Policing Gangs in London: Perceptions of the Process from Key Practitioners

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

Department of Sociology

University of Essex

Date of Submission: 18th October 2017

Abstract

This study presents a practitioner perspective analysis of how gangs, gang members and their associated risks are perceived and policed within the organisational structure of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). Drawing on a large-scale survey and in-depth interviews with a variety of gang practitioners, it contrasts and critiques specialist, analytical and local police practice in conceptualising, mapping, monitoring and policing within the gang milieu, focusing on police and partnership use and understanding of the primary tool for gang member management, the MPS Gangs Matrix. Findings highlight a perception of the gang at odds with that captured by the static intelligence mechanisms embedded in operational practice and highlight the tensions created by the complex intra-organisational structures in terms of remit and understanding. It identifies an emerging tendency to align the gang with organised crime; utilising elements of the interconnected theoretical frameworks of interactionism (specifically the activities of the labellers), contextual constructionism, and institutional theory to consider the aetiology and consequences of these actions in the context of policing policy and practice.

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Abbreviations

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
BOCU	Borough Operational Command Unit
CAD	Computer Aided Dispatch
CDRP	Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
CGU	Central Gangs Unit
CHIS	Covert Human Intelligence Source
CID	Criminal Investigations Department
CRIMINT	Criminal Intelligence Database
CRIS	Crime Reporting Information System
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CSP	Community Safety Partnership
DSA	Directed Surveillance Authority
DWO	Dedicated Ward Officer
EGVE	Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation
EGYV	Ending Gang and Youth Violence
GEAR	Gang Enforcement Assessment and Review
GVI	Group Violence Intervention
IAG	Independent Advisory Group
IIP	Integrated Information Platform
ILP	Intelligence Led Policing
MERLIN	Multi Agency vulnerable child database
Misper Unit	Missing Persons Unit

MOPAC	Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
OCGM	Organised Crime Group Mapping
PNC	Police National Computer
PWITS	Possession With Intent To Supply
SCO1	Homicide Command
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SSO	Serious Sexual Offences
TGCC	Trident Gang Crime Command
TGOM	Trident Gangs Operating Model

Acknowledgements

I have received a great deal of invaluable advice, encouragement and support from many people over the course of this thesis. I would particularly like to thank my dissertation supervisor, Nigel South, for the time he made for me in his busy schedule and the reams of enlightening advice, encouragement and inciteful comment he provided; particularly in the final stages when needed most. Further thanks to my previous tutor, Dick Hobbs for both encouraging me to come to Essex in the first place and whose work has been a source of inspiration and much reference. I am also grateful to the early comments from Darren Thiel which helped to provide some directional focus at opportune moments. I am also very grateful to Michele and her team for their endless patience and assistance with all manner of administrative concerns and conundrums! I am indebted to everybody who participated in the study and forever grateful for your considered and enlightening insights. Additional thanks are also due to those who authorised, facilitated and actively encouraged the research within the MPS, and particularly Trident. I would also like to thank my manager Paul for his encouragement and flexibility in my work-study balance, as well work colleagues, past and present for putting up with my endless pontificating, research induced mood swings and inevitable 'data panics' rollercoaster - especially Barry, Lynne and Zoe; legends. I am further indebted to my parents for their unconditional support, particularly whilst writing up when emotional support was supplemented by financial. You can have your study back now mum! Last but by no means least, I would like to thank Caroline for her unswerving reassurance, encouragement and support (not to mention tolerance) whilst I lived and breathed the PhD; it's definitely my turn to cook now!

Chapter One: Politics, Policing and the Gang

In early August 2011, just as this thesis was beginning its lengthy gestation, England experienced its worst outbreak of civil disorder for two decades, after protests over the fatal police shooting of Mark Duggan in Tottenham boiled over and rioting broke out across the country. Then Prime Minster David Cameron was quick to lay blame for the riots on 'territorial, hierarchical and heavily violent …street gangs'; the 'pure criminality' oozing from the cracks in 'Broken Britain' (Cameron 2011). Although research swiftly cast doubt on the extent of gang involvement (Lewis et al. 2011), the assertion marked a crescendo in gang-centric policy from 'no such problem' in 1999 to 'national priority' in 2011 (Smithson & Ralphs 2016); a policy shift which was to significantly impact the perceptions and response to youth and weapon-enabled violence and criminality across criminal justice and partnership agencies.

Over the six years since that pronouncement, the gang has become thoroughly embedded in both the discourse and operational practices of agencies addressing a wide range of criminal behaviours from anti-social behaviour to organised crime (Hallsworth & Brotherton 2011; Hobbs 2013; Joseph et al. 2011; Young 2016). As gatekeepers to the criminal justice machine (McLaughlin 2007), the police have played a vital role in both shaping and responding to this 'new' social threat. In London, this response is overseen by Trident Gang Crime Command, a specialist gun and gang unit created – or more accurately 'rebooted' - soon after the 2011 riots. Set against a climate of financial restraint and an increasing emphasis on the management of risk, the MPS utilise a complex array of processes and mechanisms spanning organisational and partnership boundaries to inform their response to gangs. 'Gang data' is increasingly disseminated outside of the organisation and presented as objective fact; the processes and interactions that help create this data are the focus of this thesis.

How did we get here? The Politicisation of a Gang Problem

The apparent absence of a gang problem in 1999 is as much to do with how the term is framed and defined by key social actors as it is a reflection of reality on the ground; something of a moveable feast, and a recurring theme of this thesis. The 'gang' is a word 'pregnant with possibility' (Hallsworth 2013: 103), and a phenomenon that has been discovered and rediscovered at various points in history, generally to describe the nefarious pursuits of groups of young, working class men (Hobbs 1997; Pearson 1983; Schneider & Tilley 2004). Hales et al. describe the gang as "loaded with emotive terminology and powerful social 'folk devils' such as football hooligans and East End gangsters along the line of the Krays" (2006: 60), yet it was the American cultural representation which really initially shaped the current British conception, an influence that would stretch far beyond the media application of a 'mythical gang stereotype' and into all areas of policing policy and practice.

The American understanding is itself complex and misunderstood, with an empirical evidence base stretching back over a century from the Chicago School's emphasis on marginalisation and social disorganization of transitory communities (Suttles 1968; Thrasher 1927), to Cloward & Ohlin (1960) application of strain theory, to the post-industrial emphasis on links to informal economies, drug dealing and organised crime (Bourgois 2002; Hagedorn 1988; Klein & Maxson 1996; Levitt & Venkatesh 2000). The expansive and often contradictory empirical evidence suggests a heterogeneous, complex, situationally dependant concept which does not lend itself to a universal definition (Fraser & Hagedorn 2016; Katz & Jackson-Jacobs 2004). Both the academy and government in the UK had been reticent to apply the gang tag to youth collaborations, fearful of the connotations and impact this labelling might have. Unrestrained by such concerns, it was the UK media that took centre stage in defining the new gang problem in the UK, the subsequent media furore generating a political debate that was to spark definitive action (Smithson et al. 2013).

High profile murders of a number of children such as Damiola Taylor in 2000, Toni Ann-Byfield in 2003 and Rhys Jones in 2007 - as well as teenage girls Letisha Shakespeare and Charlene Ellis in 2003 - were expressly linked to gangs by an increasingly frenzied media, as were a number of murders in London often seemingly based on little more than the fact that the victim was young, male and black (Alexander 2008). In the absence of any political consensus on definition and terminology the press had looked to America for inspiration; in London at least, the media construction could be concisely summed up as: monolithic; male and black; urban but spreading; hierarchical with leaders and rules; violence as a pervasive part of 'gang culture' (Howell 2007: 40). The fact that the sartorial style of the inner city youth reflected that of the US rappers that defined themselves by the gang made this association perhaps a little easier (Hallsworth 2013).

At this point 'gang statistics' were not being produced by police, but by the media. Although the gang related tag was liberally applied, serious violence was not a media construction; in London, police focus had been on gun crime, initially the very low prevalence but extreme internecine violence of a tiny minority of predominantly Jamaican born criminals involved in disputes over inner city crack markets (Davies 2010; Davison 1997). Firearms homicide in the capital hit a peak of 34 in 2001, having averaged 15 per year over the previous two decades. Throughout the 2000's there was a marked change in the demographics of those involved in firearms violence, both victims and suspects becoming increasingly younger and British born, with a peak of eight teenagers being fatally shot in 2007 (Davies 2010). Teenage homicides peaked across 2007 (27 victims) and 2008 (29 victims), nearly as many as in the previous four years combined and almost double the average for both the preceding and succeeding decades; seventy per cent were stabbings.[1]

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[1] MPS Homicide Statistics, internal data.

The media and political debate that was building galvanised academic attention; from the early 2000's practitioners were increasingly reporting youth involvement in violent, often drug related criminal activity leading to an initial tranche of research in Manchester which was the first to specifically highlight gang involvement – though an agreed definition of the gang was absent, and caution exercised over fears of an Americanisation of the problem (Bullock & Tilley 2002; Shropshire & McFarquhar 2002). In London, academic interest in firearms violence continued to highlight problems in definition, identifying instead:

> …peer networks providing localised social and criminal communities and in some cases providing safety in numbers, young men expecting to encounter violence in the course of their social lives in particular (Hales & Silverstone 2005: 72)

The Nascent Police Response

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), cognisant of growing public concerns, began systematically surveying boroughs to understand the gang problem across the MPS in 2003, with boroughs reporting a total of sixty-five active gangs. At this point framing was still an issue; there was no operational definition of a gang, and centralised gang specific databases were non-existent. Hallsworth and Young were appointed academic advisors to Operation Cruise in 2004 (Hallsworth 2013), providing the MPS with an operationalized definition of the gang, which sought to differentiate it from what the authors saw as more prevalent - but less harmful - peer groups, on one side, and organised crime on the other, stressing the dangers of amplifying risk:

> **Peer Groups:** 'Relatively small, unorganised and transient groups composed of peers who share the same space and a common history. Involvement in crime will be mostly non-serious in nature and not integral to the identity of the group'

Gangs: 'Relatively durable, predominately street based groups of people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the groups identity'

Criminal Network: 'A group of individuals involved in ongoing criminality for personal gain'

(Hales & Muir 2007: 4)

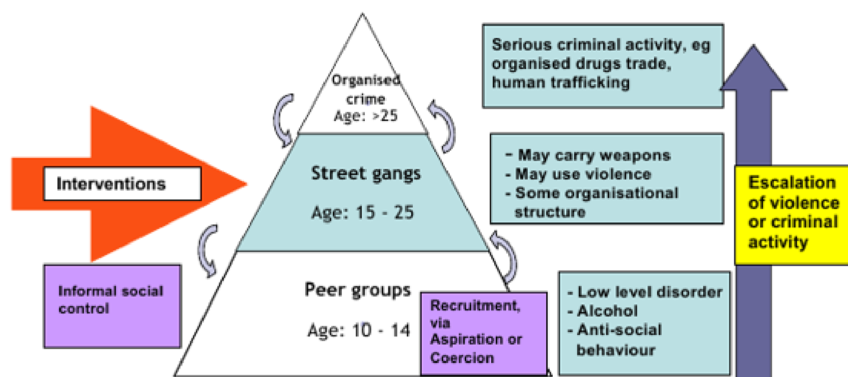

Figure 1: Pyramid of Harm (Squires et al. 2008: 24)

This definition was adopted by the MPS, who recognised the proliferation of low harm peer groups and gangs, as well as the usually fleeting nature of gang 'membership' in an individual life course, resulting in the recommendation in the 2006 MPS Pan-London Gang Profile that '[police] response should target behaviour and not gang involvement' (MPS 2006: 16). A report released the following year *MPS Response to Guns, Gangs and Knives in London* (MPS 2007) marked the first public release of information on MPS understanding of gangs, as well as a conflation of weapons and context that would set the tone for future responses. Hallsworth suggested that the number of gangs had reportedly increased to 169 and that the identified gangs were responsible for 21 per cent of all youth crime (MPS 2006: 4).

Government Catch-Up: Defining the Gang

Although the MPS and Manchester were starting to think about street gangs, the Government was initially slower off the mark. The increasing media attention and public focus on knife, gun and gang crime throughout the noughties which accompanied the spikes in the most serious youth violence meant that the Government was under increasing pressure to take decisive action to address a problem of weapons-based violence that could no longer be blamed on the organised criminal infighting of 'alien others' (Davison 1997; Hobbs & Antonopoulos 2012) on the one hand or anti-social behaviour of 'out of control youth' on the other (Young 2016). Although gangs had been in the public lexicon for years, the government had been reluctant to adopt the terminology. In 2004 the Home Office was still using the term 'Delinquent Youth Group' (Sharp et al. 2006).

The tipping point appears to have been the murder of 11 year-old Rhys Jones in Liverpool in 2007, having been caught in the crossfire between two teenage gang members (Smithson & Ralphs 2016; Treadwell & Gooch 2015). In the public outcry that followed, a gang summit was swiftly convened at Downing Street, and soon after the Government publicly embraced the term with the launch of the Tackling Gangs Action Programme (TGAP). Guns and gangs were the prominent policy pairing; TGAP's objective was to target and reduce youth violence, focusing on gang-related firearms offences in London, Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester (Dawson 2008).

Both TGAP and the subsequent *Tackling gangs: A practical guide for local authorities, CDRPs and other local partners* (Home Office 2008) drew predominantly on the unevaluated 'best practice' of the specialist 'gun and gang' units set up in London and major cities which had taken the lead from London's Trident, at this point very much a gun rather than gang unit. All

were modelled heavily on the American experience, both in terms of enforcement tactics and prevention.[2]

Resistance to the gang label was still apparent across criminal justice partners (Young et al. 2007), and it was not until the publication of the influential *Dying to Belong* report by the UK Gangs Working Group (Centre for Social Justice 2009), that the Government decided a universal definition of the gang would be advisable. The adoption of the Dying to Belong definition, itself heavily influenced by the US department of Justice definition, was another nod to the American influence on UK gang policy (Smithson & Ralphs 2016).

Figure 2: Home Office Gang Definitions

Year	Type	Definition	Source
2004	Delinquent Youth Group [originally developed by the Eurogang network]	• Young people who spend time in groups of three or more (including themselves). • The group spend a lot of time in public places. • The group has existed for three months or more. • The group has engaged in delinquent or criminal behaviour together in the last 12 months. • The group has at least one structural feature (either a name, an area, a leader, or rules).	(Sharp et al. 2006)
2011	EGYV Gang [originally developed by Centre for Social Justice (2009)]	• "A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who: • 1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group; • 2) engage in criminal activity and violence; • 3) lay claim over territory (this is not necessary geographical territory but can include an illegal economy territory); • 4) have some form of identifying structural feature; and • 5) are in conflict with other, similar gangs."	(HM Government 2011)

Unfortunately – or perhaps unsurprisingly – the adoption of a universal definition of the gang by the Home Office did not bear the fruits of research that might have been hoped. Chapter Two further highlights definitional issues with 'the gang', but suffice to say for now that the definition was far from universally accepted; a problem that has arguably worsened as perceptions of the gang have evolved. Definitions of the 'gang' and 'gang crime' are not

[2] Specialist gun units had been set up in Merseyside ('Matrix' in 2005), Manchester ('Xcalibre' in 2006) and Nottingham.

standardised across police forces, criminal justice agencies or wider partners, a continuing problem which makes comparisons complex (HMIC 2017).

Post-Riots: Ending Gang and Youth Violence

Having finally adopted a definition - albeit far from universally agreed - the Government's overarching response to youth violence, the Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) programme was hastily rolled out within three months after the 2011 Riots with an explicit aim of dealing with 'damaging and destructive gang culture' (HM Government 2015). Whilst the focus of this thesis is the MPS response, a brief overview is important to understand the political context in which it occurred. EGYV was designed to provide peer support and total funding of £10m to 33 local authority areas (20 of which were in London) 'facing serious challenges like knife and gun crime' deemed most affected by gangs in England and Wales[3] (HM Government 2015). Area selection was based on a combination of demographics (proportion of 10-24 year olds) and research conducted by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to map gangs and gang violence, apparently employing the universal definition of the gang (HM Government 2011: 15).

The programme was designed with a five-point strategy; providing support; prevention; pathways out; punishment and enforcement; and partnership working. Interventions were separated into three levels, as collated by Smithson & Ralphs (2016: 15):

> 1. Primary interventions include: family/nurse partnerships, intensive home visiting for vulnerable first-time mothers, parenting intervention and community mobilisation;
>
> 2. Secondary interventions include: mentoring of younger siblings of gang members, Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) panels; and
>
> 3. Tertiary interventions include: offending behaviour programmes, peer mentoring by former gang members, integrated offender management, conflict resolution, gang call-ins and enforcement, e.g. gang injunctions and gang exit programmes (cf. HM Government 2011)

[3] Expanded to 43 in 2014, including a further five London boroughs (HM Government 2015).

A burgeoning gang 'cottage-industry' was evident, and EGYV ensured it continued to flourish; 'gang talkers' abounded, encompassing all of the areas outline above (Hallsworth & Young 2008). Over the last decade, media and political discourse on gangs has continued unerringly. At various points, the spotlight has shifted to uncover new dangers and threats expressly linked to the gang; dangerous dogs (Harding 2012); sexual exploitation (Centre for Social Justice 2014; Firmin 2010); and soon, drugs.

In January 2016, the Home Office ended funding for EGYV and the Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation Peer Review Network and with it centralised peer reviews and local assessments for the 52 local authorities involved. The new strategy, *Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation* (EGVE) (Home Office 2016), set out an updated approach to gangs with a new emphasis on the vulnerability and exploitation experienced by gang involved young people, expanding the gang remit to take in national level organised drug dealing (NCA 2015a), with links to exploitation (Sturrock & Holmes 2015) and - perhaps most controversially – 'modern slavery' (NCA 2017).

The Police Response

EGYV both identified the 'suitable enemy' of the gang and set out the template for an expansive multi-agency response to 'solve the problem' (Hallsworth & Brotherton 2011). It is the Metropolitan Police's role in this response that is the primary focus of this thesis.

Background: Guns First

Operation Trident had been set up in 2000 to address concerns about increasing levels of firearms violence within London's Black communities, as well as the documented organisational failings in the handling of a series of crimes involving black and ethnic minority communities which had culminated in the Macpherson report labelling the MPS institutionally racist (Macpherson 1999). Over the next decade or so Trident underwent various modifications to its remit, but basically remained a specialist gun crime unit. Trident

were well-aware of the involvement of named gangs in some shootings they investigated – and inevitably developed expertise in the field - but chose to focus on the mode of violence (i.e. guns) rather than hard to identify contextual factors (i.e. gangs) in determining their response.

Post Riots: Gang Specialists

With an American understanding of the gang in place, there naturally followed an American understanding of how to tackle it. Although already present to some extent in the structure of the original Trident, and of increasing enthral to UK police departments throughout the noughties[4], the post-riots policing response to gangs is where the American influence can most readily be identified. In the most public of transatlantic gang 'knowledge transfer', former Los Angeles Police Department Commissioner and US 'gang expert' Bill Bratton was flown in and anointed 'advisor on gang warfare' following the riots, legitimizing the specialised policing tactics long employed in the States (Smithson et al. 2013).

Thesis Overview

Statement of the Problem

As the above section has demonstrated, the 'gang industry' is now substantial and the MPS play a pivotal role within it. Yet whilst interest in gangs has generated an increasingly diverse body of academic research across many elements of the gang landscape, there is a significant gap in the UK knowledge base concerning the police response to gangs. Recent research has emphasised the need to better understand these processes; there has been an increasing interest in the terminology of gang discourse (Smithson et al. 2013), mechanisms and processes by which gang members are so labelled, with particular focus questioning

[4] David Kennedy had been promoting the Boston Ceasefire approach (Kennedy et al. 2001), throughout the decade; in fact on my first day at Trident in 2007 I attended a presentation by Kennedy at the Jill Dando Institute; Kennedy's philosophy would impact heavily on London's approach to gangs - several officers made trips to the states to see program in action.

disproportionate representation of black males on the MPS Matrix (Bridges 2015; Squires 2016a; Williams 2014). The legal mechanisms used against gang members such as Joint Enterprise have also sparked an interest by critical criminologists (Squires 2016b; Williams & Clarke 2016), expressing concerns over the tendency of administrative gang research to uncritically accept the police and criminal justice data on gangs. In sum, there is very limited knowledge of how internal processes and mechanisms help to shape and create an understanding of the gang which, through governmental forums and reports, is increasingly presented publicly as objective fact.

