whilst obscuring the wider cultural context of offending. Respondents in their sample committed street robberies not to sustain their material lives but to sustain their hedonistic lifestyle. Wright et al. (2006: 13) argue rational choice theorists overlook the fact that street robbers operate within a pre-existing cultural context which values toughness and violence and where a street reputation 'would be compromised by the disciplined subordination to authority demanded by most employers'.

Deakin et al. (2007) noted behavioural practice and use of violence was dependent upon victim selection with older, drug-using respondents more likely to employ violence as a necessary practice. Victim selection was also determined by 'a complex and insightful understanding of non-verbal communication and body language on the part of the offender' (65; see also, Collins 2009). Violent victimization can be avoided through careful reading of these behavioural cues and 'signals' (Densley 2012a), especially in spaces where the 'street code' thrives (Anderson 1999). Numerous ethnographic studies have documented how young people 'living the drama' (e.g., Harding 2010) evaluate the authenticity of those around them and campaign to gain expressive rewards like honour or respect through violence (Horowitz 1983).

### **Street Robbery and Street Gangs**

Interestingly, research on street robbery in Scotland, the site of the present study, is all but absent; save for brief mentions in the literature on Scottish 'gangs' (e.g., Smith and Bradshaw 2005). Gangs have long existed in Scotland and the country's largest city, Glasgow, is synonymous with 'gang culture' (see Davies 2013; Deuchar 2009, 2016; Fraser 2015; Patrick

1973). McLean (2018) argues a number of different gang types exist in the Scottish context, each with their own features, which when examined in comparative perspective, appear like stages in the life-cycle of the gang. First, there are Young Street Gangs (YSG), essentially recreational fighting groups. Next, there are Youth Criminal Gangs (YCGs), engaged in more instrumental crime. And finally, there are Serious Organised Crime Groups (SOCGs) engaged in illicit enterprise and, in some cases, illegal governance for communities (see Campana and Varese 2018; McLean et al. 2018).

It is important to put McLean's work into broader context. There is some debate over the threshold level of organisation needed for a group to be called a 'gang' or an organized crime group (for a discussion, see Von Lampe 2016). However, research indicates that gang organisation exists on a continuum (Densley 2014), with 'instrumental-rational' (organised) groups at one extreme, and 'informal-diffuse' (disorganised) groups on the other (Decker et al. 1998, 2008). For this reason, organisational structure is largely a *descriptor* rather than a *definer* of groups, provided it satisfies a minimal threshold of members and maintains a collective identity (Klein and Maxson 2006).

Gang activity, like gang structure, also exists on a continuum. Gang members are known to engage in 'cafeteria style' offending (Klein 1995: 132), but crime type might be dictated by the evolutionary stage the gang is in and its overarching aims (Densley 2012b, 2014). In its embryonic stages, when gangs more closely resemble 'playgroups', robbery might be a means to 'break the humdrum of routine' (Thrasher 1927: 82). But as gangs mature, and focus shifts from recreational to financial gains, robbery has the potential to become more central to group goals (Densley 2014). Hence, Varese (2010) argues that organised crime should be defined on the basis of activities rather than organisational structure. The current study follows this logic and focuses squarely on what the gang actually does.

Studies find a connection between the organisational structure of the gang and the level of organisation in offending, particularly violent crime (Decker et al. 1998; Sheley et al. 1995; Bouchard and Spindler 2010). Notably, Peterson, Miller, and Esbensen (2001) found that the organisation of the gang, specifically its gender composition, predicted levels of involvement in property, violent, and drug crimes. Decker, Katz, and Webb (2008: 169) similarly found, ‘The more organized the gang, even at low levels of organization, the more likely it is that members will be involved in violent offences, drug sales, and violent victimizations’. The question for the current study, is to what extent does this ring true for street robbery.

### **The Current Study**

We acknowledge the background of street robbery motivation pertains to a cultural context of limited youth opportunities (Pitts 2008) coupled with desire to acquire high-value commodities which sustain hedonistic lifestyles (Jacobs 2000). However, the foreground issues are less well mapped out. Existing research on street robbery has hitherto failed to engage with illuminating concepts of social control (Black 1983), habitus and social field (Bourdieu 1984), street capital, (Harding 2014; Sandberg and Pederson 2011); and social capital (Deuchar 2009, Halpern 2005). Each of these offers a theoretical perspective whose interface with street robbery sheds fresh light on this old topic.

Whilst the portability of high-value items such as iPads and iPhones offers monetary benefits to robbers, the monetary value is often only effectively realised if robbers are criminally networked into individuals who can fence the stolen goods. Such links might help individual drug users raise their required cash. However, street robbery also operates within the context of a street gang and in this way we argue that the presentation of street robbery and its employment operates differently within different social fields and street contexts. We argue that concepts of street capital (Harding 2014) legitimise street robbery as a form of strategising

through which skills are acquired, displayed and honed. This in turn offers strategic advancement leading to elevation through street gang hierarchies, from Young Street Gangs to Serious Organised Criminal Groups (SOCGs). We conceive each of these criminally oriented groups as co-joined but slightly different social fields where membership, rules and criminal repertoire have been altered and modified to reflect age, experience and position in the criminal hierarchy (Harding 2014).