This thesis seeks to provide a practitioner perspective insight into the processes and mechanisms which combine to shape the MPS understanding of and response to the gang. Whilst there has been increased interest in the impact of labelling on individuals (Medina 2014; Smithson et al. 2013; Williams 2015), there has been little or no research on either the *processes* involved in labelling individuals or the perceptions of those practitioners that play a key role in such processes. The following section presents a brief overview of the current organisation of gang policing in the MPS, before presenting the structure, methodology and content of this thesis.

The Metropolitan Police Service

As London's largest employer, with 31000 officers, 2600 Police Community Support Officers and 13000 Civilian Staff (MPS 2017), the MPS is a complex organisation; a basic understanding is necessary to make sense of the processes described.

Specialist Crime and Operations (SCO) incorporates the overt and covert intelligence functions of the MPS, armed policing, specialist crime investigation (homicide, Serious Sexual Offending), Pan-London support units such as the public order orientated Territorial Support Group, and most pertinently for this thesis, the **Gangs and Organised Crime Command**. Within this sits **Trident Gang Crime Command**, the lead for gang and firearms policing in the

MPS, as well as a suite of specialist units from the well-known robbery focused Flying Squad to various fraud, kidnap, drugs and specialist intelligence functions. **Territorial Policing** is what might be best described as the directorate that oversees classically perceived policing activity – the 'bobbies on the beat', now known as dedicated ward officers, neighbourhood policing teams and local detectives who will investigate volume crime offences not under a specialist remit.

Gang Policing Structure

Although gang crime and policing will crosscut almost every area of the MPS, there are several distinct spheres in which the specialist policing of gangs occurs. The current approach to gang policing can be split into three tiers; it is the human and data driven interaction between these both that drives action and shapes organisational understanding of the gang. Along with a chapter on practitioner perspectives of the gang, these tiers form the basis of the substantive findings section of this thesis;

Central Intelligence: Primary MPS intelligence hub for development and support pan-London**.**

Trident Gang Crime Command: Specialist pan-London Firearms and gang unit.

Local Gangs Units: Borough-level, often integrated into partnership.

The policing and partnership response to gangs must also be considered against the backdrop of the vast austerity driven cuts to public service budgets justified by the 2010 financial crisis. The MPS identified a need to make savings of £769.4m between March 2011 and March 2015 as necessitated by the Government's 2010 spending review; 20 per cent of its overall budget, necessitated 4,000 fewer officers (HMIC 2013). The restriction on resources across the board has meant the police being more reliant on working with partners but has also put added emphasis on the need to prioritise and direct resources efficiently. In the arena of gang, gun and knife crime this drive to efficiency was keenly felt.

Police Mechanisms for Monitoring Gang or Group Offending

In addition to the official crime statistics described above, the MPS has a myriad of raw data and intelligence sources to draw on, generated or accessible either internally and through partnership agencies. The MPS employs a number of key processes and mechanisms that contribute to a mappable 'moral space' (Hobbs 2013: 209) of serious youth violence, gangs and organised crime in London:

The MPS Gangs Matrix

A key tool in the risk and harm prioritisation approach is the Gangs Matrix, widely misunderstood and misdescribed as a definitive centralised list of gang members, it is actually a locally constructed intelligence tool to track violent gang members and direct police and partnership response effectively. The process of identifying, adding and removing gang members from the Matrix varies considerably between boroughs, dependent on their local policing and partnership structure, politics, priorities and resources.

Gang Related Incident Tracking System [GRITS]

The Matrix informs GRITS, the MPS system for monitoring the (predominantly violent) offending of gangs and prioritising them in order of harm. Generated from intelligence and crime report scanning it identifies and collates violent incidents where intelligence suggests that either the victim or perpetrator are affiliated to a London gang.

Organised Crime Group Mapping [OCGM]

Tracks, scores and maps Organised Crime Groups. Generates a threat assessment based on a variety of factors including: individual, community and corporate harm; criminal capability, capacity and reach. The assessment determines tiered operational response level. Completion of the OCGM is a Home Office requirement, used to inform national picture including National Crime Agency (NCA) reports.

Peaking Inside the Lid of Gang Policing

Although the ethical and methodological conundrums are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, it is important to address some of the more fundamental aspects from the outset. I have substantial professional experience in analytical police work, and particularly in the specialist policing of guns and more recently gangs. During my time working for both the MPS and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), my understanding and perceptions of the drivers for violence, the police response and the interplay between policy and practice, has been shaped by my progression from dealing with 'names on screens' to speaking at length to those directly involved or affected by serious violence.

The closed world of intelligence in policing is that way for many valid reasons, and it is not my intention to expose or inhibit operational functions, thus I will not be 'lifting the lid' but rather, 'peaking inside'. However, my professional experience has also highlighted the distrust, disdain and strength of animosity felt by many communities towards the police and other statutory agencies. A consistent reason for this distrust is the perception that young, mainly black, men are being unfairly and systematically targeted by the police as 'low hanging fruit' and that the organised criminality that facilitates much of the violence is not being addressed (see, for example, Davies et al. 2017). As this thesis will explore, there are elements of truth in such perceptions, but also a failure of communication, engagement and honesty by statutory bodies about how things are done and why.

Over the past few years this lack of transparency has been highlighted by several academics, sometimes in misinformed ways, and I have also read and witnessed many academic and media accounts which misrepresent mechanisms and methods of gang policing. For this reason, I have been extremely careful with the level of detail provided here. Some processes and procedures are totally omitted, others purposely described in the broadest of strokes. Where possible – and it is surprising how much you can find on open source when you know

what you are looking for – I have ensured that such processes are already to some extent in the public domain. In some respects, it is a piecing together of disparate pieces of grey and official literature, of 'personal communications' and 'off the record' assertions. Whilst I do make use and refer to 'restricted' police data occasionally, this thesis is not primarily about this data, but how it is constructed and the actions that it generates.

MPS definitions

In the Summer of 2015 as the Metropolitan Police launched their latest operational response to knife crime (and of course, gangs) in the capital (MOPAC 2016b), putting forward the following definitions of the 'gang', 'peer groups' and 'criminal networks' (MPS 2015):

> A gang is usually considered to be a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of **young people** who…
>
> (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, and
> (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence. They may also have any or all of the following features:
> (3) Identify with or lay claim over territory,
> (4) Have some form of identifying structure feature and
> (5) Are in conflict with other, similar gangs.
>
> However, if the majority of offending is of a lower non-violent level then they would be considered a **peer group** not a gang.
>
> A **criminal network** (which is different to a gang) is:
>
> A group of individuals involved in persistent criminality for some form of personal gain (this includes profit and/or to gain or demonstrate status) which is causing significant harm to the community;
>
> - A group that keeps breaking the law to make money;
> - this law-breaking is causing harm to the community
> - or, this law-breaking is a problem internationally (e.g. people trafficking)
> - Violence is used to make money (e.g. to scare people into giving them money)
> - They are running an illegal business (e.g. drug trafficking)

The above operational definitions are open to criticism from many angles, and the picture becomes more blurred when one considers the myriad gang definitions across partners, practitioners and even other enforcement agencies. However, as Chapter Two will demonstrate, it is hard to criticise the MPS for their definitions when the academic world is far from unified in its own approach. The MPS do not have the luxury of endless discussion; what is open to debate and critique is how such definitions are understood and applied, and the impact their interpretation has on how individuals are policed. As the first section outlined, the gang – however defined – has come to be seen as a constituent driver for urban violence.

Design and Research Questions

The thesis utilises a mixed-methods, data driven approach drawing on police and partnership data from a number of sources, as well as general observation and experience in the policing field. The rationale such an approach is in the tripartite research focus on process, product (police gang data) and practitioner perceptions; allowing for pragmatism and the freedom to triangulate data where appropriate (Robson 2011). This pragmatic paradigm (Feilzer 2010) is underlined in the epistemological approach.

Epistemological Approach

The thesis is written under the guiding ethos of contextual constructionism. The body of work on interactionism and labelling (discussed in Chapter Two) produced a complementary perspective known as social constructionism. Expanding on the Chicago School, this explores the ways in which individuals and groups perceive and create social reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966). That is, something that is socially constructed is something which is intrinsically dependant on the processes and social interactions which created it; it does not exist in the way, for instance, an apple exists as objective reality. From the constructionist

perspective, claims makers and moral entrepreneurs compete and perform through the medium of the various social institutions to which they affiliate to generate an overarching rhetoric which becomes a social issue or problem. Kitsuse and Spector (1973: 441) define this process as 'the activities of groups making assertions and grievances and claims with respect to putative conditions.'

For constructionists, the claims and counter claims combine over time to form an 'objective' reality dependent on viewpoint and 'access to power based resources, including social, cultural and material capitals' (Leinfelt & Rostami 2012: 38) and as such interpretation of an issue or phenomenon can only occur within the context of one's own 'situated knowledge'. Strict constructionism, as Brotherton (2012: 42) notes, places the researcher 'into a contextless region where claims-making may only be examined in the abstract.' Applied in its purest form, constructionism presents considerable problems to conducting sociological research from within an organisation, and particularly in using positivist tools such as police data and survey statistics. Importantly, academic enquiry is focused solely on the processes of construction of rhetoric that creates social problems such as gangs; the versions of 'objective' reality are ignored.

An alternative tranche of constructionist theory known as contextual constructionism seeks to halt the journey to the abstract by allowing for comparison and evaluation of the nature and scope of social problems however represented (Best 1989; Hacking 1991). From this perspective, representations of objective conditions – be they police data, surveys, interviews - are *in addition* to the process rhetoric of the claims makers.

Working in what constructionists would undoubtedly describe as a 'claims making' environment, the pure-constructionist perspective does not sit comfortably, particularly given the explicit requirement of the researcher to sit 'outside the bubble of social life while analysing the claims making process as it occurs within the bubble' (Sanders 2007: 25). For

this reason, this thesis is written from a contextual constructionist perspective, an epistemological position that continues to be misinterpreted by those of a more realist persuasion. This is identifiable in the criticisms of Hallsworth's perspective on gangs in the UK and vis-à-vis the policing response. As Berger and Luckman (1991) make clear, the Constructionist perspective does not make ontological claims but rather addresses the social construction of knowledge. Thus, exploring the social construction of gangs does not deny the reality of gangs *per se*, despite the vehement allegations of Pitts and Harding on this matter. Contextual constructionism is fitting with my role as a gang practitioner; I work on gangs, with gangs and around the construction of gangs; I recognise the objective reality and its influence on gang construction (Burningham & Cooper 1999).

Data Sources

The key data sources analysed in this thesis are:

- 19 digitally recorded interviews with a range of police practitioners.
- 92 valid responses from an online survey sent out to all 32 boroughs which focused on local processes and understandings of the MPS gangs Matrix.
- Police data from a variety of intelligence and crime reporting databases, including:
    - The MPS Gangs Matrix
    - The Gang Related Incident Tracking System (GRITS)
    - Organised Crime Group Mapping (OCGM)
- Primary data from a number of police sources including:
    - Crime Recording Information System (CRIS)
    - Police National Computer (PNC)
- A wide range of internal and external documents spanning policy, standard operating procedures and protocols.

Research Questions

My primary research question/aim was broad:

> **How do the various labelling processes and recordkeeping practices of the MPS shape organisational understanding and response to gangs in London?**

Over the course of the research this developed into a specific set of questions relating to different elements of the overall process under investigation, allowing for consideration of external factors which might influence organisational approach. These were influenced by connected theoretical perspectives, generating supplementary research questions:

Labelling and Symbolic Interactionism

The labelling perspective encourages a critical consideration of the construction of gang data and understanding; the thesis focus is predominantly on the activities of - and interaction between - the 'labellers' in the gang policing field (Denzin 1974: 274):

- How is the 'gang' perceived by police practitioners across units and roles?
- What are the processes for mapping gangs, gang members and gang criminality?
- How do gang-specific databases products and processes for assessing harm/risk contribute to organisational understanding and operational practice, and how are they communicated both internally and externally?
- What might cause distortions in these processes?
- What effect might these have on:
    - External and internal perceptions of the gang and the policing response.
    - The individuals labelled as gang members by police.

Organisational and Environmental Factors

The thesis also draws on approaches within the field of organisational theory (Burruss et al. 2017; Crank & Langworthy 1992; Katz 2001) to understand the MPS response to gangs:

- How have environmental and organisational factors influenced the current approach to policing gangs?

Chapter Outlines

Chapter Two, the literature review, presents a broad critique of contemporary UK research on the gang and the policing response. Part one compares and contrasts the three major theoretical perspectives and extant literature influencing current academic and political discourse on the gang, whilst highlighting influences from the vast body of American gang research. Empirical findings relating to gangs in the UK are then explored in terms of prevalence, demographic composition, criminal involvement, organisation and structure. Part two examines the policing response to gangs, with focus on research exploring labelling processes and mechanisms in the US and UK. Part three introduces the theoretical framework for analysis; elements of symbolic interactionism and organisational perspectives.

Chapter Three outlines the research approach. The complexities of the research setting are discussed in terms of the organisational structure of gang policing. The epistemological framework is outlined, leading to a reflexive account of the benefits and drawbacks of 'insider/outsider' research, and the tripartite identities of policy researcher, police researcher and academic researcher. The ethics of the research are outlined with particular reference to protection from professional and reputational harms, and data sources and methods of analysis are outlined.

The central intelligence response to gangs is outlined in **Chapter Four**. Providing an overview of how violence and gang related criminality is monitored and measured within the MPS, and the key mechanisms for doing this. The final part of the chapter considers practitioners perceptions of the process.

Chapter Five focuses on the specialist response to gangs in the MPS and Trident Gang Crime Command, situating the unit within the exploring the relationship between gun and gang divisions, and the evolving proactive policing procedures.

The local policing response to gangs is considered in **Chapter Six,** with emphasis on the how the gangs Matrix is understood, used and collated differently within different boroughs. The partnership response is addressed with particular emphasis on the role of Local Authority analysts in shaping MPS understanding of gangs through their analysis of multiple internal and external data, and noting their privileged position as they straddle the array of often competing organisations and objectives.

Chapter Seven explores practitioner perceptions of the gang, particularly the changing nature and extent of criminal involvement. Part two is a case study of perceptions of two local ward officers who experience daily interaction with an established north London street gang.

Analysis of the findings is presented in **Chapter Eight**; a deconstruction of 'gang construction' in the MPS. It draws on the findings of the previous four chapters to consider the labelling processes and mechanisms which shape the understanding of the gang and also applies elements of the institutional theoretical framework to understand the response. The chapter also considers the future of specialist gang policing in the MPS.

Finally, **Chapter Nine** draws conclusions from the analysis, suggesting future areas for research and policy implications.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter is split into three parts; the first outlines the major theoretical perspectives on UK gangs, which centre not as some claim on the existence of the gang *per se* (Harding 2014; Pitts 2008), but rather the degree to which they are organised, cohesive and definable structures worthy of the policy attentions described in chapter one. The relatively sparse empirical findings on the prevalence and characteristics of UK gangs are then addressed, with London based work prioritised in line with the thesis focus. Part two explores the police response to the gang problem – here the American experience is drawn upon to a greater extent; indicative of both its influence in the UK, and the lacuna of empirical evidence this side of the Atlantic which this thesis seeks to partially address. The final part introduces the overarching theoretical perspectives I draw on to make sense of my research findings at the individual and organisational level; interactionism – specifically the actions of the labellers – and elements of organisational theory.

Part One: UK Gang Literature

Although the recent policy rhetoric might lead one to think otherwise, gangs are not a new phenomenon. Across the UK, historical evidence shows groups of young men engaging in criminal activities have been part and parcel of metropolitan living for centuries; with many of their proclivities – from the criminal to the sartorial - remarkably similar thorough the epochs (Davies 2013; Patrick 1973; Pearson 2006). In London, a raft of popular factual accounts describe territorial street gangs partaking in 'pitched battles' for local pride, some demonstrating links to the notorious organised crime families of the 20th century (McDonald 2010; Thompson 2004). Although gangs – explicitly described - have certainly captured the attentions of the media and public at various points throughout the past few centuries - with no shortage of comparison to the American experience (Pearson 1983) - UK academics have

been remarkably resistant to framing transgressive relational networks of youth as such. For most of the twentieth century scepticism of the 'gang' as a distinct entity shaped the dominant academic view of youth groups in Britain (Medina et al. 2009).

Early Academic Accounts: Gangs Shunned

Early academic reticence to identify gangs rested in part on the interpretations of structure, organisation and the extent to which criminal activity was integral to the group which shape the current debate. Downes' (1966) oft cited study of delinquent youth groups in the East End of London found small groups who sometimes committed illegal acts together, but declined to label them gangs due to an absence of structure and commitment to delinquent activity identified by American peers such as Cloward & Ohlin (1960). Downes highlighted the disassociation of working class youth, drawing a correlation between the mundanity of the employment prospects they had been born into and the entertainment sought through delinquency to mitigate this.

In contrast to the earlier post war accounts of gangs in the UK, the study of youth cultures which held sway over British criminologists in the 1970's began to produce intricately layered accounts of sub-cultural forms in the context of class and attempts at liberation and resistance to the prevalent outlook of their parent cultures (Hall & Jefferson 1972); many participated in recreational, territorial violence between and within their chosen styles. As Hobbs (1997) notes, sub-cultures are not gangs, yet it is hard to imagine that within such sub-cultures groups of youths would not partake in some if not all of the activities and form associated with the rediscovered contemporary gang, as Hallsworth's (2013: 43-63) auto-ethnography emphasises. Throughout the 1980's and early 1990's academics continued to resist the application of the by then highly developed American theoretical concepts of the gang to the amorphous swathe of sub-cultural youth collectives in the UK. The UK media was less circumspect in looking to America to make sense of urban violence, and as the introductory

chapter described, generated a furore around the 'new threat' of street gangs directly compared to the popularised American conception which reached a crescendo which academics and policy makers could not ignore. Yet rather than emerging out of the blue, the genesis of the current conceptualisation of the 'new face of youth crime' (Pitts 2008) can be traced.

Moral Panics

The apparent absence of a gang problem in 1999 is as much to do with how violence and the illegal economy is framed and defined by key social actors as it is a reflection of reality on the ground; something of a moveable feast, and a recurring theme of this thesis. The explanatory theoretical lens most commonly used to describe the peaks and troughs of public and political anxieties across a range of youthful subcultures, criminal activities and methods of violence is moral panic theory (Cohen 1972). Misinterpreted as being a politically correct tool to justify 'libertarian permissiveness' (Cohen 2011: 238) or simply facilitate a supposed denial of a problem (see Pitts 2012: 28) moral panic theory holds that:

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce them diagnose and solutions… Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, expect in folk lore and collective memory, at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself (Cohen 1972: 9)

Several such episodes can be identified over the last thirty years which, to differing extents in the London and national contexts, combine to create what might be described as collective 'deviancy amplification' (see, for example, Young 1971) of groups of marginalised, working class and - at least in some major urban centres such as London and Birmingham - predominantly black youth. As the gang was being 'rediscovered' in the early 2000's, street robbery was the prevailing urban crime concern, the racialized social response to which was

famously dissected by Stuart Hall et al. (1978) two decades earlier. The ‘mugging’ of the seventies and eighties became the ‘steaming’ of the nineties and the ‘street robbery’[5] of the noughties, as a new national dialectic of ‘youth in crisis’ added anti-social and ‘yobbish' behaviours to the charge list (Young 2016).

Over the same period, concerns over the emergence (and rapid entrenchment into folklore) of the Jamaican ‘Yardie’ gangster – ‘the ultimate folk devil’ (Williams 2015: 22) - ignited a tripartitite ‘gun, gangster and drugs’ panic with similar racial undertones of an archetypal ‘alien other’ (Woodiwiss & Hobbs 2008), but this time focusing on organised drug supply, the extent of their involvement in which is contested (Gray 2002; Ruggiero & South 1997). Whilst at this point ‘Yardies’ were not being connected to the street crime of British youths (Klein 1996), their framing in the media as an organisation with ‘tentacles spreading to many parts of the United Kingdom’ (Woodiwiss & Hobbs 2008) echoes the contemporary ‘organisational’ thesis of the gang (Pitts 2007; Toy 2008), however erroneous or localised the links. Similarly, the gun violence associated with Yardies (Davison 1997),[6] provides the genesis for the frequent association of ‘gun culture’ in line with the policing response of the time (Bullock & Tilley 2002; Hales et al. 2006; Hales & Silverstone 2005; Squires et al. 2008).

The Main Theoretical Perspectives in ‘Academic Gangland’

Whilst embryonic compared to America, UK gang research has developed rapidly since its resurgence at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The lack of a common epistemological starting block coupled with the surfeit of American influence, mean the field is somewhat disjointed across theoretical and methodological approaches. The following section outlines the dominant UK theoretical perspectives: each has waxed and waned in policy influence over the last decade or so.

[5] Unlike mugging, there was empirical evidence of a spike in street robbery (Hallsworth 2005).
[6] Also evident in empirical research (Davies 2010).

The Prevailing Status Quo

Perhaps because of governmental London-centricity, as well as the professional persuasions of the researchers[7], the perspective which has gained most traction within policy circles is that forwarded by Pitts (2008) and supported by the almost exclusively London-based work of Toy (2008), Densley (2013) and Harding (2014). The overarching perspective holds that a coalescence of economic, social and cultural factors borne of neo-liberal globalisation has seen a marked change in contemporary gangs in London; they have evolved. Gangs are now (to varying degrees) hierarchically structured, violent, enterprising and highly organised entities who are intimately involved in organised drug supply, from which the upper echelons are loathe to retire and instead 'put measures in place to ensure the gravy train never ended' (Densley 2013: 81).

Self-described as 'left-realist' (Harding 2014), from this perspective the gang problem is tangible and has a serious impact on the communities and individuals involved. The influence of American gang research is evident in the explicit comparisons to the drug selling gangs in the informal economies of the deindustrialised 'Rust Belt' of the American Midwest in the 1980's (Hagedorn 1988; Wilson 1987), as well others who identified a 'new generation' of more instrumentally motivated youth gangs (Fagan 1990). More recently, the influence of enforcement-focused deterrence can be identified in policy recommendations (e.g. Densley & Jones 2016).

The Alternative London View

An alternative London perspective is offered by Hallsworth who rejects the arboreal organisational description and instead argues that although changing socio-economic conditions mean the gang of today must be different from previous understandings - 'the

[7] Toy and Harding were both Local Authority gang practitioners whilst Pitts was employed as an external researcher by the boroughs where he carried out his research.

organisation of the street', and of the groups, gangs and individual activities is rhizomatic, akin to a 'glorious species of weed' (2013: 113). Young men dabble in violence and entrepreneurial activity and may or may not develop a full-time commitment to crime. From this perspective, gangs exist but are a rarity; most of the transgressive activity of youthful collaborations can be typologised as peer group orientated (Hobbs 2013). This is essentially a cultural and critical perspective (Ferrell 1999; Presdee 2003), although the influence of early US gang researchers of an ecological persuasion is notable. Hobbs (2013: 5) offers a similar perspective, emphasising both the continuities and adaptations in youthful transgressions, as well as the tendency of control agents to impose order on what he describes as a 'volatile, market-based series of fluid and mutating collaborations'.

This perspective has been subject to regular misinterpretation as one of 'gang denial' (e.g. Harding 2014); almost universally, contemporary British research on group criminality acknowledges the existence of gangs *per se* and has never, despite what the more fiery re-joinders may allude, denied this (e.g. Factor & Pitts 2015; Hallsworth 2014). The tedious argument can surely be put to bed by dint of the fact that those labelled 'gang-deniers-in-chief' – Simon Hallsworth and Tara Young - effectively created the current MPS definition of the gang, as outlined in the previous chapter (Hallsworth & Young 2006).

The Manchester School

A significant body of gangs research has come out of Manchester, offering what might be described as a middle ground between the two previous perspectives (Aldridge et al. 2008; Medina et al. 2009). Although gangs are seen as a discernible phenomenon worthy of academic attention, this perspective emphasises the apparent continuities between previous 'experiences of marginalised youth' and is thus sceptical of the evolution thesis (Medina et al. 2009: 9), pointing to the dangers in labelling individuals and neighbourhoods with an all-encompassing deviant 'gang' tag (Aldridge et al. 2011). As well as labelling theory (Becker

1963) and the social reaction theories it inspired,[8] the perspective is heavily influenced by Malcom Klein who, whilst an architect of the US administrative approach, maintains a position that, rather than being hierarchically structured:

> Gangs are fluid, loose, messy and interlinked networks that share with gangs elsewhere 'ephemeral leadership, high turnover, and only moderate cohesiveness' (Klein and Maxson 2006: 164) (Aldridge et al. 2008: 17)

With all this in mind, the following section highlights the major UK empirical findings on the gang, considering prevalence, structure and organisation, criminality, territory and gang member characteristics.

Gang Prevalence

The perennial problem of definition is writ large when it comes to identifying gang prevalence. Empirical findings vary widely and wildly; different methodological approaches also generate different interpretations. Bennett & Holloway surveyed arrestees across England and found fifteen per cent self-labelled as having 'current or past experience as a gang member' (2004: 311) whilst the now defunct *Offending, Crime and Youth Justice Survey* reported six per cent being members of a 'delinquent youth group' (Sharp et al. 2006: 3). Ethnographic studies, with a narrower focus have found messy, 'difficult to define' collectives, where gang membership is something of a misnomer to describe the subjects of the research (Medina et al. 2009; Young et al. 2007).

The difficulties inherent in generalising findings relating to gang prevalence are exemplified in the Centre for Social Justice Report, *Dying to Belong* which gave an overall estimation of up to 50,000 young people involved in youth gangs in the UK (Centre for Social Justice 2009). A recent Home Office survey of practitioners in 'gang designated' Local Authorities across England and Wales underlines such difficulties, finding differing estimations of gang

[8] See for example Manning (1986).

prevalence within the same areas, but a general view that the number had remained static between 2013-2015. London respondents were more likely to say that gang numbers had increased. Fluidity in membership and makeup was highlighted as a key perception, making estimations of prevalence harder still (Disley & Liddle 2016).

In London, the MPS estimation has remained relatively stable; from 170 gangs in 2012 to 187 in 2015 (MOPAC 2016d). The number of gang members is frequently confused with the number of individuals on the Gangs Matrix in official publications (for example, Disley & Liddle 2016; HMIC 2017). Based on official data and his own research Pitts (2007a: 30) estimated 600-700 young people directly involved with gangs in Waltham Forest, one per cent of the borough's 10-29 year-old population. More recent Local Authority estimations suggest comparable prevalence in other London boroughs; Brent, for example, gave a very precise 962 gang associated individuals across 18 gangs (Brent Local Authority 2015). A recent Inspectorate of Constabularies report highlights the variation in definitions and differentiation between street gangs and Organised Crime Groups across UK police forces as problematic in measuring UK prevalence (HMIC 2017). Squires et al. have offered a more measured approach recognising the 'over definition issues' in police estimates (Squires et al. 2008: 21).

Gang Durability

In the UK, gang *durability* has not been fastidiously documented. Pitts (2008) bucks this trend to an extent and identifies several 'super articulated gangs' in Waltham Forest, borne from familial ties and now 'institutionalised' in the local area with the ability to regenerate. Their histories are traced back to the 1990's. Harding, building on Pitts' (2007b) previous research in Lambeth, traces street gangs still in existence today back to 1996 (2014: 312). Bullock & Tilley (2002) date two of the Manchester gangs they studied in 2002 to the late 1980's. Generally, empirical evidence points to some gangs having a longevity sustained by

generational and locational inheritance (Hallsworth & Young 2006: 30), whilst recent research from a practitioner perspective indicates an increasing tendency for some gangs to schism, amalgamate or expire (Disley & Liddle 2016).

Gang Organisation and Structure: The Main Debate

The organisation and structure of gangs, and how this relates to criminal activity – specifically drug dealing, can be viewed as the fundamental point of contention amongst gang researchers linking definition, criminal prevalence and, crucially, policing response. These alternative interpretations of the organisation and structure of gangs in London have their aetiology in differing perceptions of the extent to which drug dealing is an organised endeavour. This has important knock-on effects in terms of how the motivations for gang associated violence are perceived; whether as predominantly instrumental or expressive in nature.

'It's a London Thing': Super Articulation and Organised Crime Conflation

Pitts' gangland thesis links organised criminal networks to the street gangs to 'discover' a behemoth with its roots in the 'garrison communities of Kingston Jamaica in the 1970's' (2008: 114) and a nefarious finger in every pie; identifying the 'Articulated Super Gang'. Based on (sparsely elaborated) qualitative research across three London boroughs, but primarily Waltham Forest, Pitts (2008: 26) proposes a six-point typology of gangs in the borough, ranging from disorganised youthful 'wannabees' to the 'Super Gang'; he suggests that every gang type has the potential – through either agency or coercion – to become ensconced in the 'Super Gang'.

For Pitts, the super-gangs are embedded highly organised hierarchical structures, focused on drug dealing activities. Pitts' (2008: 20) mapping and offending based assessment of harm related to gangs in Waltham Forest is based on police data and 'strong suspicion' of professionals. Whether it was his intention to do so or not, Pitts' depiction of the 'political

economy of gangland' placed a diverse and complex swathe of activities and connectivity within a single graspable terminology of the gang, becoming highly influential with policy and practitioners.

Support for the organisational super-structuring is found in Toy's (2008) practitioner perspective on gang and weapon violence which despite providing no empirical evidence apart from a brief reference to 'recent MPS intelligence' suggests that:

> the changing dynamics of middle drug markets from localised to regional supply chains has meant that organised criminal networks have become synonymous with strong well-structured gangs. In essence… gangs are now the fabric that binds organised criminality (Toy 2008: 27)

Although Toy at least recognises the problems that the blurring of organised crime groups he describes as 'properly constituted gangs' and 'associations developed through community based environmental networks' create for both intervention and enforcement activity, his contribution arguably only adds to the conceptual confusion. Another former practitioner, Harding (2014) employs a neatly executed ethnographic analysis situated in Bourdieusian Field Theory to identify an organised, structured and age-based gang hierarchy. His research is limited to a single London borough and only a small sample of gang members (twenty) and is again highly influenced by the practitioner perspectives.

A somewhat wider London ethnography, though still with heavy practitioner influence, is provided by Densely (2013) who develops Pitts' (2008) argument that gangs in London have fundamentally changed, suggesting a universal evolutionary road-map from street gang to organised crime network. Drawing on research focusing on twelve gangs across six boroughs he develops Taylor's (1990) thesis that gangs evolve towards increased organisation over time, he argues that gangs naturally evolve across four distinct stages. The Recreational stage sees gangs formed from familial links and friendships at school or the local community, being involved only in petty crime and anti-social behaviour. The Criminal stage sees crime

becoming ‘intrinsic to group identity and practice’, with specialisation such as street robbery coming to the fore and a desire for material gain beginning to trump respect or ‘street capital’ (Harding 2014) . The level of threat and risk is essentially raised, necessitating a strengthening of internal structures and an increase in violence. At this stage, Densley argues, developing a reputation for violence is key to rising through the ranks. The penultimate stage is that of Enterprise; essentially organised drug dealing. Densley suggests a high level of organisation and an acknowledgment by those involved that this is an occupation; they are in business. Finally, comes Governance, where the gang seeks to operate a monopoly over a given domain; ‘sole suppliers of illegal goods and services’ within a certain domain (2013: 61).

Densley’s approach recognises the variance and heterogeneity in gang structure and activities but by presenting it as a rational evolution to which all gangs aspire – and, he suggests, many achieve - he also reinforces the Universalist perspective of the gang as a monolithic quasi-corporate entity. Again, this is likely to be a case of where the academic spotlight shines, raising questions about the generalisability of his findings. Of the twelve gangs across six boroughs featuring in his research, five had reached the enterprise stage, which in his words ‘By some margins…would constitute organised crime’ (2013: 61) and another five the governance stage; it is unsurprising then, that his thesis should confirm such a swing to organisation and rational action.

Drug Dealing as Fundamental to Structure

Differentiating between the role of both individuals and gangs in organised drug supply is a consistent point of contention in the current UK debate. For example, Windle & Briggs (2015: 1178) suggest that drug dealing is essentially an individual pursuit, with entrepreneurially inclined drug dealers making their way up the ladder, building ‘trusting, reciprocal relationships with dealers and clients’ as they progressed . Their research on drug selling by self-identified members of a single London gang indicated the use of the wider gang as a

protection mechanism against robbery, rather than as central to their drug dealing operation. This view is explicitly supported by Densley (2013: 57):

> Drug sales are fundamentally an individual or small group activity, not coordinated by the collective gang. The gang provides the reputational and criminogenic resources to sustain the enterprise.

However, this observation is somewhat at odds with his own overarching gang evolution thesis, which portrays highly structured, hierarchical quasi-corporatist bodies whose *raison d'être* is of organised drug dealing and ultimately, monopolistic control of the market (2013: 61). The viewpoint may indicate wider misconceptions as to the nature and organisation of drug networks, and organised crime more generally. There is a significant body of literature – surprisingly ignored by the UK gang researchers - which questions the popular perception of organised crime groups as hierarchically structured, but rather views them as loosely structured networks (Dorn et al. 1992; Morselli et al. 2010; Murji 2007).

Hallsworth (2013) argues that the *a priori* assumptions of 'gang talkers', whether practitioners or researchers, mean they see the drugs trade as organised and therefore bureaucratic. Such a view can be reinforced by small-time players in the street drug trade, who are merely nodes in an articulated network, but who themselves assume it to be hierarchical, based on popular conceptions and their interaction with the highly bureaucratic and corporate licit world. Offender or witness descriptions of 'elders' and 'youngsters' are taken as confirmation of a corporate structure (e.g. Densely 2013; Harding 2014). In reality, Hallsworth suggests, this may well be a 'distributed network' – a Fordist model where individuals know only their own segment - and organised drug gangs are therefore 'the enemy [gang talkers] already presupposed they knew' (2013: 26). Windle & Briggs (2015: 1173) found that the gang practitioners they interviewed ascribed a far more sophisticated hierarchical structure to the gang's drug distribution than that described by the gang members themselves.

The failure to account for the fluidity in gang and individual participation in violent activity and drug supply – and the net widening it creates – is blamed by Hobbs (2013) on the British State's conflation of gangs with organised crime, suggesting this super-ordering means that any kind of youthful collaborative transgression cannot escape the label of 'gang related'.

Violence as Predominantly Drug Related

As recently as 2009, the limited empirical evidence described the key determinants of gangs in the UK as territorially driven, chaotic violence of ever younger members. The influential *Dying to Belong* report pointed to 'geographical territory… transcending drug territory' with postcode allegiances 'part of their raison d'être, an integral part of their identity' (Centre for Social Justice 2009: 26). The 'evolution to organisation' perspective identifies gang-related violence as increasingly drug orientated. One of the report's authors has since suggested a discernible change towards instrumentality:

> Chaotic 'turf wars' have given way to a more measured use of violence to protect or extend drug dealing territory, while new alliances have been forged between previously antagonistic groups to ensure 'business as usual'. (Pitts 2015: 6)

Densley (2013) identifies similar dynamics but places these squarely in the context of the gang. According to Densley, gangs 'heavily scrutinise gang member violence', to ensure that members do not bring unnecessary community or police attention. This draws parallels with the disciplined violence employed by organised crime groups and professional criminals; used only when necessary and frowned upon in everyday settings. The contradictions and conflict between this and a need to build violent capital are clear, particularly given the hypersensitive street world where perceived disrespect is enough to attract a beating, stabbing or worse: 'adult business criminals contracted muscle from local gangs as additional manpower to murder informants and competitors' (Densley 2013: 55).

Hallsworth & Silverstone (2009) draw on Hobbs' work to outline a complex and multi-faceted world, defined by neither the gun or the gang, but instead the level of involvement in criminal

activity, which they term 'criminal cultures'. Here, they differentiate between the instrumental, sparing use of the firearms by professional criminals and the chaotic uses by younger, less singularly orientated 'on road' sub-culture, 'legitimately conceived as a self-destructive response to the conditions which late capitalism has created' (Hallsworth & Silverstone 2009).

In summary, structures vary, and findings depend on where the spotlight of enquiry shines, summarised succinctly as follows:

> We suspect that some gangs which appear to be hierarchically structured at first glance may, on closer inspection, be looser networks of individuals and cliques; although this may well depend upon who you ask (Windle & Briggs 2015: 13)

As the above section makes clear, the fundamentals of gang organisation, structure and criminal activity are contested, and heavily influenced by epistemological persuasion. It is therefore unsurprising that the empirical evidence base regarding gang member characteristics is similarly disjointed.

Gang Member Characteristics

Age

Recent UK research recognises that general societal changes impact on gang age structures too; maturation out of gangs takes longer, and this is by no means unique to gangs; individuals are getting married later or delaying moving from their parent's homes (Brannen 2005). Harding (2014) considers the gangs he studied in Lambeth as having legitimate elder members (up to mid-thirties) rather than 'developmentally delayed adults' who have failed to mature out of the gang (Vigil 2010 cf. Harding 2014: 93). This view is supported by Densley (2013), again nodding to the 'super gang' thesis, when he describes gangs which have evolved to become organised criminal groups from which the upper echelons are loathe to retire and instead 'put measures in place to ensure the gravy train never ended' (Densley 2013: 81). Recent UK research indicates that that there is a perception amongst practitioners that gang

members are getting younger, although the authors note that reports of gang members as young as nine were from 'a small number of survey respondents in London' and 'the involvement of young people under the age of 11 in gangs was thought to be relatively rare' (Disley & Liddle 2016: 5).

When considered in the context of gangs being equated to 'youth violence' in policy and practice; age becomes particuarly problematic. As such, debate is often confused by the use of aggregated figures for weapon enabled violence which include adults. Gun crime is a particulalry salinent example; low prevalance sees all firearms discharges put forward as 'evidence' of rising levels of serious youth violence thus distorting the landscape being discussed, and increasing the perception of 'risk' of youth as both Squires (2011) and Young (2016) have highlighted.

Ethnicity

Although frequently raised in terms of labelling actions discussed in the policing section below (Joseph et al. 2011; Smithson et al. 2013; Williams 2015), ethnicity has been relatively unexplored in empirical research with most researchers simply stating that the ethnicity of the gangs reflect the areas where their members live; this theme has continued across the period of analysis (Disley & Liddle 2016).

Gender

Empirical evidence strongly indicates gang members are predominantly male, and while interest in female participation has increased, the evidence base on gender is contentious, and the empirical evidence base weak, drawing criticism for its general 'androcentric' focus (Young 2016: 13). Recent research conducted between 2011-12 based on point of arrest screening data identified one per cent of 8,000 female arrestees between 10 and 18 being gang associated (Khan et al. 2013). Policy reports have highlighted exploitation and vulnerability to sexual abuse (Beckett et al. 2013), but emphasised it should be viewed within

wider patterns of sexual harm and victimisation amongst young people. A methodologically sketchy report from the Centre for Social Justice further ramps up the rhetoric (CJS 2014). Possibly in congruence with policy emphasis, as the authors note (Disley & Liddle 2016), the practitioner view indicates a perception that girls are increasingly heavily involved in gang activity, being used as 'honey traps', providing safe houses to store weapons, or as victims of sexual exploitation.

Gang Operating Environment

UK research suggests the operating environment varies between gangs although all recent gang research focuses on areas of multiple deprivation. For example, the gangs that provided the focal point of recent research in Glasgow were predominantly street based (Fraser & Hagedorn 2016). In contrast, research in Manchester by Aldridge et al. (2011: 14) recognised that 'young people in gangs do not always have a street presence; many do not reside in gang neighbourhoods'. A recent survey of practitioners suggested a decline in street level visibility, linking this to a perceived increase in organisation and professionalism, as well as a function of increased police attentions (Disley & Liddle 2016). Although outside spaces have historically been linked to gangs, recent research has also noted how technological advances have allowed gangs to exist in a virtual space as well (Storrod & Densley 2016).

Territory

Dying To Belong (2009: 19) leans heavily on Pitts' (2008) suggestion that postcodes trumps all else in the world of the gang, claiming 'geographical territory is transcending drug territory'; this finding is increasingly debated (see Hallsworth 2013: 10) and again subject to regional and local variations. Recent research has begun to highlight the role of drug market expansionism in de-territorialisation (Coomber 2017; Windle & Biggs 2015) but as Hobbs (2013: 125) suggests, often fails to appreciate the 'complexities of territoriality, post-industrial urban identities and pervasive entrepreneurism'.