To expand this thesis further we propose a typology of street robbery illustrating how it adapts and changes in both style and technique as one progresses up the gang hierarchy from Young Street Gang to SOCG. To illustrate this we have elected to establish this argument within a Scottish context, focusing specifically on the criminal gang hierarchy and how robbery is strategically employed to gain elevation then sustain position within the social fields.

### **Method**

Within the wider context of a qualitative research study focused on gang membership, offending and evolution in Glasgow (Scotland's largest city), data were gathered between 2012 and 2016. Extensive and multiple semi-structured interviews were conducted with young people over the age of 16 who had been involved in gang-related, organised criminal activity (specifically drug dealing) (Scottish Government 2015). We acknowledge that by focusing on participants embedded in gangs and organised crime, the voices of small-scale drug users and dealers who may be involved in street robbery but who are not gang members are excluded, and this is a limitation. Still, we present data from a unique 'hard-to-reach' sample population (Bhopal and Deuchar 2016), that was accessed via a combined purposive and snowball sample that started with frontline practitioners in outreach projects acting as gatekeepers. In total, we conducted interviews with 34 young men and 8 young women; of these, 10 were ex-offenders and 32 active offenders, the age span was 16-35 years and all had been raised in the most socially disadvantaged areas of the city. Our flexible interview

schedule enabled attitudes and beliefs to be foregrounded from the perspective of insiders and the privileging of their collective voice (Carlsson 2012; Holligan and Deuchar 2015).

Whenever possible multiple interviews were scheduled for participants. These ranged between one to five interviews with each participant. On average, interviews lasted about one hour. Almost all interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, although three interviews were group interviews. Whenever feasible, data were triangulated through discussions with other interviewees or participants voluntarily providing corroborating evidence. Interviews were recorded via audio devices before being transcribed, coded, and analysed thematically (Creswell 1994). Ethical approval was granted by the researcher's home institution. Names are pseudonyms, and some dates/locations have been changed to help preserve confidentiality.

## **Findings**

Our findings are presented under three headings. Each heading relates to the level of gang organisation and outlines how robbery may present itself at each stage. These headings are *YSG and Robbery*, *YCG and Robbery*, and *SOCG and Robbery*. Respondent names are pseudonyms and some dates and locations have been changed to protect participant identity.

### **YSG and Robbery**

While Glasgow YSGs typically comprise both core members and peripheral members, nonetheless such groups are inherently recreational. Although the number of YSGs in the city has varied at points, at the peak of YSG violence in the early 2000s, Police Scotland identified 170 YSGs operating within their geographical remit. Over 1700 YSG members were identified (Centre for Social Justice 2009). When criminality occurs in YSGs, more often than not this involves core members, although peripheral members may be present. The types of delinquent

and criminal activities which YSGs engage in, as a whole, is generally minor, expressive crime such as anti-social behaviour (i.e. vandalism, graffiti, and drink/drug taking) and occasionally gang fighting, as the statements below suggest:

*'I like a wee toke (smoking cannabis) with [friends]...Helps me chill out and stop stressing.... Probably [got] drunk most weekends and toured the streets wi' [my] muckers, having a laugh, shit.'* – (Del)

*'Most [of the] time we hung out was spent getting high. Used to meet up down the woods to take buckets[(a method of consuming cannabis via the use of a plastic bottle) .... People would take turns in getting the [cannabis]. I used to get it [from my older brother], but they had to pay me back .... Or sometimes we would all chip in. I got it but so didn't pay.'* – (Fraser)

*'I hung around wi' my best pal and only really seen the other lads (YSG members and associates) if I got a Facebook [message] or [a phone] call about a fight [that's] happening.... [or] when I see them at the dancing [on weekends], or doing [other] stuff.'* – (Henry)

As illustrated above, YSGs are essentially recreational outfits which occasionally engage in delinquent and criminal acts. Group formation is essentially driven by social factors, of which delinquency is a potential and not a given. Such delinquency is more likely to occur at certain times, events, etc, (i.e. weekends, clubbing). At these events, drink and drugs were frequently consumed. Yet as Fraser notes, drug taking and drug supply are rarely distinct; an idea consistent with the work of Coomber and Moyle (2014) and others. When YSGs do engage

in drug supply, often this is in terms of social supply as opposed to outright drug dealing proper. Cannabis use can be heavy.

Robbery is one of several activities employed by gang-affiliated young people as part of a strategy for advancement within the social field of this peer group. In this way street robbery includes the manufacture of ‘street capital’ (Harding 2014) to help them build their status and reputation amongst peers. It might also be used as an opportunity to demonstrate trust and in-group loyalty (Halpern 2005; Densley 2012a). At this level, and within this context, three forms of robbery are most frequent: (a) Opportunistic robbery of criminal peers; (b) Street robbery of peer groups, (e.g. clubbers); and (c) Street robbery of the general public. Clearly, the latter two forms listed above are usually undertaken in small groups or duos, whilst opportunistic robbery might be undertaken by one individual against another.