In London, territorial, post code-related violence still occurs but appears to have declined in recent years as gangs become smarter about police enforcement, and are wary of drawing attention to themselves through colours, bandannas and specific items of clothing (Disley & Liddle 2016). Five years ago, many street gangs were readily identifiable by the colours they wore – many even went by that name 'green gang' 'red gang' etc. Being caught 'slippin' (venturing into a rival gang territory) is highly dangerous and still likely to result in violence following variations on the classic challenge; 'where you from bruv?' (Brookman et al. 2011; Reid 2017).

London respondents to a recent EGYV survey of practitioners were much more likely to perceive violence as drug or postcode related than they were two years ago, and see gangs as less visible and more likely to be linked to organised crime groups (Disley & Liddle 2016: 41). The findings also echo the policy and police line almost precisely – with concerns around sexual exploitation and county lines - which raises questions as to whether or not these perspectives are simply regurgitated 'received wisdom'.

Certainly, the origins of most well-known gangs are based on a specific locality, as most often, is their name. The longevity of the gang despite a rapid turnover of its members can be explained to a large degree by its geographical connections; Medina et al. (2009) found that territorial identity was crucial in this respect.

Summary

The 'gang' today covers a vast amount of ground, from the chaotic violent youth groups all the way to multi-national criminal networks. The 'discovery' of the 'gang', just like that of organised crime,[9] and subsequent conflation and inflation, has only served to increase the problem of definition. Some academics have boldly sought to move beyond the definitional conundrum, having contributed to and then tired of the circular debate (Hallsworth & Duffy

[9] For an overview see Hobbs (2013; Chapter 2).

2011), whilst others have sagely advised against becoming academically ensconced in something 'no one understands'.[10] The most marked shift in the contemporary gang debate in the UK is that of gang participation in organised criminality. This melding of gang and organised criminal networks can be traced back to Pitts (2008) account of gangs in Waltham Forest and has since gained traction as the defining feature of the gang today. In contrast to the views of Klein (1970; 2006), gangs in London today are understood by their involvement in the illegal drugs trade.

Arguably, the 'delinquent peer groups' of the past have been sucked into the contemporary understanding of the gang, which is also in the process of merging with some forms of organised crime. There is a tendency to criticise and focus on particular aspects of definition and debate which can detract from the aim of understanding and curtailing serious street youth violence (Sullivan 2005). This is seen in academia (see, for example, Hallsworth 2014; Pitts et al. 2012), but is also noticeable amongst and between practitioners who are wary, sceptical or fatigued by their colleagues 'knowing best'.

[10] Dick Hobbs, Personal Communication.

Part Two: Police Responses, Data and Practice

Part one of this chapter has detailed the disjointed and relatively sparse empirical academic evidence base on gangs in the UK, outlining how this has influenced – and been influenced by – media, policy and practitioner experience rhetoric, as well as the equally complex American experience to create what may be a self-reinforcing understanding of the gang. The second part of the chapter reviews the pertinent literature concerning the policing response to gangs, focusing specifically on the construction of police gang data, and the policing response in the form of specialist gang units.

The 'gang industry' has generated a great deal of debate and critique of the policy response to gangs (Densley 2011; Hallsworth 2013; Joseph et al. 2011; Pitts 2017; Shute & Medina 2014) , but far less empirical research focusing specifically on policing. As Ralphs et al. (2009: 485) note; '…in Britain, …controversial US gang interventions have slipped unquestioned into mainstream policy and practice'.

Where policing is mentioned, focus is usually on general issues around the adverse effects of labelling, disproportionality and civil liberties concerns, often as a by-product of ethnographic or phenomenologically focused research (Densley 2013; Hallsworth 2013; Smithson et al. 2013; Williams 2015). In contrast, the US has generated a vast body of research specifically on the production of police gang data and the police response from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives, and as such features prominently in the review below.

Police Statistics

The deficiencies and bias in crime data have been thoroughly explicated in the US and the UK and form a fundamental basis for much criminological critique (Black & Reiss 1970; Bottomley & Coleman 1981; Coleman & Moynihan 1996; Cicourel 1976). Writing from an ethnomethodological perspective Kitsuse & Cicourel (1963: 137) famously described official

police statistics as 'indices of organisational processes rather than indices of the incidents of certain forms of behaviour.'

In the UK, various levels of police discretion have been highlighted as impacting on the data generated by police actions. This can be through the activities intended to meet the 'general policing goals' of 'maintaining order, controlling crime and catching criminals' (Sanders & Young 2007: 957) such as the traditional deployment of police resource to patrol public space which increases the likelihood of sanctions against those of a lower social class who are more likely to occupy public rather than private spaces, to the detriment of what have been called 'available populations' (FitzGerald 1999); predominantly young, male, poor (Webster 2008) and often black (Lea 2000).

Force and local policy can vary substantially; Lambeth's decision to trial the effective decriminalisation of cannabis by directing its officers to turn a blind eye to possession is a pertinent, albeit extreme, example (Adda et al. 2014). Pressure from local or force directives to focus on a particular crime type may be driven by the desire to maintain funding within particular units or to ensure the continued provision of resources for particular 'threats', for instance, units specialising in organised crime and gangs (Densley 2013; Hallsworth 2013; Hobbs 2013).

The pressure to achieve results – efficiency gains and performance targets –also inevitably leads police to cut corners (Reiner & Newburn 2000), sometimes through 'hiding crimes' ('cuffing') at a force or officer level, through misclassification or non-recording or increasing detection rates by targeting 'easy wins', such as cannabis possession (Stanko & Hales 2009); recent controversies highlight this as a continuing concern (Patrick 2012). Olisa (2005) found such pressures to influence senior ranks too; the need to get things done on the ground meant that invariably management ranks fell back on tried and tested methods, which often resulted in the discriminatory application of policing practices such as Stop and Search.

Rank and file police have been the subject of numerous ethnographies, identifying a 'cop culture' that ethnographic studies have variously described as 'sexist' (Heidensohn 2003), 'racist' (Daly 2003; Phillips & Bowling 2002) and conservative and authoritarian (Skolnick 2011; Waddington 1999). Suspiciousness has been identified as fundamental to the culture of front line policing (Skolnick 1994: 265), and police draw on their culturally defined stereotypes of a suspicious person to exercise discretion; be that the clothes they are wearing, the people they are with or the colour of their skin. Discriminatory behaviour like this is far from universal within the police, and varies between individuals and units, but the overarching culture makes stereotyping more likely to occur. Further, a non-representative force is likely to mean non-representative crime reporting (see Reiner 1992 ch.38); in 2016, Scotland Yard's head of diversity claimed that a Metropolitan Police Service which is representative of the communities it polices is still a long way off (Dodd 2016b). However, as 'moral street sweepers', as Reiner & Newburn (2007: 921) describe them, 'police prejudices are more a product than a cause of the differential use of police powers, which embodies the socially constructed nature of the police mandate'.

Police Intelligence

The adoption of increasingly 'actuarial' mechanisms within policing aimed at managing risk and harm has been identified by many as a key facet in the transformation of policing practices (Feeley & Simon 1992; 1994; McLaughlin 2007), regardless of how quantifiable that 'risk' actually is, and how much it is influenced by politically determined priorities (see (O'Malley 1998). 'Risk management' is now perceived as a crucial tool for efficiency and sustainability across public services with the police, as Ericson & Haggerty (1997) note, 'at the fulcrum of risk communication between institutions'. The rise of 'Crime Management' in the form of 'Intelligence Led Policing' and 'Problem Orientated Policing' – strategic, target orientated approaches – has ostensibly sought to increase efficiency through appropriate resource allocation and assist in meeting performance targets although there is little empirical

evidence of its efficacy (Seddon 2008). Contemporary policing is situated in an 'intelligence-driven crime-control paradigm' (Reiner & Newburn 2008: 352). As a criminal milieu where both public and self-reporting are less than prevalent, gang policing lends itself to an intelligence led policing approach (Ratcliffe 2008) and consequently much understanding of the gang is built up this way. The approach also presents crime control 'opportunities' in the form of 'pre-crime' policing; pre-emptive targeting increasingly conflated with 'prevention' (McCulloch & Pickering 2010; Zedner 2007).

Intelligence Led Policing has been the subject of some academic enquiry (Ratcliffe & Guidetti 2008; Ratcliffe 2010), although there is limited research relating directly to gangs. Pertinent to this thesis, the role of the intelligence analyst in interpreting and creating data has been explored, although to a far lesser extent than that of police discretion described above. Research has also highlighted what Sheptycki (2004) describes as the 'organisational pathologies' inherent in intelligence led policing approaches, and specifically the flow of intelligence in multi-agency environments (Sheptycki 2017; Weston 2015) . A growing body of work examines the cultures and working practices of police analysts, identifying ongoing challenges in integrating analytical functions due to resistance from a police culture that places greater value on experiential knowledge Gill (2000; 2005). Ratcliffe (2008: 217) outlines the scale of the cultural shift:

> Intelligence-led policing is attempting to synchronize two different types of knowledge (old and new) that are, on the surface, fairly mismatched, and is attempting to do so in order to create intelligence products that go beyond the existing arrest mentality and into preventative areas that are incompatible with the subculture of current policing.

However, the implication in Ratcliffe's assertion presents intelligence analysis as an objective process. Indeed, crime and intelligence analysis is often portrayed and perceived as a scientific approach (see, for example, Clarke & Eck 2003). This, as Sanders et al. (2015: 190) argue,

> …ignores the subjective and interpretive practices … involved in their manufacture, and the contingencies and limitations of the products…thus, the data is only made meaningful and actionable through the interpretive and analytic processes of people—analysts and police officers.

Similarly,

> …there is a process of objectification implicit in much police intelligence analysis, whereby the contingencies and ambiguities of the 'raw' data are subtly edited and glossed, as a consequence of which, 'soft' data come to be ascribed 'harder' qualities. (Innes et al. 2005: 40)

Research on intelligence led policing has also questioned whether processes have actually changed to any great extent or have simply been adopted because of perceived effectiveness and the legitimacy it bestows. As Sanders & Condon (2017: 13) note 'crime analysis and the practice of policing through flows of data has changed the *symbolic* nature of policing while reaffirming traditional ways of knowing and policing'. Further, some have argued that in austere and risk averse times, the approach has been particularly appealing to police services engaging in 'aggressive information gathering' (Sanders et al. 2015), which in turn raises questions of oversight and accountability (Dorn et al. 1992: 174).

In a wider consideration of the impact technology has had on policing practice, doyen of sociological policing research Peter Manning, suggests a similar obstinacy to change ingrained ways of working:

> Beliefs override facts in a world dominated by trust. The information and information processes seen in this book were adapted to the police organization and its characteristic practices: IT and its supporting features did not change any significant practice in the three organizations studied […]. Police organizations stabilized in part by routines and assumptions about the nature of the work and its cause and consequences. These are largely unexamined. (Manning 2008: 262)

Police Gang Data

The specific construction of gang statistics has received little academic attention in the UK. One of the few UK studies to investigate the veracity of police labelling of gang members is

that of Williams (2015). The study took data from Greater Manchester Police's XTF database of police identified gang members and triangulated it with the author's previous research (Smithson et al. 2013), finding:

> …it was evident that the police database comprised individuals who were (a) defined as 'gang-members', (b) young people who were thought to be 'associated' with 'gang members', (c) individuals who were 'historically' considered to be 'gang-involved' and whose details were retained for 'intelligence' purposes (ex-gang members), and (d) people who were deemed to be 'at risk' of gang-related violence.' (Williams 2015: 29)

Williams also raises questions about inclusion criteria:

> Our findings resulted in the identification of fifty-one individuals who the police regarded as 'active' gang members; the majority of these individuals were serving custodial sentences. Yet even the notion of 'active' was subject to the interpretation of individual officers. As one informed the research team, 'being prominently seen on the street … is active. He might not have done anything wrong but … he's putting himself forward as a target'. (2015: 29)

Some studies have hinted at the range of actors influencing the process. Smithson et al.'s (2013) qualitative research in a deprived local authority in northern England compared practitioner and community views of the nature and extent of gang related criminal activity, discovering differing perceptions between various stakeholders. Highlighting the ambiguity and conceptual difficulty with gang terminology, they found that the police identified a gang problem, and generated a gang database and intelligence around hierarchical structures, yet questioned the extent to which the gangs were violent. In contrast, local communities recognised a drug dealing problem but did not perceive a gang problem. The researchers themselves found no evidence of gangs as defined by *Dying to Belong*,[11] observing instead that on a policy level:

> There seemed to be conflation between the young people who were hanging out on the streets in groups, committing minor-level anti-social behaviour, and the serious gun crime incidents that had been linked to Northville (Smithson et al. 2013: 123)

[11] Now used with minor amendments by the MPS.

Densley & Jones (2016) highlight the administrative problems in policing gangs on a borough basis, and hints at the difficulties in centralised mapping of localised problems. The role that intelligence plays in attributing gang membership is generally under researched in the UK, most likely due to lack of appropriate access. Those that have written on the subject highlight the numerous difficulties experienced by those so labelled, including increased police attentions, stigma, exclusion from family and social events and the psychological stresses induced (Medina et al. 2009). All of this amounts to cumulative labelling impacts. McAra & McVie (2005) used survey data to explore the hypothesised disproportional policing of certain communities (lower class, living in high deprivation, living an active street life and having delinquent friends with previous police contact, dubbed the 'usual suspects'). Their findings supported the hypothesis of disproportional policing against these groups, and crucially that once individuals have been labelled as troublemakers 'this status appears to suck young people into a spiral of amplified contact, regardless of whether they continue to be involved in serious levels of offending'(p.9). Medina (2014) also draws on survey data, finding that ethnic disproportionality in stop and search is evident when sociodemographic, self-reported offending, area characteristics and street presence are controlled for. Unlike McAra & McVie (2005), the author specifically relate this to gangs:

> It seems as if in practice, "intelligence-led" policing means that hanging out with the "wrong crowd", including gangs, is likely to exacerbate the chances of a young person being approached by the police regardless of their own level of offending (Medina 2014: 219)

Although both studies are limited by their reliance on self-reported offending, they provide evidence that can be related directly to the organisational labelling and policing of gangs.

Aldridge et al.'s (2008: 23) ethnographic research on youth gangs in Manchester highlighted concern amongst voluntary and community sector practitioners and members of the public around the official use of gang databases; they highlighted the civil liberties implications and development of appropriate guidelines and procedures, cautioning:

> Young people related to gang members, attending the same schools or youth provisions, and living on the same streets were in danger of being classed as a gang member or at least a 'gang associate' and subjected to increased surveillance and intervention.

Gang members are likely to be subject to increased and 'undue law enforcement attention'; there is plenty of empirical evidence to suggest this is the case. It is a function of gang databases. Police practice routinely and logically focuses attention on individuals who previously come to attention, as well as the associates of those people : 'joining a gang also leads to greater police attention, even adjusting for other potential explanations for this police attention such as offending' (Medina et al. 2013: 5).

In an illuminating and unique study, Fraser & Atkinson (2014: 155) highlight the role that civilian intelligence analysts play in defining gang membership in a Glasgow police intelligence unit. They identify the civilian analyst as playing a 'pivotal role in the identification of gang members' and the construction of gangs 'in the system'; crucially they have in their gift a measure of discretion which is usually only associated with police officers. The authors found gang lists compiled by the police to be inaccurate, inconsistent and out of date and some within the police service recognized that the distinction between the police and gangs – between order and chaos – is not always clear.

The technical analytical approaches to gang-related policing have received some academic attention. Specifically, the benefits of using Social Network Analysis (SNA) in identifying structure, embeddedness and wider networks. Most however, focus heavily on the technical approach rather than perceptions and use in a policing environment (Coles 2001; Oatley & Crick 2014; Paulo et al. 2013). A recent Home Office report does consider police perceptions of SNA, finding a preference for a more qualitative, experientially based approach to mapping networks amongst officers (Gunnell et al. 2016). The report highlights the benefits of SNA approaches to gang mapping both in terms of increased objectivity, but also in identifying

non-criminal links within networks. The suggestion is these may be individuals 'at risk' of gang involvement and thus warranting intervention.

In the US, the construction of gang statistics has received greater theoretical scrutiny. Meehan (2000) examines the construction of gang statistics from a social constructionist perspective, arguing that police generated gang data is intimately linked to local political context and the 'police accommodation of political interests'. He draws on a range of field work data including calls to police and observation on 'ride-alongs' to demonstrate how the interactional and recordkeeping practices of the police are influenced by the politicisation of the gang problem. Meehan further recognises that police officers themselves often understand gangs in a way concordant with the social constructionist perspective; seeing gangs as 'an issue for the mayor not a real problem for the police' (2000: 338):

> The emergence of gangs as a social problem is arguably as much a product of the various interactional and record- keeping practices of the police that have developed in response to the problem as it is to "labelling" in a broader sense. The daily work practices of persons working in organizations are responsive not only to public and media pressure but also to internal recordkeeping procedures and the various legal and political bodies to which they are accountable' (Meehan 2000: 337)

Another detailed ethnographic account of the processes behind the creation of gang statistics is that of Katz (2003). He found that rather than being representative of official or informal definitions, gang statistics were the product of poor communication within and between police units; that is, rather than the ulterior or external manipulation found by Meehan, poor administrative processes and policies created inaccurate statistics. Katz found officers used a substantial amount of discretion in collection and documentation of gang data, and that it was disseminated to agencies outside the police, utilising it to impose a range of social sanctions such as employment or school enrolment.

Police Gang Databases

In the US, gang database research has focused on the working practices and processes which generate gang data, with a suggestion by some that uncontrolled officer discretion and subjective classification criteria make generated statics unreliable (Burrell 1990). The questions of 'to what extent such problems are administrative in nature?', or 'the degree to which they might be the product of wider processes and influence?' have also been explored. US research has provided some empirical insights into the issues highlighted in the UK.

The utility of recording gang information at all has been questioned, highlighting deficits in the ability of police or other stakeholders to correctly identify gang affiliation (Chesney-Lind et al. 1994; McCorkle & Miethe 1998; Spergel 1995), or suggesting that the focus should be on individual and group (as opposed to gang) harm (Kennedy 2009). Other scholars go further, suggesting that attempting to quantify and track gangs actually re-enforces or even creates an oppositional culture instrumental in *increasing* and *solidifying* gang cohesiveness:

> Gangs develop an oppositional culture that leads them to reinterpret attempts either to deter them or to help them as attempts to denigrate them. Such attempts, no matter how well meaning, only serve to increase gang identity among the members, that is, to increase group cohesiveness (Klein 2014: 702)

Klein (1997) also highlights the dual recordkeeping practices of the Los Angeles Police Department relating to both gang motivated crime and crimes involving a gang member, regardless of motivation. Only serious violence orientated offences are included (which are very similar to those on the MPS Matrix).[12] As Klein (1997: 28) notes:

> Gangs, [the databases] suggest, commit only horrific offences and are thus altogether different from other offenders...this is legislation and regulation suited to limited enforcement and prosecution purposes; it has little to do with gang realities.

[12] Homicide, attempted murder, felony assault, robbery, shooting into an inhabited dwelling, kidnap, rape, arson, witness intimidation, extortion and battery of a police officer. (Klein 1995 p.28).

The potential risks to individuals in receiving more severe Criminal Justice outcomes have been of primary concern for American critics of gang databases (Jacobs 2009; Klein 2009); although as Caudill et al. (2014) note, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support such contentions, with the few empirical studies generally finding the opposite (Caudill et al. 2014; Pyrooz et al. 2011). Other risks include the possibility of increased likelihood of conviction (Wright 2006), civil consequences such as expulsion from school or employment; increased risk of violent victimisation or being ostracised to the extent that they embrace the incorrect labelling in congruence with 'secondary deviance' labelling (Jacobs 2009; Kennedy 2009; Sullivan 2005). Identifying concerns in the administrative functions, Esbensen et al. (2001) highlights research suggesting that non-gang members have more pro-social attitudes and behaviour (see Esbensen & Huizinga 1993) as an important reason to remove individuals that have desisted.