### ***Opportunistic robbery of criminal peers***

Whilst robbery is often a group or dual activity some individuals from YSGs will commit robbery against other peers who are already perceived, or known, to be criminally involved or criminally active. In such circumstances, the individual acts as a lone operator. Often this is a form of criminal opportunism and ‘seizing the moment’. Transactional insecurity is widely recognised amongst the drug dealing fraternity and accepted as part of life. Waldo recalls a past drugs transaction in which he robbed the dealer:

*‘[I] knew the [dealers]... [He] stayed [near] me, [and was] a bit younger. [I] heard he was selling [ecstasy tablets] .....I didn’t go [out] to rob him, but after I bought the pills I seen him take out a wad of cash and though ‘fuck it, am taking that....[I] Just said “give me that”. Obv[iously] he was shocked, but fuck it. [I] Got up in his face.... [and] he shat it and gave me the money. [I] took the*

*pills as well.... I don't feel bad. He knew what he was getting into.... his fault for no[t] protecting himself.' – (William)*

For William, robbery was not planned but opportunistic and ad hoc to the circumstances. This robbery strategy involved a rapid risk assessment of both situation and the personal attributes of the dealer, with judgements made as to whether or not the dealer (soon to be opponent) was 'tooled up' or ready to fight back. Assessment will include the present state of the opponent, whether he is stoned, relaxed, in his own domain or elsewhere, able to acquire assistance from others, etc. Sometimes these assessments are conducted over time establishing a basic assumption that this person is 'takeable'. An asymmetric imbalance of physicality might influence this judgement. A further element of asymmetric imbalance is that the robber simply wants the cash more than the victim and is prepared to do what it takes to get it. Here a sudden rush of the victim or a sudden switch in persona will provoke shock and demonstrate unpredictability. Violence is also available.

On occasion this form of 'ambush' robbery can be more skilfully planned (Wright and Decker 1997:98). By fitting into the street world as a drug consumer, would-be assailants can establish co-presence and use these short transactions to establish where drugs and cash are secreted. These 'set-up buys' permit risk assessment of viability and defensibility.

Justification or techniques of neutralisation (Sykes and Matza 1957) are often offered up as a way of rationalising why violent robbery is suddenly necessary, e.g. the dealer was careless, annoying, unprofessional, 'taking the piss', or waving money around. The key technique of neutralization being that, 'he knew what he was getting into'. In this way, robbery of a criminal peer is an expected, or at least well understood, part of The Game. It also assures, and confirms that within the rules of The Game (Harding 2014), snitching or reporting to the

police, will not occur, not least due to the primary criminal activity involved in dealing drugs (see also, Anderson 1999).

The use of weapons in robbery is common. Our study participants who had partaken in robbery, or been victims of robbery, spoke of knife use, or threat, as frequent in such attacks. Steff's statement captures this process:

*'[Most] guys I know [that] rob folk [do] carry blades....[because] the guy (victim) will be [more likely] to hand over his stuff.... makes [the robbery] quick' – (Steff)*

As Steff points out, opportunistic robbery often requires production of a blade. This expedites the incident by visually illustrating both intent and capacity to use violence. A fast execution of a robbery will help the attacker avoid apprehension. Core YSG members were more inclined to carry knives (see VRU 2011). Knife carrying practices do have an impact on increasingly the likelihood for opportunistic robbery taking place, as Vince, who was incarcerated for such an act, explains:

*'Not as if I thought I am going take this dagger, rob that cunt, and plug him. Isn't how shit happened. Had the dagger cause [YSG rival] was pure out scanning the place, [he was] after me. Me and [YSG friend's A, B, and C] bumped into [YSG rival's] two mates. Things got out of hand, didn't they! We cornered them... made them hug each other, shit, like gays (laughs)... I took the dagger out, [said] "gees your jackets or you're getting made into a fucking teabag". [I] thought I was being funny... [probably because] my mates were there. You see your chance don't you, you take it.' – (Vince)*

Outnumbering his rivals and being in possession of a knife stacked the odds in clear favour of Vince and his companions. This increased the likelihood for robbery to take place, as mocking quickly turned to robbery and even assault. Vince did not intend to initially rob his opponents quickly recognised their position of weakness and level of complicity. This meant that Vince moved from humiliating his opponents to engage in robbery as he looked to ‘get one over them’. Thus, while robbery may initially or on the surface seem as though it is opportunistic and for peer viewing, deeper and more complex issue may also be at work.

### ***Street robbery of peer groups (e.g. clubbers)***

Robbery, as a criminal activity, can be conducted by a single gang member, but more commonly it is conducted in group formation with other members present. The manifest reasoning here is that this provides an added advantage against the victims. Members may simply be present while the robbery takes place, or may be actively taking part in the robbery. Adopted targets are often other young peers who are leaving pubs and moving on to clubs. They may well be intoxicated, ill-prepared and unaware and assumed to be carrying cash:

*‘We would [travel to Glasgow city centre] for a [gang fight] .... [but we’d] make a tidy wee earner [in addition] .... [the YSG] would wander around the main streets, usually where the old [nightclubs] would be. [club goes] would have to pass [by] .... We would rob them [as they] made their way [to the nightclub] .... cops and adults never got involved either.... was easy enough. We were already [in Glasgow] for a [fight] so everyone was usually [carrying weapons] and [intoxicated]. We would all be egging each other to do shit ... We would look for stragglers, or goons (weak) .... [We] would just stop them and say “gi[v]e’s a pound”, but we’d take everything.... Anything I got I kept....*