Others have been more complimentary of police gang data; Katz et al. (2000: 434) suggest that non-gang members, associate gang members and gang members, can accurately be distinguished using a standard police documentation process and that the differences in severity of offending make this process worthwhile. Similarly, drawing from previous 'gang audits,' preceding iterations of his Group Violence Interventions (GVI), Kennedy (2009: 714) observes that '(t)he striking thing…is how well law enforcement understand what is going on'. The potential for gang databases to be used as a tool for prevention and intervention as well as enforcement has previously been highlighted by Spergel (2009) and Short (2009), the latter arguing that identification and definition should not be the exclusive responsibility of the police. Huff (1998; 2004) describes the 'windows of opportunity' for intervention, with a second window between a gang member's first and subsequent offences, suggesting that informed multi agency approaches could trigger interventions in more timely and focused ways. Indeed, in the UK there is some evidence to suggest that individuals themselves

recognise this, both in terms of intervention, but also to keep them safe in other ways; determining their placement in prison wings, for example (Setty et al. 2014).

Non-identification carries its own risk, for instance, and of direct relevance to the Matrix, non-identification may mean that the individual is denied diversionary interventions, or at a wider level present an unacceptable risk to society (Ericson & Haggerty 1997); unidentified gang members may be given carte-blanche to commit criminal and violent acts, and may avoid the enhanced control or penalties that gang association can bring in terms of civil or legal actions.

Police Gang Units

As with gang databases, US literature is more developed and theoretically nuanced regarding the creation of police gang units. Curry and Decker (1998) created a six-stage typology of local responses to gangs; stage one sees the first signs of a burgeoning gang problem through graffiti, or 'senseless youth violence'; stage two has the police and local politicians downplaying the violence; stage three displaces denial with frank admission as public anxiety increases; stage four is the scene of outcry and over-reaction and a call that 'something must be done'. The fifth stage, Densley (2013) notes is where the MPS are now – the creation of special police squads and anti-gang units to suppress the gang. It is debatable whether over the course of the next three years we have reached stage six – 'the multiplication of gangs and gang members in spite (or because of) heightened intelligence and increased arrests of gang members' (2013: 148).

The police gang unit in the UK features more as a footnote to academic research than a main focus. Densley (2013: 148) briefly acknowledges the opening of Trident Gang Crime Command as 'the strongest evidence yet that Britain is at least beyond its state of denial about gangs' whilst Hallsworth (2013) treats it as a subject for withering sarcasm, for its perceived contribution of legitimising 'control agent' actions to a constructed 'gang problem'. A partial exception is Roberts & Innes (2009: 343) who discuss the original formation of Trident, albeit

then a gun crime unit. Although the authors rather unquestioningly describe its formation as 'an attempt to provide a more effective response' to the issue of firearms crime within London's Black communities, they also note the political influences that also drove its creation:

> [The post-Lawrence] identification of systemic failings in terms of how crimes involving people from minority ethnic backgrounds were being handled. This political imperative to be seen to be doing something in the face of serious criticisms meant that, at least initially, it was not a well thought through response.

In America, research on the specialist police responses to gangs, and 'police gang units' in particular, is more developed. The specialised policing of gangs began to appear *en mass* in the 1980's, Katz & Webb (2003) estimated that by the turn of the century half of all agencies with 100 or more sworn officers had a specialist gang unit. Their emergence was in keeping with a wider trend towards specialism in policing, perceived to be more resource efficient, developing nuanced technical skills (Huff & McBride 1993) whilst serving as a marker to local communities that the police were aware and dealing with issues of particular concern (Meyer 1979; Scott 2013).

Research has linked increased or over emphasised media coverage of gang issues with the creation of gang units; Hagedorn (1988) identifies the creation of gang task forces after extensive media coverage of gang violence in Milwaukee and Minneapolis, whilst Zatz (1987) argued that the discovery of gangs in Phoenix was due more to the availability of government funds than any substantive gang problem. Funding was also found to be a driver for the creation of gang units by Katz et al. (2002), who utilised survey data to conduct a test of competing theoretical explanations for the advent of a police gangs response. They found that rather than being a response to a contingent environmental threat, or a constructed 'moral panic', many gang units were set up in a bid to secure funding. McCorkle & Miethe (1998) suggested that the Las Vegas Police Department helped to create an image of

marginalised ethnic minority youths as gang members, constructing a social threat to address aimed at regaining the legitimacy of the department following a number of scandals, whilst securing funding. Their findings are limited by a reliance only on media reports and official crime statistics.

Although research on responses to gangs is usually bereft of theoretical underpinnings, as Katz (2001) notes, much of the discourse describing policing of gangs is associated with contingency theory. This is exemplified in the surfeit of literature suggesting that the increase in prevalence of specialised gang units is explained by the increase in prevalence of gangs (Ball & Curry 1995; Spergel 1995; Klein & Maxson 1996); the implicit assumption is that the creation of a gang unit is a rational response which will increase efficiency and performance in this field.

A small body of research by those not enthralled by the current status quo offered evidence of different motivations. Katz & Webb (2003: 45) found that the gang units they researched were more likely to have been created to address issues of institutional legitimacy rather than to 'respond to actual contingencies in their environment'. Developing this approach, Rostami et al. (2015), compared claims of the success of a Swedish anti-gang operation with prosecution statistics and internal documents concluding that such claims had been exaggerated into organisational 'myths'.

Policing Led Gang Interventions

Chapter one described the overall paucity of empirical evidence around police led (or indeed any) gang interventions in the UK. One import from America that has received some academic scrutiny over the years is the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) programme. Perhaps best known from its original incarnation as 'Ceasefire', conceived and implemented by Professor David Kennedy in Boston in the late 1990's and replicated with some success in numerous

other cities (Braga et al. 2013; Braga & Weisburd 2012; Wong et al. 2012). The strategy is essentially one of 'focused deterrence'; targeted enforcement action against those groups committing the most serious violence in a locale. To legitimise these actions, the approach relies on a unified message from the authorities and the community affected by the violence, offering opportunities to leave the 'gang-life', whilst emphasising that if the violence continues robust enforcement for any misdemeanours will be meted out to all those in the group.

There has been sporadic application of the GVI strategy in the UK. In 2002 the Ceasefire approach was attempted in Manchester, but suffered 'mission drift' and fidelity issues (Bullock & Tilley 2002; 2008). In 2005, Strathclyde Police ran a version of GVI in Glasgow, achieving significant success in decreasing weapon carrying and violence among gang involved youths, although reporting no significant reductions in physical violence (Deuchar 2014; Williams et al. 2014). In London, the 2009 Pathways programme was based on GVI principles but also encountered implementation challenges (MPS 2011a). More recently, elements of the GVI approach have been implemented by several London boroughs, usually via an MPS led partnership approach, though none have received rigorous evaluation (Densley & Jones 2016). The latest attempt in London, Shield, had previously proven success but was beset by familiar issues around, community engagement, project understanding and competing priorities. An evaluation found 'it was not possible to demonstrate a significant reduction in violence across the targeted Shield groups' - this does not indicate a GVI approach does not work or is not fit for London - rather that the challenges in implementation resulted in no clear test of the model (Davies et al. 2017: 29).

Part Three: Theoretical Framework for Analysis

This chapter has so far described the complexities and nuances in understanding the gang from an academic, policy and policing perspective demonstrating the myriad of competing and re-enforcing influences each can have on each other. It has highlighted the major theoretical perspectives of UK 'gang talkers', and demonstrated their application not only in explaining gangs, but also the police approach. For example, Hallsworth and Young apply a Social Constructionist perspective, arguing that the policy response is redolent of a Moral Panic; a constructed social threat designed to legitimise the actions of 'agents of control'. Pitts, Harding and Densley's realist perspective lends itself to contingency theory – a common (though mostly unstated) perspective in US work examining gang policing. The Manchester school offer a critique in the interactionist mould, cautioning against the dangers of labelling and the impact this might have on those 'usual suspects'.

The complexity of my research topic and the limitations to my data mean that rather than apply a single theoretical framework to my analysis, I will draw on several interconnected theoretical approaches; all have their genesis within the broad field of ideas known as labelling or interactionism (Williams 2004), as indicated by my primary research question:

> **How do the various labelling processes and recordkeeping practices of the MPS shape organisational understanding and response to gangs in London?**

My research focuses on both practitioner perceptions of the gang, the organisational policing response and the internal and external processes and practices which influence them. The interlinked theoretical perspectives allow a consideration of labelling and recordkeeping practices at the individual, organisational and institutional levels. Although this thesis is primarily concerned with the activities of the labellers as opposed to the subsequent reaction of the individuals so labelled, it is instructive to briefly review the origins of interactionism.

Symbolic Interactionism, Societal Reaction and Labelling

In essence, a reaction to the predominantly positivist structural approaches to understanding the social world, symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theoretical framework to explore how society is constructed subjectively at an individual level through constant and repeated interaction. From this perspective, meaning trumps objective structure; nothing can be taken for granted. The basic tenets of symbolic interactionism state that:

1. individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them;
2. interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects (persons), as well as situations, must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings;
3. meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society
4. meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others

(Blumer 1969 cf. Carter & Fuller 2015)

Symbolic Interactionism can be traced to George Herbert Mead, whose 1918 essay *The Psychology of Punitive Justice* emphasised the strength of societal reaction to deviance. Mead (1918: 587) proposed that criminal labels created boundaries between the acceptable and the condemned — 'the angel with the fiery sword at the gate who can cut one off from the world to which he belongs'. Such boundaries, Mead argued, contribute to the maintenance of social order in society. His student, Herbert Blumer developed the term symbolic interactionism to explain the process of defining and interpreting interaction with human's actions rather than simply reacting to them (Blumer 1969). Symbolic interactionism generated the field of work on Labelling (Becker 1963; Cohen 1980; Kitsuse 1962; Lemert 1951; 1967), and as the above review has indicated, both have been influential in research relating to the police, and gangs.

The labelling perspective can be split into three main areas of enquiry; the societal reaction which drives law-making and labelling practices (see Black 1970, 1976; Cohen 1995); the labelling processes themselves and the self-conception of the individuals that are labelled (Williams 2004); that is, the internalisation of conferred labels and the possible impact on subsequent behaviours (Becker 1963; Lemert 1967). Although all areas are relevant to this thesis, it is the second which constitutes the primary focus; the activities of the labellers.

Drawing on the symbolic interactionist perspective, Kitsuse (1962: 248) argued for greater enquiry into the 'processes by which persons come to be defined as deviants by others', echoing Lemert (1951) in that interpretations of given behaviours - rather than an individual's actual behaviour - are critical features of the 'deviant defining process' (Kitsuse: 255). Becker's (1963) collection of studies cemented the notion of social judgement as fundamental to the study of deviance, and crucially, how the labelling process can be affected by both offender and victim characteristics and the beliefs, stereotypes knowledge and working practices of agents of the criminal justice system (Rock 2007; Williams 2004).

Linked to this, the labelling perspective has been crucial in the development of critiques on construction of crime statistics and data – 'the organisational processing of deviance' (Coleman & Moynihan 1996: 14), encouraging an understanding that:

> the data are not some objectively observable universe of "criminal acts," but rather those events defined, captured, and processed as such by some institutional mechanism (Biderman & Reiss Jr 1967: 1)

Despite criticisms of determinism, over-simplification, and a lack of consideration of victims, the perspective's utility as a bridging mechanism between consensus theories of criminality and critical theories that encourage the structural analysis of power, control and the politics of knowledge (Taylor et al. 1973; 1975) ensures a continued contemporary relevance as the first sections of this literature review demonstrate. The political nature of the labelling process is further explored via theoretical perspectives within organisational theory.

Organisational Perspectives in Policing

The interactionist approach has also influenced Organisational Theory, which has been used to understand policing responses to a variety of 'innovations', adoptions of new practice or changing operational configurations. The study of organisations, both in terms of structural features and processes such as decision-making, power, motivation and culture (Starbuck 2003) draws heavily on interactionism and constructionism. Through this 'open systems' lens (Scott & Davis 2015), we can see how the influence of external factors (social, political and environmental) will always shape organisational structure and decision making; organisation is dependent on the nature of the environment in which the organisation exists.

Contingency Theory

Traditionally, organisationally focused policing research has been influenced by Contingency Theory, which although recognizing that there are many internal and external factors that influence organisational behaviour (Lawrence & Lorsch 1967), views organisations as rational and adaptive; 'purposive and active organisms' that will logically seek out the most effective and efficient means of achieving their aims (Crank & Langworthy 1992: 474). This perspective might best be described as the 'official' or 'operative' line. Ineffectiveness or failure to hit performance targets will, according to contingency theorists, drive organisational change (Mastrofski & Ritti 2000). There is an acceptance amongst contingency theorists that organisation, environment and outcomes may be incompatible (Giblin 2006). This is an 'optimistic perspective' on police organisation, and not without support (Kelling & Moore 1988), although critics have noted deficits in its overall explanatory power (Langworthy 1986); it fails to explain behaviour of police organisations that is not rational, and adequately account for the social factors that may also bear influence on organisational process.

Institutional Theory

An alternative perspective on organisations which considers not only the pressures of performance, but also the influence of legitimacy, has increasingly been applied to policing organisation and practice. Drawing on the conceptual basis of social constructionism, institutional theory suggests that an organisation's structures and activities are not necessarily rational responses to environmental contingencies (Crank & Langworthy 1992). Instead, behaviour in an organisation becomes institutionalised through an ongoing process of social construction (Carter & Fuller 2015). The perspective holds that organisational structure and activity are reflections of the beliefs and values of influential internal or external actors within the institutional environment.

These are accepted ideas and beliefs which may not be objectively tested but are widely considered 'social facts'; referred to as 'myths' (Crank & Langworthy 1992; Meyer & Rowan 1977). In this way, they may be viewed as rational as although they may not be based on empirical evidence, they are perceived to both identify and address problems (Scott 1992 cf. Katz et al. 2001). Myths in this context are dependent on being widely understood and communicated across actors within the institutional environment as conventional wisdoms.

The actors within the institutional environment, referred to as 'sovereigns', have the capacity to direct policy, resource and decision making, and can determine the legitimacy of an organisation, and ultimately its survival (Meyer & Rowan 1977). In the institutional environment of policing, sovereigns will include the Mayor, City council members, local authority leaders, interest groups, local communities and criminal justice or partnership agencies (Katz et al 2001). Crank & Langworthy (1992) argue that in the policing context, legitimacy may be more important than effectiveness and efficiency; for example, it was long held that preventative patrols were fundamental to the role of policing, and this perception remained as received wisdom despite significant evidence that this activity was not an

effective measure in reducing crime. Crank and Langworthy (1992) contend its continuance because of the signalling power to the police's institutional environment that they are doing what is expected of them; the myth drives the activities regardless of evidence base.

In search of Legitimacy

Reviewing the literature on institutional theory, Schuman (1995) outlines the key ways in which organisations gain and sustain legitimacy, and the resources that accompany it; conforming, selecting or manipulating the environment in which they conduct their activities.

Conforming to the Environment

Organisations can conform to environments in a number of ways. Changes to organisational structure has been identified as one way in which organisations can communicate or 'signal' to their institutional environments that something is being done (Meyer 1979). For example, Crank & Langworthy (1992) hypothesised that specialised units might often be 'ceremonial' rather than efficient and effective responses to a contingent problem; a means of communicating to various sovereigns, as well a potential criminals, that the perceived problem is being robustly addressed (Katz 2001).

Environment Selection: Coupling and De-Coupling

Organisations may simply seek to select a different institutional environment where legitimacy is more easily conferred (Schuman 1995); that is, instead of conforming the organisation selects a different environment that will value the outputs that it provides (Katz 2001: 42). Within a policing context, selection of environment is often not possible; they are inherently high-risk (Johnson & Vaughn 2016) and pre-defined. However, institutionalists argue this problem can be mitigated through decoupling activities (Schuman 1995); this allows for variation in approach whilst allowing the organisation as a whole to engage in core activities, and as such is ideally suited to the policing environment (Crank & Langworthy 1992). Thus, as Katz (2001: 42) observes:

> By creating a specialized unit, administrators are able to respond publicly and decisively to an emerging problem as identified by their social and political environments. Such a strategy allows the police to selectively respond to environments that will garnish them legitimacy while allowing them to attend to core technologies.

In addition to issues of environment selection, the nature and extent of decoupling activities within the gang policing environment presents a useful framework with which to examine questions of information flows, oversight and control:

> For a criminal justice institution to function effectively, a certain amount of discretion must be delegated to line staff to judge and address unusual, unpredictable, and, often, dangerous situations (Walker, 1993). While authority is necessarily handed down through the organizational hierarchy to line staff, a certain amount of oversight is necessary to maintain organizational integrity. Accordingly, it is necessary to maintain, and perhaps increase, quality oversight as more authority is delegated to personnel. This increase in oversight, however, can be difficult to establish and maintain in criminal justice organizations due to decentralization and lack of resources and personnel (Johnson & Vaughn 2016: 161)

Manipulation of Environment

The third way in which organisation might seek to gain legitimacy or resource is through the purposeful manipulation of their environment, intentionally creating 'new myths' to shape sovereign's 'expectations of social reality'. Theorists see this as most likely to happen when there is an assumption that the environment is unanalysable (Daft & Weick 1984; Katz 2001). In the gang policing environment, this might be through the construction or heightening of a perceived threat, as described above in an American context (Katz 2001; McCorkle & Miethe 1998; Zatz 1987).

Isomorphic Pressures

Finally, institutional theory can be used as a framework for examining the ubiquitous pressures to change and conform within the institutional environment of policing. DiMaggio & Powell (1983) argue that subtle 'centrist' forces derived from the power of governments or professional bodies lead organisations within an organisational field to increasingly resemble each other over time. According to DiMaggio and Powell, this process of homogenisation

can be seen in three isomorphic forces; coercive, normative and mimetic. Coercive isomorphism comes from political oversight, regulation or other political pressures such as changes in law or the provision of funding which compel organisations to adopt a particular policy (Crank & Langworthy 1996). Normative isomorphism can be generated from the shared beliefs, organisational knowledge and accepted best practice imbued from professional associations, conferences, training or professional subcultures (Carter 2016). Finally, mimetic isomorphism results when organisations mimic approaches or practices – essentially, as Maguire (2014) suggests, it is an organisational equivalent of 'keeping up with the Jones' whether in the belief of increase effectiveness or perceived legitimacy. This hypothesis is supported by research findings across a vast array of organisational fields.

Summary

The combination of labelling and organisational approaches allows for a consideration of macro and micro process within the organisational environment of the police. It should be reiterated that this is a data driven study and the aim is not to test or wholly apply any of the above theoretical approaches, but rather draw on elements of the approaches to help explain a complex environment.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The Research Setting

The research setting was chosen due to my professional experience within the MPS, and with data concerning policing gangs and serious violence particularly, having worked for the organisation in a number of different capacities since 2006, maintaining professional and personal connections in my current role as a Research Analyst for the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). As the police force for the capital city, and by far the biggest urban metropolis in the UK, the MPS has substantial organisational experience in policing gangs, serious violence and organised crime. As chapter one outlined, London's 'gang issues' have been recognised in national policy, twenty-five of its thirty-two Local Authorities formed part of the Government's *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* programme (EGYV), accounting for over half of the 'gang affected' areas in England and Wales (HM Government 2015).

This study focuses on the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) organisational response to gangs. The MPS is a vast organisation with some 45,000 employees (MPS 2017). It is split into thirty-two borough commands and a range of specialist directorates. Because of the scale of the MPS, the varying degrees of autonomy and discretion of boroughs, and the diversity of the capital it polices, it might also be viewed as thirty-two separate police forces. Rates of all types of crime vary considerably across London, both between and within boroughs. This makes MPS wide research particularly challenging, but also highlights a key question within my research as to whether a centrally configured mapping of the gang is feasible for a phenomenon that may be strongly influenced by the local environment (Fraser & Hagedorn 2016).

Research is focused on the policing response to gangs since the creation of Trident Gang Crime Command in 2012 and the subsequent attempts at a standardised pan-London approach. The setting also allows for a historical interpretation of the evolution of gang policing over a period in which policy attentions on the area have been reasonably constant.

Research Design: A Journey

A research design is a framework within which to organise the key components of the study; research questions, methods, sampling process and theory (Robson 2011). The research design was flexible; constantly adapted and evolved over the course of the research, with all of the key components 'swirling around in a decision space' well into the process (Grady & Wallston 1988: 12).