*everyone (in the YSG) just got in a frenzy and would be robbing people all over the street.’ – (Robert)*

The latent motivation here is that robbery is a type of ‘performance’ played out in front of peers that demonstrates bravado and adherence to group or peer objectives; thus strengthening in-group loyalty and belonging. It serves to build trust amongst the peer group whilst demonstrating skill at the physical execution of robbery including articulation of threat, speed of execution and of course the value of the takings (Densley 2012a). Through such bonding mechanisms, the YSGs will generate personal and group reputations, build their own personal brands and biographies (Harding 2014) whilst using the night’s events to craft exaggerated stories and narratives and contribute to myth-making (Decker and van Winkle 1996; Lauger 2014; Pickering et al. 2012).

There are similarities between William and Robert’s statements indicating that for YSGs robbery appears highly opportunistic and sporadic. The favourable advantage of group robbery is that it acts as a training ground and group performance, giving younger or peripheral members the confidence needed to carry out such audacious acts.

### ***Street robbery of the general public***

A third form of robbery undertaken by YSGs is robbery against the general public. Here again a level of planning and premeditation is required. YSG members will often undertake these robberies in or around busy town and city centres thereby avoiding their local scheme territories and also avoiding rival schemes:

*'... would travel into town. Just get the bus you know..... get off and walk through to the Trongate, down to the Barras.<sup>1</sup> You know where [I am talking about].... There's like a wee underpass just off the main road .... [because] was more people about to choose from, plus no one knows you. If you do shit in your scheme, you are going to get well huckled (caught by police).'* – (Boab)

As Boab points out, with his peers, he would specifically travel to a certain location at the edge of Glasgow centre, select a quiet location close to a busy main road and carefully target victims. Here again attacks are not random:

*'Aye, prob[ably] is a type you look for. No even thinking about it mate. You can see when someone is quiet, makes it easier to take their money, know man.... no' like you're going to take on the guy built like a brick shit house, and scars all over his coupon (face) ....mostly quiet boys themselves, or wi' like one mate or that....rob junkies as well, they fight back but never go to the police.'* – Boab

As Boab suggests, victimization is based upon risk assessment of multiple variables including social space, physical appearance and attributes. Interestingly, having planned to rob, Boab then claims victim selection is largely unconscious. His risk assessment skill is sufficiently honed to assess those who are 'quiet', less likely to fight back or report to police. Use of the term 'boy', indicates his targets are usually younger thus he employs asymmetry in his selection process.

Whilst an element of planning is identifiable, once 'in the moment' some offenders adopt a more 'casual approach' (Feeney 1986) to victim selection, where crude choices are

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<sup>1</sup> A busy open market characterised by stalls and street sellers at the edge of Glasgow city centre.

made on limited information (Jacobs 2000). Rational choice theorists refer to ‘bounded rationality’ (Cornish and Clarke 1986) where time pressures might limit and simplify complex decision-making. In such circumstances, perceived rewards might be exaggerated as justification for risk taking. Here again the need for follow-through can dominate with the selection of the right target overtaken by the selection of *any* target, (Jacobs 2000; Simon 1990).

### **YCGs and Robbery**

Though clearly linked to YSGs, Youth Crime Groups (YCGs) operate as a slightly different social field with their own rules, members and preferred forms of criminal activity. Whilst progression from the social field of YSGs to YCGs is not universally determined (Harding 2014), it is nonetheless common, may be ‘expected’ and is often deemed ‘logical’ by participants. Unlike YSGs, the social field of the YCGs is predominantly comprised of core members and operate in much smaller outfits: most commonly of around 3 individuals. By this stage the recreational excitement of group activity is fading whilst more instrumental or criminal activity is taking precedence. Unlike YSGs, this criminal core seeks to project their own personal and innate identity onto the group as a whole. Thus, YCGs are intrinsically criminal in purpose and intent. YCG members are older, physically more developed and intellectually more mature. While YCGs retain social properties - in maintaining group relationships and the criteria for selection of group memberships - crime has become the primal orientation of this group. YCGs primarily centre on drug supply, yet given that the gang is in its early stage of ‘criminal’ involvement, it is common for YCGs to experiment with or try out, other types of crime. This often sees YCG engage in crime such as robbery more frequently than other criminal groupings:

*'[My YCG] shifted [an assortment of drugs]..... always wanting to make a faster buck .... getting older, [we were] on the scene a lot .... tried armed robbery.... tried [fraud involving third party delivery services] .... [also sold other commodities] we'd got [smuggled] in, well no' us directly like, more through a guy.... [carried out false] insurance claims.... just meet people in this game that are into all sorts. End up giving it a try and see if it works for you.'* – Ken

As Ken points out, YCGs are inclined to try out numerous criminal ventures in addition to drug supply: often in search of a 'fast[er] buck'. At this level they are also exposed to wider criminal networks already actively engaged in a wider repertoire of criminal activity. This allows YCGs to broaden their horizons and 'try out' other types of crime. Invitations will be proposed to 'jump in' on various planned exploits. YCG members use these opportunities to test their ability, to train and acquire or build expertise before commonly favouring one type of criminal activity in which they might excel. Older SOCGs may also utilise YCG members for odd (criminal) jobs to monitor their ability and performance as a way of 'testing them out'.

### ***Group robbery of rival dealers***

Robbery for YCGs typically involves targeting others involved in the illegitimate market. It is recognised that such individuals will have no recourse to third parties or law. Moreover robbery against drug dealers is viewed as 'justifiable' and part of 'the Game', as Ryan demonstrates:

*'There is nothing wrong with [robbing] dealers... [it is not] like they are your mates or that. [Dealers] aren't respectable, know what am saying?.... They [should] be expecting it.'* - Ryan

As pointed out by Ryan, those criminals being targeted for robbery primarily come in the form of other groups and individuals involved in drug supply. Targeting of rival dealers at this level will generally involve group robbery as opposed to individual robbery. It is recognised that at this middle tier of the gang drug supply profits will be greater and takings more lucrative.

Again robberies often appear opportunistic, but in fact are planned and rely upon the gang being supplied with intelligence (intel) from local sources (family, friends, and acquaintances) which are considered credible. These sources inform the YCG that others have recently acquired, or are storing drugs or money. It is while such goods are 'housed' and stockpiled, sometimes with girlfriends or indebted drug users, that the YCG seeks to strike. This is when goods become stockpiled and are at their greatest profit and vulnerability:

*'We would usually steal drugs, aye mainly drugs, from like other [dealers]... no' like ounces ... needs to be worthwhile....that's why we hit it when its housed, know.... [Therefore robbery] depends [upon] who has what, and when they have it know.... people might know you are into that game but see if they can prove it was you that [robbed] them, they'd wan[t to] fucking kill you, for serious.....fact, more time goes into planning.... [when] robbing other crews<sup>2</sup> then ramming the locals (shops).' - Ken*

As Ken points out, because robberies are aimed against other criminals, considerable effort is taken to carefully ensure that robber identities remain anonymous, even if such 'Krews' are known among criminal networks for carrying out and practicing robbery against

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<sup>2</sup> When referring to criminal 'crews', Glaswegians often replace the c with the letter k for spelling purposes.

other criminals. Ken states that identification would often result in victims seeking revenge via murder. Thus, it would seem that robbery against other criminals carries a significant degree of risk. To further reduce chances of identification and harm, Alan states:

*'Fucking right its dangerous man, know? See, you can hit a place and the cunt's inside are heavy Ricky Maroo'd (armed) right up, no joke ..... aye, we would defo be tooled up, [as well], know. Aye .... take a shooter (firearm) if you can get your hands on one, but that's more like shit you read about happening down England..... we always had blades, case shit gets close and personal know.... [YCG X] always carried a machete on raids.... they aren't the best in truth mate, but they scar the fuck right out of cunts. And see if [they] see you wielding that thing about their face, they mostly shite it and give you what you're asking for, [e]specially if you start taking off ears, know... you really want to hit the place when its empty.'* - Alan

At the YCG level, the risks involved in robbery are greater but the rewards are sweeter and several key principles and variables are in play. Firstly, the importance of verifiable, credible intelligence. This represents a risk in its own right and purveyors of intel will have already earned the trust of the gang by virtue of longstanding personal ties. Part of the intel includes providing an assessment of the rival dealing group, including their capacity (how many in the Krew) and capabilities (will opponents be armed?), location (access) and timing of activities. Planning the robbery or the home invasion is key. Here other variables are risk assessed and then risk managed, including how to outnumber the opponent(s), weapons to be carried and used, and utilising the element of surprise. Employing these variables is important for the successful execution of a robbery with minimal risk. Here robberies are committed for

profit unlike for YSGs where robberies are primarily motivated by group bonding and excitement. As YCG core members are all tried and tested, each is expected to play an equal part in the execution of an event. Thus the profit acquired through robbery is typically distributed more evenly amongst group members as a whole.

Group robbery of rival drug dealers typically goes unreported to law enforcement. Police involvement typically only occurs because an individual has ‘gone too far’ and ‘someone has been seriously hurt’, or law-abiding citizens have been caught up in the ensuing violence. Risk management practice attempts to identify all potential outcomes in a scenario, however the potential for the rival group to be violent remains an unpredictable variable and events can ‘[turn] ugly’. This potential outcome is increased as YCG members will typically be intoxicated or high during robberies. Drugs are consumed to eliminate fear and ‘pump up’ members, creating a ‘super-optimism’ (Walters 1990) and sense of invincibility, but in a tense scenario this can prove counterproductive, as Alan recalls:

*‘[YCG member Z] was pure mad with it (intoxicated) [on this occasion], fucking coked right out his eyeballs....[he] was [only] to watch the [hostages]... we use to always put them in the bathroom crouching down (Alan does motion), know.... It’s no[t] like in the movies, know, tying cunts up and that shit. No time man. Plus, you start that shit and the cunts are going to fight back. No chance they are going to let you just tie them up.... anyway [YCG member Z] starts thinking he has heard one of the guys saying his name, pure para, fucking para, so [he] fucks this cunt right in the head with the [hatchet].... we had to fucking bail.... left with fuck all [except] an attempted murder wrap on our hands, well on [YCG member Z’s] hands. I wasn’t taking no derry [blame] for that.’ - (Alan)*