Chopping & Changing: Lessons Learned

Evolution is a key theme within the thesis, both in terms of the changing perceptions of gangs in London and the policing response. The theme can be extended to the methodological orientation of the thesis, which has changed significantly over the course of its construction. My research focus changed significantly over the course of my studies and the thesis I set out to write in 2011 bears little resemblance to the finished product. The reasons for this are multiple and complex; some are my own doing and some the result of factors beyond my control; changing jobs, professional pressures and the extraordinary and ordinary mundanities of life. The research journey has certainly altered my perception and thinking about the role and interconnectivity of policing, data and research both professional and academic.

My initial research focused on the relationship between violence and the illegal economy in London and progressed to propose an application of Black's (1993) theory of conflict management using multiple sources of police data to explore motivation and dynamics related to violent incidents. A key reason for a change of direction was the inability to access

data of sufficient quality to enable analysis of motivation and situational context. A number of previously highlighted caveats in relation to the use of police data in understanding context of criminal acts were recurrent frustrations (see Hobbs 2013: 5). A paper describing my research in the first year of my doctoral studies alludes to these:

> Where a level of context – or least thematic ordering – is attempted in official analysis, such blanket labelling of violent criminality can have detrimental effects on understanding the true drivers for violence. My employer's current preoccupation with mapping gangs, in tandem with an increasingly performance driven approach to policing, effectively cloaks much conflict in a catch all label – 'gang related' - used to 'explain away' a variety of complex drivers and motivations. Individuals are labelled gang members often based on questionable intelligence and with little more 'evidence' than their age, ethnicity and locality of offending. Such 'net widening' brings with it a multitude of sins too far reaching to discuss here; my point is that whether linked to drugs, territory, respect or revenge; complex and often chaotic disputes often get pared down to simplistic binary relationships in a mappable 'moral space' that gives little consideration to the multifaceted cultural and socio-economic contexts in which they occur (Osborne and Rose 2004 cf. Hobbs 2013: 209)
>
> (Davies 2013)

Acknowledging the problems with feasibility of my original design, I began conducting an exploratory analysis of the police data-sets concerning 'gang-related' activity, finding noticeable differences and inconsistencies in the approach to mapping gangs and gang members across the organisation. From here, my research questions and design changed to focus on highlighting these differences, and understanding the impact on the individuals involved. At this point the approach was fundamentally quantitative and still hampered by the use of data constructed by the police. It became apparent that the story to be told should focus on the processes of constructing that data and the perceptions of those involved.

Final Research Design

The final research design was therefore the result of a combination of pragmatism, planning, and serendipity, as well as stylistic considerations; a mixed methods approach, orientated towards the qualitative paradigm, specifically description, interpretation and theory (Maxwell

1996). The design incorporates a combination of in-depth semi structured interviews, survey data with an emphasis on the qualitative analysis of open ended questions, as well as secondary and primary data sources. Because of my professional position within the environment being analysed, the design allowed for an iterative approach; questions and concepts raised in interviews could be discussed, explored and interpreted with reference to the data that I had at my disposal, both in terms of primary data and secondary documentation. I was also able to follow up or clarify points where necessary. This also allowed for a degree of validity checking, for the survey data, where officer assertions as to process could be compared and contrasted; this is discussed in more detail below.

Restraints on both time and funds meant that whilst there was reasonable compatibility between the elements of my research design – purpose, research questions, conceptual framework and sampling strategy – this was not always optimal. For example, limitations in the sampling strategy are discussed below. The complications elicited by a broad research question and complex organisation meant that a practical balance had to be sought so as to enable the continuation of the project, put succinctly, a 'satisficing strategy' was sought (Simon 1979). As described above, the most fundamental of these shifts has been the move from a quantitative analysis of police data concerning gangs, to qualitative analysis of perceptions and processes concerning the creation and interpretation of police 'gang data'. Perhaps counter intuitively for research where statistical data is prominent in the discussion, I have opted to minimise the presentation of such data within the thesis, partly for stylistic reasons so as not to impact on the narrative flow and partly because it is not the results of the quantification, but rather the *processes behind the quantification* that is the primary topic of interest.

The Researcher's Role: Reflexive Observations

Conducting research within the field in which you work has mixed blessings. The positives are manifest; particularly in gaining access to the opaque realm of specialist policing and (sometimes) seeing through the smoke and mirrors rhetoric of the policy arena, yet practical and ontological complications abound. Just as my research straddles these two entwined institutional environments and the many compartmentalised components within, so my professional career has constituted roles of varying length and levels across both the MPS and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC).

Between 2006 and 2014 I was employed by the MPS in various roles, spending the majority of my time as a researcher and then analyst for Trident, mostly in the period before it became Gang Crime Command. I have since worked as an analyst in central intelligence before leaving to become a Research Analyst for the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime in 2014. Over the course of my time in the MPS I have produced or contributed to almost all of the processes discussed within this thesis; impartiality and complete objectivity as an observer is not something I can claim.

As an 'inside outsider' (Brown 1996: 180) in my day job at MOPAC, I have encountered the whole spectrum of cooperation from police officers. This invariably boils down to the nature and urgency of the data request or meeting, and existence of any previous working relationship. Certainly, I have been in professional situations where I have felt like I was being viewed with suspicion because of my employer (Reiner & Newburn 2008) but generally I have found this to be unproblematic. My professional experience and strategies developed to gain 'buy in' made engagement with my academic research 'hat' on easier that it might otherwise have been. It should also be noted that Brown's 'inside outsider' typology takes on another dimension when one considers the general relationship of civilian police staff to officers themselves, a subject rarely researched (Atkinson 2013; Innes et al. 2005) .

As I am issued with a police email address and police staff identification card, it is possible – without any active deceit – to appear as a member of police staff, which on occasion has smoothed passage in my professional capacity. This has happened unintentionally; I remember sitting in a meeting shortly after having left the MPS for MOPAC, when two former colleagues from Trident walked in and greeted me cheerfully. They proceeded to unleash a flurry of insults directed at my new employer, and the particular project we were meeting to discuss. It was not until the meeting began and introductions were made that they realised I had - in policing parlance - moved 'to the dark side', generating a further flurry of expletives.

The management of dual – or even tripartite – identities, that of a doctoral researcher, a former Trident Analyst and a current MOPAC Analyst – generated some challenging ethical considerations; these were generally negotiated on a situational basis. For instance, presenting at an MPS gangs 'Crimefighters' meeting[13] with my MOPAC hat on, I was not going to announce my additional status as an academic researcher with significant interest in the subject to a room of fifty senior officers. Yet whilst professional discretion and confidentiality protocols mean such events do not feature as sources in this thesis, it would be untrue to say that experiences from them did not shape perceptions or analysis at all. It was sometimes necessary to clearly state where my professional work ended and academic work began; for example, I had a number of meetings where both professional and academic items were being discussed. This never to my knowledge caused any problems, most likely because of my connections with Trident and Central Intelligence and the personal relationships I had developed.

My experiences interviewing officers and analysts were relatively painless; this was due in part to me having previously worked with a number of them on different projects. My 'insider' status, particularly having worked for Trident, seemed to ease the processes

[13] Performance focused pan London meeting for MPS borough gang leads.

considerably, and where I did not know the participants their manager or colleagues did. My Metropolitan Police Staff pass has been of undoubted benefit in gaining physical, unescorted access to police buildings, but also as a signal of reassurance to those I interviewed or whose meetings I attended. I was surprised at how open and forthcoming interviewees were across all aspects, particularly the police officers who were more than happy to share anecdotes and proffer opinions across relatively controversial areas without hesitation. Indeed, counter-intuitively for me, it was the officers rather than the analysts I spoke to that gave deeper consideration to the questions I asked, and in general provided thoughtful and articulate responses.

This is not to say that interviews were without limitations; I had a suspicion that some of the officers I spoke to were promoting a conception of their future role within the organisation. Some phrases and platitudes uttered were very similar between interviewees, however, rather than treating me like a 'tool of management' (Reiner & Newburn 2008) they were very open with their concerns. This may of course simply have been a function of them working closely and having previously discussed many of the interview topics. In the end the adaptations and evolution of gang crime policing became a central theme of the thesis, thus the possible self-promoting narratives were ultimately used to my advantage.

Linked to this, conducting research at a period when the MPS was undergoing significant organisational change created its own challenges. As well as the uncertainty about the future of Trident, continued financial restraint, redundancies and pay freezes had generated an understandably morose atmosphere amongst some. This was advantageous in some ways, as police officers may have been more likely to 'tell it like it is', but is also likely to have influenced some of the opinions presented. On top of the organisational changes were those concerning the wider institutional environment specifically affecting my research subject including changes to government policy and funding around gangs, changes in Mayoral

administration and importantly political party. As with the officers, I sought to incorporate these changes into my study, thus allowing for analysis of external influence *in situ.*

Data Access and Overload

A major advantage of working for MOPAC has been the access to police and internal data and personnel. I was fortunate to maintain a 'gang heavy' portfolio on moving to MOPAC, ensuring connections built during my time in the MPS were maintained and providing the opportunity to develop additional ones. Nevertheless, in the initial stages of my study I experienced some significant difficulties in obtaining data. Due in part to my move from the MPS to MOPAC two years into my research, the complexity and type of data I was requesting, and the workload of those I had requested the extracts from, all caused difficulties.

Ultimately, access problems were mitigated by shifting research focus and concentrating on the data I already had available or could easily access, which was abundant. A common complaint in police research is difficulty in accessing data, I arguably had too much access; researchers have previously noted the information overload the police have experienced (Brodeur & Dupont 2006), and it is fair to say that I was initially over-zealous with my access to the 'Cambrian data explosion' (Lewis 2011); what might be described as a self-generated 'compulsive data demand' (Sheptycki 2004: 10). Although not something I feel particuarly comfortable citing as an impingement to my studies, the sheer wealth of data available to internal police researchers is overwhelming; this has been made more so over the past two years as MPS data management and extraction tools have progressed significantly.

Ethical Issues

The policing of gangs continues to be a contentious, emotive and inflammatory subject – particularly in terms of the relationship between the police minority communities. As Chapter One explained the 'gang' is viewed by many – certainly in London, and particularly post riots - as a pejorative and ethnically loaded term (Williams 2015). Recent tragedies such as Grenfell

Tower, and deaths following police contact coupled with a controversial media approach by the MPS to the 2017 Notting Hill Carnival have caused some to compare the anti-police sentiment among many in the black community as "very close" to conditions before the Broadwater Farm riots in Tottenham (Townsend 2017).

Along with significant issues in police-community relations relating to the policing of gangs, there has been an increased spotlight on more general intelligence orientated policing practices, with recent controversies surrounding the use and behaviour of undercover police officers, as well as the expansion of surveillance powers in the context of Anti-Terrorism policing. Thus, a study which focuses partially on the police use of intelligence in the profiling of gangs might be seen to be a particularly sensitive subject area, and certainly one rife with ethical considerations.

Professional Harm

The avoidance of harm to research participants is a guiding principle of research ethics (David & Sutton 2011). Conducting ethnographic research amongst Scottish police officers and analysts, Atkinson (2013: 73) considered his major ethical responsibility to his research participants to be protection from *professional* harm, a guiding principle I too have applied in this research.

Informed consent was gained from all interviewees, as well as many officers and practitioners I spoke to on a more informal basis. It is recognised however that informed consent may be more to protect the researcher rather than the interviewee, possibly encouraging cavalier use of data (Diener & Crandall 1978). Thus, every care was taken to ensure the anonymity of interviewees was maximised through the use of non-gender specific coding. Respondents to the MOPAC questionnaire were advised their comments may be used in 'additional research', thus not explicitly informing them of my doctoral research focus. This necessitated a weighing up of the available options; they had provided consent for anonymised quotes to be used for

internal analysis and presentation of results, thus their protection from professional harm. I also increased the level of sanitisation placed on their qualitative responses, ensuring that any location specific references were removed or disguised.

Reputational Harm

The reputational harm of agencies and organisations not directly involved but located within my field of enquiry and mentioned by interviewees were considered; although not explicitly raised by any of my participants or those that gave overarching consent to my research, my professional experience and knowledge of the data and issues meant this was a significant cause for concern so references were removed or sanitised based on an ad hoc consideration of any potential harm. Whilst research of this nature will naturally provide critique as to the practices and processes of the institution under the lens of enquiry which is both essential and unavoidable, it also seeks to present a balanced critique which recognises the pressures and difficulties from all sides. Because of the nature of analysis comparing approaches across boroughs, arguably boroughs or local authorities could also be exposed to reputational harm; for this reason, they have been anonymized and aggregated where appropriate.

Data around gang affected boroughs and neighbourhoods is in the public domain, however research has the potential to stigmatise locales already suffering multiple-levels of deprivation as well as poor police -community relations (Aldridge et al. 2011); for this reason, the case study of a gang affected ward was sanitised. The nature of the study also raises questions about potential conflicts of interest between my role as an academic researcher and my role as a colleague or ex colleague to many of those I interviewed. Certainly, this led to a small number of difficult decisions and delicate judgements about what to include or exclude when actions or opinions of a more controversial nature where put forward; this was again handled on a case-by-case basis. For much of the discussion around the Matrix, OCGM and GRITS, information provided was cross referenced with open sources; and the discussion

of more specific covert tactics not in the public domain has been avoided (Brodeur & Dupont 2006: 23).

Methods

The study draws on a wide range of data sources from both inside and outside the MPS, (e.g. in-depth interviews, survey responses, official police generated data and official documents) to both explain, elucidate and corroborate with reference to the research questions, allowing for data triangulation (Denzin 1988).

Interviews

I interviewed a total of nineteen police officers and analysts. Given the size and scale of the MPS and related Local Authority structures, sampling was always going to suffer issues with representativeness. Because the key mechanisms for understanding gangs in the MPS are generally populated and maintained by analytical staff centrally, and because the survey captures only officer views at the local level, I opted to over-represent analysts in my participant sample. A small sample of Local Authority Analysts was added during the course of the research as it became clear that due to organisational restructuring they were playing a significant role in the processes shaping the MPS understanding of gangs; essentially - as this thesis argues - proxy police analysts.

Participant selection was a mixed process; given that I had previously worked in two of the units I sought interviewees from, and a number of individuals I knew both professionally and personally were still working within them. For some ranks (front line Trident officers) I was able to employ a snowball sampling technique, asking officers I knew to suggest people I should approach. A possible drawback of this approach is the possibility that officers were selected by their managers because they could be trusted to toe the organisational line; however, only four officers were selected this way and analysis indicates sufficient differences in opinion and perception.

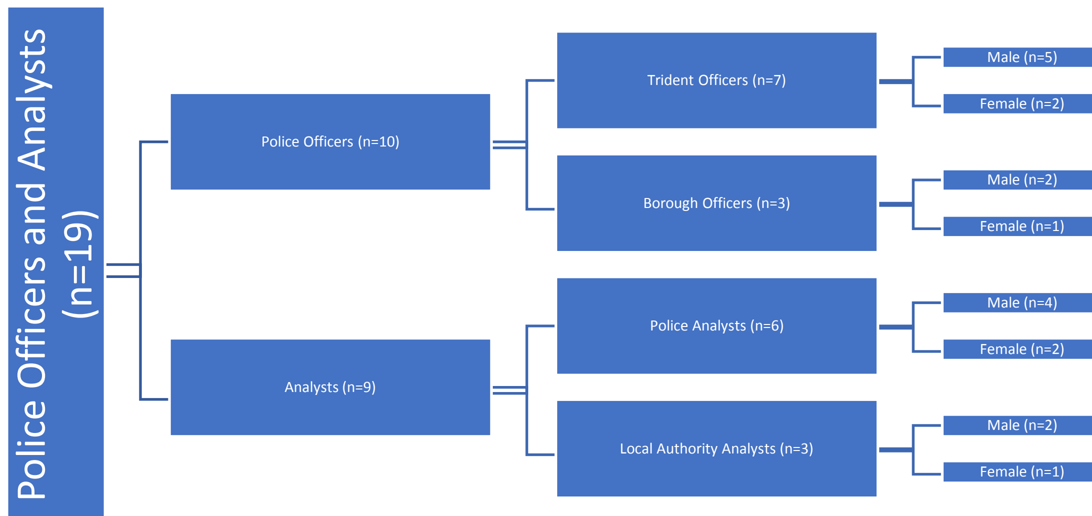

Figure 3: Breakdown of Interviewees

I opted to seek out participants with developed experience of policing in 'gang-focused' roles; whilst increasing the chances of 'institutionalisation' or subject fatigue (Reiner & Newburn 2008), this allowed for greater consideration of the changing nature of organisational processes and perceptions of gangs and the nature of gang activity. All but one of the police analysts were currently employed within MPS central intelligence and all had previous experience of working on borough and/or specialist roles relating to the policing of gangs; two were 'higher' analysts (team leaders). For police officers, participants were purposely selected across a range of ranks, with representation at every level from Superintendent to PC. Ages of interviewees ranged from c.25 to c.60; all except one officer having at least five-years' experience.

Many of the discussions were quite animated, and where possible I sought to include the dynamics, gestures and emphasis of those I was interviewing, adding to the interpretation and sometimes creating data of its own (Tilley 2003). Klein (1997: 39) provides an illuminating account of his experience of interviewing police officers - my experiences match his:

> …respondents were, by and large, being thoughtful. They quickly became involved in the definitional issue and understood its importance. They became research informants as well as mere respondents.

Interviews focused on four overlapping themes, derived from professional experience and the substantial review of extant literature detailed in the previous chapter; the participant's perceptions and understandings of what constitutes a 'gang' and gang related criminality; their views on how gang and individual harm is identified and quantified within the MPS; their experience of how this information is communicated within the MPS and the influence of data from external organisations on this process. Interviewees were also encouraged to consider how their views might have evolved over time, and the extent to which this may have been shaped by changing realities on the ground. Interview duration varied between one and two hours, and all were digitally recorded. Notes were also taken during interviews, and immediately afterwards to record instant impressions and act as guidance for subsequent transcription; the majority of interviews were fully transcribed, although particular segments warranted only selective transcription, an iterative process as emergent themes began to solidify (Gibbs 2008). Transcriptions ranged between 3222 and 8450 words. Interview data was anonymized and codes applied in random numerical order; for the local officer case study pseudonyms were applied using a random naming convention to aid narrative flow. Analysis was conducted both manually using NVivo.

Police Practitioner Survey

My research also draws on data from an internal joint MOPAC and MPS survey of police practitioners with knowledge and experience of their local gangs Matrix. The survey was commissioned to gain a clearer understanding of local processes, understanding and use of the MPS Matrix, and to identify areas where improvements could be made. Technically a secondary source, the survey was designed and disseminated by me; on agreement with my research manager, I was able to build in questions pertinent to my academic research that

would also be of value to MOPAC and the MPS, in line with the 'temporary research questions' methodology outlined by Robson (2011). This was essentially an additional data source that presented itself at what had seemed like an opportune time. However, due to delays in implementation and eliciting sufficient response rates it actually entailed a risky strategy, albeit one that eventually delivered the benefits first anticipated.

The survey was developed over a period of six months and was informed by my professional and academic knowledge of both the Matrix and gang policing more generally, as well as the interviews I was conducting for my academic research. Questions focused on four key themes: gang defining features and change over time; perceptions of the MPS definition of the gang; general perceptions of the validity, use and impact of the Matrix and perceptions of the contribution of internal and external information sharing. Feedback on drafts of the survey was provided by a range of practitioners including the Superintendent in charge of gang policing for Trident, the lead MPS analyst for the Matrix, MOPAC's policy lead for gangs, the head of research for MOPAC and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime. In addition, the survey was tested by several staff members within MOPAC.

The use of survey data in an organisation as complex as the MPS enables a relatively efficient method of data capture. This is especially true in the area of gang policing, where thirty-two boroughs will operate in different ways, each with their own issues and concerns. The fact that the survey was targeted at those with a direct professional interest in gangs and youth violence was also beneficial, whilst the relative anonymity allowed for the possibility of more honest responses. The survey recipients were instructed to complete it by their local senior management, guaranteeing a reasonable response level. Due to the method of dissemination and the aforementioned complexities in local organisational structure, a total response rate could not be calculated. Valid responses are present for twenty-eight of the thirty-two MPS boroughs (88 per cent).