Prior intoxication or drug use may reduce fear and inhibition, but also it generates a misreading of, or unplanned (and often violent) reactions to, the risks that are present (in this incident resulting in the robbery by Alans YCG not going to plan). Alan later pointed out that YCG member Z gave away his name after striking the individual on the head, resulting in YCG member Z being attacked at a later date as part of the victim's retaliation. As a result, YCG member Z was seriously scarred on the face and head. Alcohol and drug misuse prior to a robbery therefore introduces a further variable of risk which is unpredictable.

### ***Transition to SOCG***

The social field of the YCG presents slightly modified rules of operating and rules of entry. It presents different stages of development typically characterised by testing and perfecting abilities, trying out new crimes, employing a heightened role of violence and individual hyper-masculine practices. Those who progress from the YCG to a Serious Organised Crime Group (SOCG) will again be aware of a slightly modified social field. As the gang gets older there is a need for a greater sense of stability, reduced risk and for the individual/group to embody professionalism. Dee recalls this process of transition from YCG to SOCG:

*'When [my YCG] started out we were always getting into shit....still young and learning the trade ... [we] would fight with [everyone], robbing folk....building up big [drug] debts and no[t] pay.... [we] were always looking to bump [people]. Can't go on like that but ... got to be more professional if you want to do it right, stop all that shit [be]cause no one wants to work with you [otherwise].'* – (Dee)

Dee states that only by '*stop[ping] all that shit*' could the group progress towards more profitable criminality. If a gang is known or has acquired a reputation for robbing other criminals or 'bumping' drug debts, this may act as a form of bad credit. This means that the group's short-term goals are counterproductive to long-term ambition. It could reduce the gang's ability to be able to purchase drugs or other illegal commodities from other criminal/criminal groupings, and could lead to rival groups actively seeking their demise. Only by embracing professionalism can a YCG member progress towards being, or becoming involved in, a SOCG. Professionalism then becomes a delineating requirement and codified expectation of this more elevated social field.

### **SOCG and Robbery**

Unlike lower tier YSGs and YCGs, the social field of the SOCGs is heavily focused on business relationships and economic principles. Police Scotland have identified 164 known SOCGs, comprising 3282 individuals, to be active across Scotland, with the clear majority located in and around the Glasgow conurbation (Scottish Government 2016). The governing principle in the social field of the SOCGs is increased social control of both markets and personal relationships to stabilise transactional security and increase profit margins. Control of this social field is maintained by developing a more hierarchical model of organising their criminal activity which is less visible and more insular, utilising role differentiation to distance the upper echelon from street interactions or police surveillance. Again progression into this social field is not a 'given' but previous experience in the social fields of the YSG and YCG present candidates as being in the 'pool of availability' (Harding 2014). Those within the SOCG are included largely because they can be trusted, act professionally, and importantly, bring a particular skillset which enhances group proficiency and improves individual revenue:

*'[Former YCG associates] were too wild and were always going to end up dead. I missed hanging out wi' them.... but they were bad news... [They] never grew up.... I [eventually forged an alliance] with I guy a had done some business with in the past. He done alright for himself and just said if I wanted to help him out.... only if I ditched my [YCG friends].'* – (Harry)

The reasons why a group would transition to become a SOCG are complex (Densley 2014). While Harry stressed the need for greater professionalism, factors both internal and external to the gang, from leadership to opportunity, cannot be discounted and deserve greater attention than can be provided here. It is recognised, often via (auto) biographical accounts, that those SOCGs who initially became involved in the emerging drugs trade during the last quarter of the 20th Century were comprised of professional criminals who previously robbed jewellers and banks. This shift in criminal speciality occurred for several reasons, including globalisation (Pitts 2008), free market policies (Pearson and Hobbs 2001), increased access to illegal drugs from overseas (Densley et al. 2018) and risk mitigation owing to dedicated law enforcement action, technological advances, and improved security (Walsh 2011). Of course, SOCGs existed in Scotland (and elsewhere) in earlier periods as a form of class resistance (e.g., Hobsbawm 1969) and a provisional solution for alleviating strain (Cohen 1955). A resultant decrease in bank heists and robbery of jewellery stores, however, effectively means that outright or violent robbery may be a thing of the past for SOCGs, supplanted by more 'white collar' forms of robbery (e.g., fraud, insurance claims, tax avoidance, etc.) associated with laundering the proceeds of drug crime (Levi 2008):

*'Running about acting the macho man is only going to see you ending up dead.... [I don't act like that], am a pro.'* – (Harry)

For those involved in SOCGs, the criminal persona has altered to one of ‘professional businessman’ as opposed to ‘thugs’. At this level, members have acquired status and reputation alongside the trappings of criminal activity. Their intention is now to conserve this position of privilege using conservation strategies (Bourdieu 1984). This includes a more conservative perspective on risk and for some an active risk aversion.

For SOCGs, highly visible or highly violent acts of robbery decrease as professionalisation increases and conservation strategies are employed. Gang business is reassessed with a new focus on limiting risk and increasing sustainable or diversified profits (see Gootenberg 2011). This is not to suggest that SOCGs do not engage in robbery. Rather, it takes a much subtler form as Alan explains, when discussing how stolen money and commodities are divided:

*‘[When] we done (robbed) [SOCG A] stash over at the flats [in Glasgow area A], we got about a Kilo in Chico (already cut cocaine), I would say so. Aye, think about that. Probably just over to be honest, [be]cause some was already bagged to go.... I got [paid] about 8 G[rand] for that hit. Same wi’ the [other YCG members], more or less, aye. It was worth more but we had to punt it on fast [for an associate to sell]... I kept the weed I took, wee [YCG member A] took the speed we got off [victim A].....think there was around £13000 [in cash]. That went to [SOCG B]....[because] that’s [YCG member A’s] brother, well step-brother. Was him that tipped us off.’ – (Alan)*

Alan points out that while YCGs are more inclined to carry out robbery, particularly those aimed at riskier targets, such ‘hits’ rely on information being made known to them. This

intel can come from SOCGs, who although unwilling to be directly involved, are happy to pass on information which allows such events to take place: for a small fee or cut of the take. The incident above is one in which the SOCG who provided the intel were the original sellers of the package. In this case they sold the package to another SOCG, before supplying a YCG with intel, which allowed them to gain a double profit.

For SOCGs, robbery also diversifies in form to include fraud, online fraud, bogus calling and burglary artifice. The latter often involves partnering with female affiliates, wives, girlfriends, etc, to locate elderly residents and secure entry to the house by conning their way in. This utilises considerable skill and craft as well as confidence and determined planning and observation. Again such activities are low risk and high return. At this level, robbery can also be used as a strategic containment of rival business operations, i.e. to target legitimate or illegitimate operations and inflict damage to a rival seeking to expand within a neighbourhood or community. The use of robbery to scare rivals and/or target businesses that do not show respect comes almost directly from the mafia and organised crime playbook (see Von Lampe 2016).

## **Discussion**

Drawing on McLean's (2018) earlier research, through extensive insights gathered via semi-structured interviews with offenders, the current study attempted to create a typology of street robbery and to explore and examine how this particular criminal activity may adapt and change as young men progress up a gang hierarchy (McLean et al., 2018).

Our findings suggest that, in the embryonic stages of gang activity where criminal behaviour is mostly recreational and expressive in form and nature (Densley 2014), young men may engage in opportunistic robbery that is violent and often morally neutralised on the basis of being part of 'The Game' (Harding 2014; see also Matthews 2002). In addition, violent street

robbery of peer groups was seen as a form of masculine performance and a reputation-building pursuit, while engaging in street robbery of the general public lent itself to building and cementing criminal distinction within the context of gang membership (Harding 2014; Deuchar 2018). As young men progress from street gangs to young crime gangs and the accompanying criminal activity becomes more instrumental in nature, robbery becomes more focused on targeting rival drug dealers and wider criminals which is based on intelligence-gathering and risk assessment. Although still clearly involving the need for potential violence, robbery becomes a means of gaining economic capital as opposed to symbolic capital (Harding 2014), while also being motivated by a need to strengthen and sustain social capital in the form of male group bonding and brotherhood (Deuchar 2018).

As young men begin to transition into SOCGs, there is clearly a need for fewer risks, greater stability, and enhanced professionalism and a corresponding shift in violent street-oriented robbery to more subtle forms of business-oriented practices including fraud and money laundering – but the occasional need for ‘flash holdups’ to instil fear and a sense of potential retribution among rival criminally-oriented businessmen. Accordingly, our data suggests that, as gangs evolve, so too does the common enactment of robbery – from street-oriented violent dramatic performance as a form of expressive status enhancement to a more criminally-oriented means of enacting social control and ensuring the maximisation of economic capital (Jacobs 2000; Harding 2010; Densley 2013; Deuchar 2018; McLean et al. 2018b).

In its ten-year strategy, the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) (2017: 5) stresses its commitment to prevention and to ensuring the bringing about of ‘attitudinal change towards violence at a societal, community and personal level’. It focuses on the need for mentoring of the most ‘at risk’ young people as a way to ‘reduce impulsive and aggressive behaviour and to increase social competence and resilience’ (ibid: 11). Further, in its own ten-year strategy,

*Policing 2026*, Police Scotland (2016: 22) recognises that the force will face considerable demand in the years ahead in respect of ‘investigations into serious crimes’. The force highlights the need to ‘scale and develop’ (p.25) its capabilities to meet new demands in this area. It places an emphasis on driving improvement in the years to come through ‘detecting crime, protecting vulnerable people’ and placing an enhanced focus on prevention by working with a range of partners, including members of local communities themselves (*ibid*: 13). As we have highlighted elsewhere (McLean et al. 2018), in its national strategy for reducing the harm caused by organised crime the Scottish Government (2015) presents a four-pronged approach. The approach focuses on the need to: *divert* people from becoming involved in OC; *deter* SOCGs; *detect* and prosecute those involved in OC; and *disrupt* SOCGs.