In order to minimise length and maximise anonymity, the survey did not request demographic information. The survey contained internal routing to allow for technical questions to be directed at specific roles, including Gangs Matrix Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) for each borough, meaning that the response rate varies between questions. For the purposes of this thesis, the survey generated 92 valid responses for questions relating to gang features and perceived change and 80 valid responses for all other questions. Aimed at practitioners rather than management, 83 per cent of respondents were either constables (57%; n=52) or Sergeants (25%; n=23), with the remainder Detective Inspector (n=12) or Detective Chief Inspector rank (n=4).

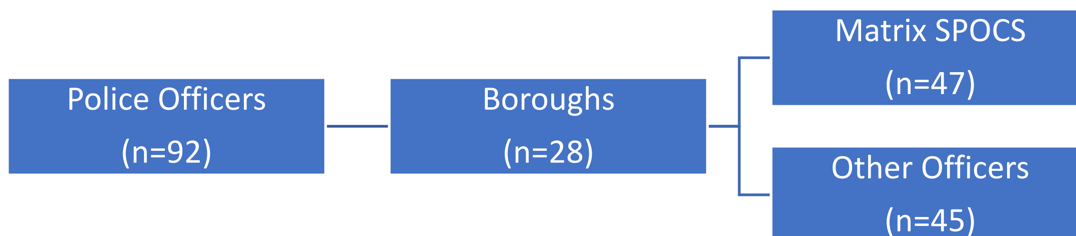

Figure 4: Breakdown of survey respondents

Survey data also has distinct drawbacks; the proliferation of the methodology across all fields of research from marketing and political polling to academia and professional environments has contributed to potential 'survey overkill' (Robson 2011). In the policing context, the combination of an abundance of surveys, computer-based training packages and general digital bureaucracy is likely to impact response rates.

It is recognised that responses will not necessarily reflect the real-world actions and beliefs of those surveyed; this is explored in the analysis via triangulation with police data. This may be a particular problem in the rigid hierarchical structure of policing, and all the more so when the surveyor is the body charged with holding the MPS to account. However, the increasing disillusionment of many police officers means they are more willing to speak the truth and

less fearful of repercussions.[14] Survey responses were anonymized and codes applied in random numerical order.

Observation / Field notes

Field notes and observations were therefore made, whether on my phone, my work notebook or simply on scraps of paper. Often they would be *aide memoires* to follow up an area which sparked academically orientated interest - as Katz & Webb (2003: 41) describe, 'in a sense, these notes served as potential hypotheses to be tested'; similarly, I often incorporated any new information in future interviews or ran further exploratory data analysis.

Police Data

Quantitative Data

In terms of the presentation of quantitative data I was hampered by the differential between the access to information and the data that I could legitimately publish without breaching data protection rules; this is particularly true of the Matrix section where one might expect a multitude of tables, I have instead presented key findings from the analysis within the text. This has its own benefits, hopefully maintaining the narrative flow whilst not detracting from substance or asking the reader to refer to complex statistical tables. Sanitised versions of selected statistics can be requested and supplied at the discretion of the author. The main police data sources utilised were:

- **The MPS Gangs Matrix**: A snapshot of the Matrix was extracted for every month within a four-year period (June 2013 to May 2017)
- **GRITS**: 2015 data extracted from MPS
- **CRIS**: Various data extractions for 'gang flagged' and Matrix scoring incidents

[14] Personal Communication with the analyst in charge of Public Attitudes Survey (PAS) and User Satisfaction Survey (USS).

All other police data reflects secondary analytical products rather than primary data. Some Matrix analysis was completed in SPSS, the majority of analysis was conducted using Excel.

Official Documents

The study utilised official documents produced either by Trident, Boroughs, central intelligence or the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime. These included the Gang's Operating Model, various internal documents relating to the process and use of mechanisms such as the Gang Matrix, Gang Related Incident Tracking System and Organised Crime Group Mapping. Further, some PowerPoint presentations, strategic and tactical assessments were included. For obvious security and data handling reasons, some internal documents are excluded from the references section, and appropriate care was taken in the handling of information and data with the potential to compromise ongoing investigations.

Analytical Procedures

The qualitative analysis that informs the majority of the findings in this thesis was conducted using NVivo data analysis software. This allowed for interviews and survey responses to be organised into key themes categories, concepts and ideas, and enabled coding and cross fertilisation of themes and subsequent emergent themes. Whilst as described for my interviews, major themes and areas of investigation had already been identified from my professional experience and literature review, the method of analysis allowed for an inductive approach where new themes could be identified. Elements of structure were always apparent; for example, the organisational structure of intelligence and operational policing provided its own natural ordering of many of the thematic elements.

Exploration and analysis of quantitative data was carried out using SPSS v24 and Microsoft Excel. Again, findings from my qualitative research and the literature around the construction of statistics laid out useful caveats and boundaries as to what was possible, feasible and useful in quantitative terms.

Inherent Bias and Subjectivity

Engaging in academic research in the field in which I work professionally raises obvious questions about subjectivity and inherent bias (see, for example, Sheptycki 1994). Whilst my professional experience matches the subject of enquiry, and bias is certainly possible, the advantages of conducting 'insider' research outweighs these concerns. Being aware of the possibility of bias encouraged me to take steps to avoid it. The research design and framework for analysis was chosen to provide a representative view of perceptions across roles.

Internal and External Validity

Elements of interview data could be triangulated to gauge the validity of the information elicited but given my experience in the field and the nature of the subject area this was not usually deemed necessary; moreover, the research questions were to a great extent designed to elicit feelings and perceptions rather than factual accounts. However, there existed significant likelihood – particularly within the survey data, conducted as it was as part of an internal audit of process – that officers would simply describe what they understood the process to be rather than that which actually occurred. Survey respondents do not always do what they say they do (Erwin 2001) and attitudes and behaviours do not always correspond. Analyses of responses indicated discernible variance in process which in turn suggested good internal validity.

Summary

The thesis utilises a mixed-methods, data driven approach drawing on police and partnership data from a number of sources, as well as general observation and experience in the policing field, facilitating focus on process and perception. Limitations include the absence of 'voice' from several roles involved in the process of policing gangs; the interview sample cannot claim to be fully representative. In hindsight, the interview sample would have included more local officers.

Chapter Four: Mapping Gangs and Risk from the Centre

Spanning central, specialist and local policing functions, the processes by which gang criminality is mapped and policed are complex and far from uniform, as will be demonstrated across the following chapters. However, central oversight and control is integral to the current organisational dynamics of the Metropolitan Police Service (James 2014) as the MPS seeks to map gang harm and manage risk from the centre via its Control Infrastructure. The intelligence-led processes and mechanisms designed to do this are the focus of this chapter. Part one outlines the organisational processes for identifying and mapping gang members, gangs and links to organised crime in the MPS, considers the primary police indicators of gang membership and criminality, and how these inform key mechanisms for assessment of harm and risk in gang policing. Part two explores perceptions of the process from the perspective of the intelligence analysts who scan and interpret raw intelligence and crime data, transforming it into analytical product to direct police responses (Ratcliffe 2010), as well as the officers that utilise it. Descriptions of the process are also informed by professional experience.

Part One: Gangs as an Organisational Priority

Identified as a significant threat to London's safety, gangs have been a consistent theme of MPS Control Strategy[15] since they were first systematically mapped in 2004, as Chapter One described. Consequently, the identification and monitoring of gang related harm – primarily in the form of violence – has been part of operational practice for over a decade. However,

[15] The MPS's operational priorities and response as informed by 'regular assessments of the risks to London's safety, assessed against threat, vulnerability and harm' (MPS 2017: 8).

the processes by which this is done have developed considerably from the ad-hoc surveys of local understanding which marked the first forays into gang mapping (MPS 2006).

Change and evolution are recurrent themes in this thesis, and the findings in this chapter are presented against the backdrop of the wider government policy turn to gangs and the significant organisational changes in the MPS brought about by the financial crisis. Analysts who had worked in the unit for a long time recalled a distinct change in focus towards the risk assessment of violence, gangs and public order following the 2011 riots, one describing an 'almost fearful response'. A senior Trident officer recalls the organisational shift in priority:

> The key bit for me was post 2011 riots; we had started working up the gang's piece but there wasn't really the appetite MPS wide as there was a lot of things already existing such as Trident and borough work (OFF1)

At the same time, the MPS was undergoing the first stage of a massive restructuring program necessitated by the Government's 2010 spending review. Known internally as Met Change, the programme sought delivered £769.4m of savings of the four-year period to prepare for the austerity driven 20 per cent cut in Government funding (HMIC 2013). The transformation project incorporated a major change within the control infrastructure, including the centralisation of all analytical resource.[16]

Central Oversight, Central Decision Making

The sheer volume of criminal activity in London makes prioritisation of resource a fundamental aspect of modern policing, and never more so than in the current economic climate. The centralisation of analytical and intelligence resource, whilst clearly driven by the need for savings, was nevertheless presented as a positive change which would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the process; an internal memo sold the changes as bringing

[16] This took place over several stages, beginning in 2013 the centralisation of area level intelligence hubs in early 2017 marked the final stage. The changes spanned the period I was researching this thesis.

‘smarter tasking, improved coordination and clearer governance’ (de Brunner 2013). The key areas of control infrastructure are:

- **Met Command and Control** manages first contact with public, handling calls and dispatching resources as appropriate.
- **Met Grip** provides daily oversight and co-ordination of activity across the MPS, with emphasis on flexibility.
- **Met Resources** provides central management of resources; duties and event planning.
- **Met Intelligence** - provides a single service for the delivery and management of crime related intelligence products and intelligence support.
- **Met Tasking** reviews, coordinates and prioritises pre-planned police activity.

Whilst all the above areas impact on the policing of gangs in London,[17] and will have some impact on the construction of gang crime data, this thesis focuses on the two areas which have the most influence on how gangs are understood within the organisation; Tasking and Intelligence. The intelligence-led tasking process is structured so that theoretically, the upper echelons of the police hierarchy have complete oversight of current and emerging risks enabling them to direct corporate resources and assets appropriately. Tasking, performance and co-ordination occurs at distinct levels: corporate, specialist, area and local, with the level of detail increasing as focus becomes more localised.

The tactical assessments that inform the tasking process focus on short-term issues in relation to crime trends, operations, investigations, and emerging issues, making recommendations for both proactive targeting or intelligence development. Tasking takes place in congruence with an array of additional oversight boards, panels and performance and intelligence

[17] For example, Met Resources might instigate abstractions from local gang units to deal with a major incident elsewhere in London; Command and Control will field calls from the public relating to believed gang fights; see Meehan (2000) for a view on this process from a US perspective.

meetings at all levels. Gang tasking will typically consist of the following representations of the current situation:

- The most harmful gangs and current police activity against them.
- The most violent gang members and current police activity against them.
- Emerging tensions or ongoing disputes between gangs.
- Short and long term violent crime trends, including ‘gang related’ and ‘proxy’ performance measures.[18]
- Recommendations for intelligence development and/or proactivity against any of the above.

In the world of gang policing, Met Intelligence is responsible for producing the array of analytical product that informs the tasking process at all levels, as well as developing further analytical product to support taskings. This chapter presents an exploration of the practitioner perceptions of the processes by which these products are created. As one of the primary customers of the intelligence products described below, Trident officer perceptions are also explored.

Documenting Gang Members

The following section highlights the primary pathways by which an individual can become a ‘documented’ gang member on MPS systems, that is raw intelligence or information indicating gang membership is actioned, and that individual is then identified as a gang member within the range of analytical products that this chapter describes. A gang member is defined as:

> someone who has been identified as being a member of a gang and this is corroborated by intelligence from more than one source (e.g. police, partner agencies or community intelligence) (MOPAC 2014: 36)

[18] Including measures such as ‘Non-domestic abuse related Knife Crime with injury where the victim is aged under 25’.

Theoretically, police intelligence is one of a battery of sources from which gang membership can be identified. Contrary to popular perception, the MPS does not have a definitive list of documented gang members in London, instead there are a variety of sources and mechanisms which can indicate gang membership, held both centrally and locally. Analysts will generally document gang membership to inform an analytical product, whether a 'quick time' intelligence briefing, or a developed piece such as Social Network Analysis or a gang or individual intelligence profile. Resourcing issues mean police officers are increasingly undertaking their own research, providing another avenue for documenting gang members discussed in greater deal in chapter six. At face value, the process of determining whether someone is a gang member appears relatively uniform and uncomplicated; officers or analysts must simply ensure that there are at least two intelligence sources indicating gang membership. However, as the next section will demonstrate, this process offers plenty of room for subjective interpretation.

Police Intelligence

The MPS pan-London criminal intelligence[19] database, CRIMINT contains 'raw' information reports and intelligence records linked to individuals, addresses or vehicles. The graded intelligence can be entered by anyone working for the Metropolitan Police as well as some partner agencies. Whilst there is a quality assurance process for newly added CRIMINT logs, the sheer volume of intelligence, coupled with the inherent difficulties of corroboration means extreme variations in quality.

CRIMINT is the widest and most unrefined source of information on all aspects of gang intelligence; from believed affiliations and associations, future and past criminality to tensions and disputes. It is usually the first port of call when any kind of research or analysis is

[19] The Authorised Professional Practice guidance defines intelligence as: "'collected information that has been delivered for action' (www.app.college.police.uk)" (HMIC 2015: 3); essentially information that had been evaluated to assess it's worth.

conducted, whether by officers or police staff. Reports may be used to indicate gang affiliation or association based on the strength and date of the intelligence. The process is heavily reliant on the judgement of the analyst in assessing whether an individual is a gang member. Sources of intelligence range from routine collection by police such as officer observations (X seen with Y), or that collected in the course of police duties (Stop & Search/Account, Warrants, Property Searches). Intelligence may also be information volunteered by the public, or specifically tasked from overt or covert sources (CHIS - Covert Human Intelligence Sources, phone data, Automated Number Plater Readers etc.).

CRIMINT is essentially a vestibule in which a significant amount of process, developed and raw intelligence around gang membership sits ready for extraction. The process of CRIMINT management means that intelligence is often duplicated – and thus reinforced - through the inclusion of developed intelligence products (e.g. gang profiles or Social Network Analysis). Duplicated, unsubstantiated or poor intelligence has the potential to develop false pertinence through constant recycling and citing, as one analyst noted:

> One intelligence log that someone is in a gang can be quite dangerous because that can lead to numerous other intelligence reports putting him in a gang… It's never easy, it's quite subjective and it is very difficult to identify who is in gangs in London (AN1)

There are many ways an individual can become gang 'documented', and the analyst holds significant power in doing this. For example, an analyst may be tasked with identifying members of a particular gang. He or she may infer that because X was seen with Y, and another log says that Y is a member or Z gang, that X is also a member of Z gang, caveating the inference, but nonetheless creating further 'evidence' of believed affiliation on the system. Whilst many analysts (and officers) were noticeably precise in their criteria for associating *and committing* crime together for the gang label to applied, several were less prescriptive, illustrating the potential for net widening through association:

> They'd be stopped with gang members and they would go on the system, normally there'd be a CRIMINT ... with everybody's name on it (AN6)

Another suggested that the type of criminal activity that they are involved in may determine their documentation as a gang member on the system, noting the difficulties experienced in accurately establishing involvement:

> I'm not sure sometimes people appreciate; it is not that easy to know who is in gangs in London. It's more built up on various things like CRIMINT and crimes that they are involved in. No one walks around with a sign on his head (AN3)

Individuals may also be identified as gang members on other police systems, which may or may not be transferred to CRIMINT. For example, a crime report or MERLIN[20] record might contain indications that an individual is gang associated. Theoretically, all intelligence received should be recorded on CRIMINT, colloquially referred to as 'the box'. Every analyst has experienced the frustration of an officer telling them fresh and detailed information about something they have recently researched. In practice, this does not always occur due to practicalities, or proclivities of those handling the intelligence. Sometimes this might be a defiant stand against the 'new policing' (McLaughlin 2007), but most often it is simply a case of the lack of time to do it.

Changing Behaviours

Analysts suggested that changes in gang visibility on the street made it harder for them to document gang members based on officer intelligence. Five years ago, gang members would openly 'claim' allegiance to a specific gang or wear colours known to be associated with it, making it easy for officers to log intelligence recording gang affiliation:

> Gangs were quite happy to wear colours and walk around with bandanas on and openly tell officers they are involved in gangs. There was a lot of crackdown on gangs in 2012. That made it a lot more difficult than it was (AN1)

[20] Merlin is a database that stores information on missing persons or children who have become known to the police for any reason.

Open Source Intelligence

The use of social media as a tool with which to identify gang members was highlighted by many of the practitioners. For one analyst involved in the systematic analysis of music videos, the medium gave a hitherto untapped level of insight into interactions and relationships between gang members, whether criminal or otherwise. He saw the connections that could be identified through non-criminal activity such as music production as a potential tool for explaining criminal collaborations or acts of violence:

> It has given us a different world of interactions; what is happening with gangs, that you wouldn't know that they have a relationship. Let's say for instance with a producer or a broadcaster; they are building very, very important relationships (AN2)

He highlighted the importance of local knowledge to identify individuals appearing in, and deciphering, the local references within the lyrics. In terms of identification and affiliation, views were again mixed. One analyst believed that appearing in a gang video did not in itself indicate gang membership, criminality or warrant police attentions:

> I think there were people that were involved with gangs and would be in music videos and hanging out having a laugh, but they wouldn't really be what I'd look at as members (AN6)

However, she suggested that these individuals would never-the-less be added to police indices, becoming part of the gang intelligence landscape. There were mixed views on the impact of police defined gang association on the individuals concerned, whilst some similarly assumed an increase in police attentions, others had more confidence in officers understanding the analytical process:

> Having a person on my database it doesn't mean that that person is going to be stigmatised in society; this is one of the fears - that I am going to look at this young person and they're going to be flagged as a gang member and that has not been necessarily the case, if I just take a caveat of saying this is my grade of confidence by which I'm saying this or that (AN2)

The myriad of ways both in which individuals can be presented as gang associated on the system, and in how these products are consumed or utilised by officers, precludes any robust assessment of impact of generalised gang association. However, this is not the case for the primary mechanism for monitoring violent gang members, the Gangs Matrix, which is designed to generate police action.

Prioritising Violent Gang Members: The Gangs Matrix

The Gangs Matrix is widely perceived within the police to be the definitive dynamic database of all gang members in London. This misinterpretation has extended outside the MPS, following publicization of the Matrix via a series of media reports in 2014 (The Evening Standard 2014). Although central intelligence has overall responsibility and oversight of the Matrix, it is actually a collection of locally managed and maintained matrices intended to identify and direct resource to the *most violent* gang associated individuals. The localised management is contrary to the sweeping centralisation of analytical and intelligence resources described in this chapter and may explain some of the confusion; the logic behind local management is sound – boroughs will understand their gang problems best, and with partnership input, are best situated to identify their most harmful gang members. The processes and understanding of the Matrix at a local level are explored in depth in Chapter Six; the following section focuses on the central use and functionality of the Matrix as an intelligence tool fundamental to gang policing.

The Matrix scores and ranks violent gang members based on recent violent and sexual crime reports and intelligence.[21] Scoring for offending is automated; crime reports are matched to individuals on a daily basis. The necessarily dynamic nature of the scoring process means that

[21] The exact scoring process is confidential but see Tower Hamlets (2015: 24) for a precis. Individuals are categorised into a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) categories which broadly denotes their harm/risk which determines the appropriate level of police and partnership response (MOPAC 2016d).

it is based on suspected rather than proven offending, with scores weighted dependent on when the offence was committed and whether the individual was listed as a suspect or charged with the offence, thus creating the possibility that higher scores merely represent the 'usual suspects' of police attention.

A list of potential names for inclusion based on association via the Crime Reporting Information System (CRIS) is also automatically generated centrally and disseminated to each borough. It is up to the borough to decide whether or not to include these suggestions on the Matrix, drawing elements of gang member identification out of the purview of analysts and well into the realms of predictive policing. Boroughs are responsible for scanning and updating intelligence scores on individuals locally. The Matrix is used centrally and by Trident as a performance management tool; boroughs are encouraged to utilise Judicial Restrictions against Matrix nominals wherever possible and are subject to intermittent drives to get greater proportions of individuals in custody.