Previous research into robbery, with its predominant focus on the victim/offender profile or the type of violence utilised in offences, has largely obscured the opportunity to consider how robbery presents differently in different social fields which each operate with different forms of gang organisation and gang hierarchies. The empirical insights contained within this paper suggest more bespoke diversionary strategies are needed. In so doing, they could provide more depth to the existing knowledge-base of the Scottish Government, VRU and Police Scotland in terms of how best to tackle robbery and the wider issues of violence and organised criminality that often surround and accompany it. The findings hold the capacity to further inform members of the VRU in how best to identify those ‘at risk’ young men who are the most impulsive, as well as focusing interventions on the transition periods between these co-joined but distinct social fields. By focusing on neighbourhoods with high levels of violent street robbery, targeting peer groups or the general public, authorities might more readily evidence the presence of YSGs (McLean 2018) and offer interventions which target the offenders whilst protecting the public. For persistent offenders, mentoring interventions should seek to educate young men about the impact of violence while also actively deflecting them

from the allure of the drug market as a means of preventing local gang evolution (Densley 2014).

Conversely, patterns of robbery which target local drug dealers, may be an indication of an evolution from YSGs to a more dominant YCGs in the area. Here, Police Scotland should focus on the need to *deter* young men from increased immersion in OC through improved partnership working; to prevent YCGs evolving from expressive to instrumental violence; and to ensure criminal activity with an overarching focus on drug trading fails to evolve into more elevated forms of enterprise and governance (Densley 2014). Finally, where lower incidents of violent street robbery exist but where there are increased incidents of online fraud combined with occasional flashpoints in the form of retaliatory firearms incidents, this may indicate an increased presence of SOCGs. In such cases, police officers will need to avoid the inclination to adopt a ‘warrior mentality’ and the sole use of enforcement to *deter* and *disrupt* – although it is recognised that this may be initially needed as an immediate means of stopping retaliatory gang shootings where these arise (Deuchar et al. 2018). More importantly, detectives will require to take a more proactive approach to community engagement (Crocker et al. 2017), recognising local citizens’ status as knowledgeable informants about their local areas and placing an emphasis on ‘local definition, investment, creativity, hope and control’ (Kretzman and McKnight 1993: 8; see also Deuchar et al. 2018). Working closely with and learning from local people and agencies, empowering them to come forward and to take a proactive approach towards co-construction of knowledge, insight and investment will be the only way to ensure that these communities become more resilient in terms of preventing organised crime to flourish.

## **Conclusion**

We have highlighted the relative paucity of research exploring the ways in which robbery is performed by offenders and the types of violence and criminality variably employed alongside it. In this paper, we have drawn attention to the relationship suggested in the extant literature between street culture, gangs and the hedonistic, fast-paced and self-indulgent culture that sometimes spawns young men's participation in robbery to accumulate economic capital (Jacobs and Wright 1999). We have examined existing scholarship that suggests distinct types of robbery may exist, which may include the dramatic overwhelming of a victim, the use of conning of victims to engage in street interaction, 'snatch and grab' or victim-oriented robberies involving drug deals (Smith 2003). However, we have also identified the absence of research to date on street and other forms of robbery in Scotland, and particularly in relation to gang culture.

At first glance, street robbery appears either routine or opportunistic. However, closer inspection informs us that robbery is a much more considered and planned activity than previous data suggests with risk management strategies and targeted victim selection being undertaken. Moving away from routine activities theory (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson and Clarke 1998) and basic concepts of opportunism, we propose that the conduct of street robbery should be viewed as a form of strategic action employed by gang-affiliated young people with the purpose of gaining 'street capital' or building profit (Harding 2014).

Further, street robbery as a criminal activity appears to include both manifest and latent motivations, especially at the younger end of the age spectrum. Here street robbery can often be performed in public as a group activity. Ostensibly it is undertaken for financial gain, however we found that it is often highly important as a collective activity for generating bonding social capital (Halpern 2005; Deuchar 2009). Risk aversion, risk assessment and risk management strategies are clearly evident in our data as offenders actively strategize to maximise profit whilst minimising risk of violence or arrest. Thus, our research illustrates that

as gangs evolve from what McLean (2018) describes as YSGs to YCGs or even SOCGs, adaptive employment of robbery occurs and robbery changes in how and where it is performed and against whom. Thus, policing and early intervention strategies may need to be sensitive and responsive to the subtle nuances of gang evolution stages and the forms of robbery that may accompany them.

Although our insights may enable a more informed, nuanced approach to tackling and preventing various forms of robbery in Scotland through paying due cognisance to issues of gang evolution, we also believe that further research is needed in this area. Future studies need to examine the extent to and ways in which levels of group organisation affect young men's offending patterns and how gradual accumulation of street capital can enable progression towards entrepreneurial, business-oriented forms of robbery. This type of wider evidence-base would help to enable the national police force and its partners and stakeholders in Scotland to identify the best means of intervening and preventing the strategic advancement and elevation through gang hierarchies that certain types of robbery can enable, and in turn prevent the further emergence of organised crime.

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