Central Oversight and Use

The thirty-two local matrices are combined on a daily basis, and general oversight, queries and updates restricted by the capacity of the single centrally located analyst. All central intelligence analysts have access to the Matrix and it is used as the primary mechanism for confirming gang affiliation and determining whether incidents are elevated or prioritised across a range of regular intelligence products. The Matrix has recently been aligned with the mechanism for tracking the relative harm and risk of whole gangs, carried out centrally via GRITS (described below), making the local process of deciding who goes onto the Matrix even more important to the centrally collated picture. This caused frustration among some analysts who saw the true extent of gang criminality as being restricted by rigid delineation of gang affiliation:

> The amount of times we have had people fatally stabbed who we know are not on the Gangs Matrix but they've got associates that are gang members and there is intel suggesting that that person was involved in drug dealing so you think well, they might not be on the matrix but they obviously have some kind of gang association whether it be from drug dealing or whatever… it doesn't actually include the people who don't actually get their hands dirty. Um, so I don't think we get it right (AN3)

Thus, the Matrix has become the default mechanism for establishing gang membership despite the very open criteria for selection, which includes clearly stipulated designation of identification by association. It is thoroughly embedded in operational practice, taking locally generated decisions about gang affiliation (and harm) and inserting them in the central intelligence cycle as fact.

External Dissemination

The centrally collated Matrix is disseminated to a number of specialist units and external organisations on a regular basis, including the prison estate[22] and probation services. It also used to inform partner led intervention and diversion programmes. Confusion as to what the Matrix is and misunderstanding as to how it is collated is therefore likely to extend to external agencies.

Documenting Gang Crime and Prioritising Gangs

Gang Definition

The majority of analysts or officers interviewed were not particularly *au fait* with the official definition of the gang; the general gist was well understood but it was not something that was regularly referred to. Echoing the findings of Katz (2003) on the construction of gang statistics, the definition of a gang was of less relevance than whether an individual was in a gang or not. That is, the 'gang' an individual is linked to was not routinely deciphered to check it was 'a

[22] Setty et al. (2014: 11) suggest the Matrix is disseminated to over 80 prison establishments.

gang'. For analysts this was mainly because the gangs being dealt with had longevity; they were 'known' entities, embedded in the system.

'Gang Related' Crime Reports

The MPS has utilised a 'gang related' flag on its crime reports for ten years. The intention of the flag is to enable identification of risk, and measurement of scale and impact of gang crime in London (Hales & Muir 2007). The flag is currently used to present a public representation of the scale of gang crime across London via the MOPAC gang dashboard,[23] and has been used internally as both a performance indicator and localised tool for mapping gang related activity. Its public representation as a straightforward determinant of 'gang activity' is demonstrated in DAC Mackey's description:

> The other thing given the challenges that we have had around gangs over the years is the MPS actually has what we call a gang flag. In a dispute over parking or something like that but where they think there are some gang tensions, they can flag it, so we have a flagging system as well. We can pick up everything from, as I say, those serious crimes all the way through to a dispute over housing or something that the local authority highlights to us and we can flag it in those ways (Police and Crime Committee 2015)

Gang flags do not attribute offending to a specific gang, but merely denote a believed gang link to recorded crime. The guidance for the application of a gang flag is very much open to interpretation and has the potential to cast the net widely – particularly in stipulating that 'any individual' can designate an event 'gang related':

> Any Gang-related crimes or crime-related incidents are such events where any individual believes that there is a link to the activities of a gang or gangs (MPS 2015)

Notably, the definition does not make clear whether the incident is *motivated* by gang involvement; that is, was the genesis in gang motivation, interest, or specific circumstances which enhance the status or function of the gang? The reason for this is that – as later parts

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[23] Dashboard is publicly available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/crime%20/gangs-dashboard

of this thesis will show - motivation is extremely hard to identify, particularly as gang members act individually as well as in the interests of the gang, a conundrum long identified in gang literature (Kane 1992; Maxson et al. 2002).

Interestingly, the Homicide Command (SCO1) do make the distinction in their internal databases, allowing for 'gang linked' and 'gang motivated' thematic descriptors. These do not always match with the presence of a gang flag on CRIS (Davies 2010), illustrative of the fundamental difficulties in mapping such activities. The 'gang related' label may unfairly widen the net for gang related crime whilst the 'gang motivated' label may encourage an underestimation or denial of the problem and adds a further layer of subjectivity in identifying motive. Whilst both approaches have their merits, they are heavily reliant on a robust and fair procedure for identifying and labelling individuals as gang members in the first place. An analyst summed up the confusion these distinctions engender:

> People don't really know when to put on the Gang flag and when not to. Like if a gang member is arrested with a knife and they put a gang flag on that is gang-related but it's not *gang related* (AN6)

Disregarding the motivated/related conundrum, gang flags were viewed as a poor unreliable gauge of gang offending due to the inconsistency in their application across boroughs. As with the Matrix, this partly relates to a lack of central oversight, accentuated with the disbanding of Central Crime Management Unit (CMU), who had previously quality assured CRIS flagging decisions. Although issues around subjectivity existed, there was at least a relatively consistent application as the flagging was authorised by a handful of individuals. Gang flags can now be added by investigating officers, and other individuals with sufficient rights - including some local authority analysts - meaning local policy, structure and resourcing can also impact application, as the Head of Community Safety for Hackney explains:

> Hackney acknowledged it had a problem with gangs in 2009, and developed a very strong partnership approach to it, which included the integrated Gangs Unit, and with that a range of professionals who are able to readily recognise when we have a gang crime. So [with] gang flagged crime we come out very high in that, and I suppose my narrative on that would be around the fact that we understand when we have got gang crimes, hence the numbers that are there were very accurate in understanding what our problem is in Hackney (MOPAC 2016c)

The different working practices across boroughs and units makes developing a pan-London overview based on such measures difficult; one analyst demonstrated how flag application may also be influenced by organisational silos, highlighting what she saw as underuse by specialist sexual crime investigators:

> I don't think they're accurate. So, in the CSE [Child Sexual Exploitation] world I looked at this and I think that 6 per cent of CSE reports have some kind of gang element. We know this to be higher from speaking to partnership agencies and officers in the case. We know it is completely underused and we did a rape profile recently, so that had gang flags at 0.6 per cent and when speaking to officers again they said it was a lot higher. When speaking to [Sexual crime investigation] officers they said that they don't feel it's their responsibility to go through and put the gang flag on (AN3)

This observation also illustrates the self-reinforcing power of the gang flag; the organisational focus on a singular but clearly hard to define determinant. There are no flags for crimes related to organised crime or criminal networks, or to indicate if an incident might be indicating a link to drug distribution. More pertinently, there is no flag for the 'peer group' offending, which the academic experts brought in to assess the gang problem a decade earlier had highlighted as the genesis for the majority of group-orientated offending (MPS 2006).

Documenting Gangs

The MPS also maps the offending of specific gangs through the Gang Related Incident Tracking System (GRITS). Like the Matrix, it is designed to indicate relative harm of gangs in London, enable the strategic monitoring of gang related tensions and ensure resource is directed

appropriately. Centrally controlled, it also seeks to address issues of inconsistency in gang flagged crime reports, allowing for an ostensibly more objective indicator of prevalence and severity of offending across London.

Focusing only on serious violence, robbery, drug trafficking and serious sexual offending[24], it is populated through a daily intelligence and crime scanning process which also informs a range of other analytical products. Intelligence and crime scanning is a fundamental facet of an intelligence led policing approach, and one that has gained significant momentum as the demand for quantitative assessment of risk grows. Every day, three times a day, a cadre of analysts scour intelligence logs and crime reports for notable incidents or intelligence that may present an increased threat or emerging issue, with specialist focus across the crime types that fall into the current control priorities. Violence based tension assessments are singular in their focus; 'was it gang related?'.

Incidents are plucked from police systems and reviewed to ascertain if they meet specific criteria which designates them 'of interest' based on the age, ethnicity and area in which the incident takes place. Should they meet the stipulated requirements for inclusion, further research is conducted to ascertain any gang links to either victim or suspect (if one has been identified). The research entails an additional trawl of intelligence systems, with loosely laid out (and enforced) rules relating to the timeliness and strength of the intelligence. The final decision for inclusion on GRITS or the range of other intelligence documents scanning informs (see below) lies with the Higher intelligence analysts. [25]

[24] The following crime types are currently recorded on GRITS: Grievous Bodily Harm, Firearms, Arson, Murder, Attempted Murder, Actual Bodily Harm, Rape, Sexual Assault, Harassment, Personal Robbery, Commercial Robbery, Affray/Violent Disorder, Common Assault, Theft, Drug Trafficking, Blackmail, Aggravated Burglary, Criminal Damage, Offensive Weapon, False Imprisonment, Residential Burglary and Kidnap and Threats to Life (Leinfelt & Rostami 2012: 244).

[25] The majority of civilian intelligence staff are researcher and analyst grades, there are six higher intelligence analysts and central intelligence is overseen by one senior intelligence analyst.

This main advantage of this approach in that it is not influenced by local policies on gang flagging; GRITS is constructed and maintained within central intelligence and requires no primary input from officers or local boroughs. Gangs are scored and ranked via a weighted system based on the average sentence for any given offence to provide a monthly overview which informs Central, Trident and local tasking; scores are not communicated extensively outside of this process and the level of understanding of the scoring process – and the existence of the tool - is limited. GRITS can also be useful in monitoring violence between gangs. However, the proportion of incidents where gang affiliation is identified for both victim and perpetrator is small; in 2015 this equated to just five per cent of GRITS incidents.[26]

However, the labelling of incidents based on any identifiable gang link generates a net widening effect. For example, looking at firearms discharges over a given period,[27] 44 per cent are recorded as gang related when using a combination of GRITS and CRIS gang flagging; just using CRIS lowers the 'gang related' proportion to just 13 per cent of incidents. Similarly, for stabbings, 26 per cent are recorded as gang related when using both indicators, but only 11 per cent when just using CRIS.[28] It may be that the wider figure is more representative of the true prevalence of gang related offending; alternatively, it is possible that the determined application of the gang label forces violent incidents into the gang field merely by association based on intelligence of limited quality. Either way, the process tells us little more about the genesis of the violence, whilst allowing for the presentation of a greater or lesser gang problem dependent on the proclivities of the actors controlling the data.

Unlike (some) CRIS gang flags, GRITS is not retrospectively updated; once an incident is added to the tracker, it is indelible fact. The circumstances of the incident and the suspects may

[26] 126 of 2540 incidents identified in 2015 had named gang as perpetrator and victim (MPS GRITS database).
[27] Lethal Barrelled discharges between 17/06/2016-16/06/2017 (Internal MPS Performance data)
[28] Non-domestic Knife Crime with Injury, Victim Under 25 between 17/06/2016-16/06/2017 (Internal MPS Performance data)

change markedly after the initial classification; this is problematic as crimes are generally classified as being more serious initially before being adjusted downwards when more facts come to light, leading to a possible amplification of seriousness.

Although measures are taken to avoid the system simply being a reflection of current enforcement activity, the nature of this kind of tracking means that it will inevitably reflect not just those gangs most targeted by the police but also those individuals most likely to get caught offending, raising questions about the veracity of the ranking approach, potentially reinforcing perceptions of the 'usual suspects'.

Mapping Gang Harm

The fluid nature of gangs and gang association highlighted by practitioners also makes the database vulnerable to both over- and under-estimation of harm and risk. One analyst gave the example of a prominent south London gang which regularly featured as one of the most harmful and active gangs on GRITS but – intelligence suggested - had actually split into various factions, some of whom would often commit violent acts against each other. Because the tool – or rather the intelligence it was based on – was not sensitive enough to differentiate between factions, they remained resolutely 'number one' for many months, ensuring continued police attentions. Steps are taken to account for splits; emergent gangs or believed schisms or disbanding are discussed at regular intelligence meetings but as with the Matrix such work is far from an exact science, particularly when the intelligence is often lacking. One analyst noted the rigidity of the mechanism and the dependence on timely local intelligence feeds:

> …it does the job but doesn't reflect the different relationships. Gangs are just tags created by whoever inputs the reports; the information has to come from the borough and the borough has to be good at portraying this. There may be cases where the intelligence is insufficient. There are boroughs that are really bad, they wouldn't follow procedure, they know the structure of the gangs, but they wouldn't let the intelligence community know (AN2)

Like CRIS gang flags the gang related crime does not need to be specifically gang motivated, although incidents adjudged to be completely non-gang related are unlikely to be included (i.e. a documented gang member who is involved in a fight in bar or entertainment venue). This is not always easy to identify, corroborate or confirm.

Although gang names are most often the result of numerous corroborated intelligence logs, the police naming of groups is not unheard of. Rather ingeniously, one south London drug dealing network used a tactic of calling all of their street level dealers 'Johnny' to maintain anonymity; they became known as the Somali Johnnies, and immortalised as such on police indices. The police tagging can also reinforce and solidify newly formed gangs as was the case with the 'Muslim Boys', a splinter of the well-established Peel Dem Crew, who adopted their police name and generated a great deal more notoriety because of it (see Densley 2013: 47). Location based naming by police is more common, one senior officer acknowledged this fact, but also suggested they might appropriate the given name themselves:

> …without a doubt, some [gangs] are defined by the police, or start off as defined by the police… the 'Acacia Avenue gang" - that isn't a gang, that is just because of where they live (OFF1)

Location was highlighted as an important factor for analysts in labelling criminality as gang related. Experienced analysts are very aware of locales associated with specific gangs, and this can have a bearing on how offending behaviour is labelled – whether on GRITS or any other analytical product, as one analyst described:

> It's very difficult for you to think of any of the people or any of the circumstances in and around that location as separate, even if they are. So, when you come across a person a few years later you think well he was a gang member but even if in your head you don't actually know what that means, you just think "well he was part of this gang so what he is doing now must be kind of gang related" even if he was a transitory member… (AN7)

Another analyst expanded on the notion of gangs being labelled by their locality, suggesting that gang dynamics are extrapolated from one borough to another, creating a homogenising,

easy to understand account of why violence occurred. He discussed the post-code associated violence of borough affected by gangs and suggested that those dynamics were used by practitioners to make sense of a completely different dynamic on another borough:

> It is not only the person that is going to be tagged but it is the geographical area that is going to be associated, and it comes down to a particular understanding of gang dynamics that is pervasive; it's the same as we spoke about around the gang in Cyclamen Borough as the ideal, so in Lavender borough it is the easy to understand that it is the [XXXX gang that is committing the violence], except it's not – but it is a simple concept that is easy to grasp (AN2)

Similarly, an officer hinted at the differences between the police imposed understanding of gang affiliation, and the reality of the street, suggesting that intelligence logs will be constructed with a pre-conceived notion of the gang:

> …there's a big kind of thing, there's a disconnect maybe between our internal intelligence and [how] maybe gangs on the street…. would define themselves in a way, and it's a bit of a challenge in terms of how we could ever overcome that in terms of knowing exactly what groups they are a member of (OFF2)

Identifying Emerging Tensions and Priority Areas

The daily scanning process detailed above also informs a range of more frequent intelligence products including a Daily Intelligence Briefing. Here both gang related incidents, and non-gang related serious violence are presented by boroughs to provide a concise overview of current tensions and incidents which is then disseminated across the MPS. Unlike GRITS and the Matrix, the Daily Briefing does not utilise any kind of quantified scoring process but is instead reliant on a qualitative assessment by Higher intelligence analysts of where harm and risk lies in terms of gangs and serious violence.

As tedious as it might be to perform, analysts were generally supportive of the scanning process, both in terms of informing the various mechanisms for monitoring individual and gang risk, and in identifying emerging tensions. The benefits of continuity and experience of

particular crime types and thematic areas was emphasised, particularly in identifying connections between incidents or crimes. Although several examples of successful prevention were given, these were usually due to well implemented offender tracking and management:

> We had an incident we escalated where a high-ranking gang member was released from prison and then almost immediately there were threats on YouTube, toward him and things happened. We do a good job but there will be things that we miss because the intelligence just doesn't always come in. You can't always predict that something is going to happen (AN6)

There was an acceptance that the predictive element was often unattainable because the intelligence simply wasn't there:

> …sometimes it feels like we are a bit late to the party but that's the … I don't know how you get around it. We're trying to pick up intelligence suggesting that something is going to happen and you don't always get that do you? Sometimes it's quite underground so…I don't know whether that's ever something we could do something about (AN3)

However, one officer from Trident - a primary customer of this gang related intelligence product - did not agree. He saw pre-violence identification of risk as entirely possible, and linking the failure to do so to the loss of embedded intelligence functions and the resource that could monitor open source intelligence that standardised pan-London scanning would never pick up:

> …purely from an operational perspective it's totally wrong, you need to have… say when we had the CGU [Central Gangs Unit] and we had the team next to us, they were telling us stuff, scanning, analysing without being tasked because they were part of the team so they would be ahead of the game…. So, the old classic I got told many years ago, I got told by a senior officer 'tell me something I don't know' that's what they were doing. So, they were saying did you realise we have now got a problem in this area and that this is not because of violence but they were doing it pre-violence, because this open source stuff was coming out or there had been several low-level disturbances would never have come on the radar on any overnight briefing but we were within that prevention space (OFF1)

The notion of 'pre-crime' policing – as subsequent chapters will explicate – is central to the gang policing approach in the MPS; the idea of pre-emptive policing of known offenders by

targeting minor infractions to in capacitate before serious offending (i.e. violence) occurs (McCulloch & Pickering 2010). 'Prevention', the officers I interviewed demonstrated, is largely understood in these terms rather than a more holistic consideration of the situational and environmental factors which contribute to criminal behaviours. This is true both of mechanisms such as the Matrix which are predicated on this approach, but also in the intelligence gathering and analysis processes such as those described above.

Whilst gang dynamics were homogenised through the mechanisms and processes described above and may offer a way of making sense of violent interaction to both officers and analysts, the organised criminality that is being increasingly super-imposed on the gang has its own mechanism for ordering, risk assessment and resource prioritisation. This process of 'homogenisation' is organisationally separate from the embedded daily intelligence activities which track gang and gang members, but as the next section will demonstrate, is also the cause of both conceptual confusion and further evidence of the inherent difficulties of the 'super ordering' the MPS aspires to.

Documenting Organised Crime: Organised Crime Group Mapping

Designed to identify to the nature and scale of organised crime at local, reginal and national levels, Organised Crime Group Mapping [OCGM] is a Home Office requirement and model which the MPS feeds into, in addition to a range of other agencies.[29] It also serves to align MPS operational activity with policing priorities. The confidential database contains detailed information on the reach, scope, specialism, organisation and membership of Organised Crime groups and like GRITS and the Matrix assigns scores based on perceived harm and risk. Developed at around the same time that the 'gang threat' was reaching its apex, the

[29] Including Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC); National Crime Agency (NCA); Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA).

Government's wider organised crime strategy was outlined in *Extending Our Reach* (Home Office 2009) which as the title hints, 'marked an inevitable net-widening, embracing most forms of serious illegal acquisitive crime and featuring "threats as diverse as the Taliban, Somali Pirates, and 'delinquent youth gangs'" (Hobbs 2013: 34).

Like many other police forces (HMIC 2017), the MPS contributed to a blurring of the definitional lines between street gangs and organised criminal groups by, at the beginning of the EGYV era, adding all street gangs to the OCGM. This had the effect of increasing the perception of levels of harm and organisation before a recent change of policy; as one analyst explains inclusion criteria is now based on whether intelligence suggests the violence is purely instrumental:

> It depends if you think they are solely around drug supply and any violence that's comes from it is solely [related to that], rather than they are still part of this gang and if one of their members gets assaulted by a rival gang they are going to shoot the gang member because of that (AN1)

However, as the following chapter will demonstrate, investigatory officers often find it impossible to understand the motivation for violent incidents in the street milieu, meaning such distinctions must be based on weak inferences or are simply not possible. As with GRITS incident selection, the decision to 'promote' some street gangs to OCG status is based on the not inconsiderable experience of the higher gang intelligence analysts, indicating a power to create or cement gangs in the MPS environment which goes beyond that identified by previous research (Fraser & Atkinson 2014). Even then, conflation can still occur; if members of a street gang were believed to be involved in organised drug distribution – if for example some members had cultivated an 'upstream' connection to an illicit supply - and were subsequently raised as a threat to be targeted, the street gang's name would enter the OCGM database forming a virtually irreversible indicator of organised criminal activity.

The Confidential Bubble

The OCGM is a confidential database and as such is maintained within the separate confidential intelligence function. Such compartmentalisation and 'sterile corridors' is an unavoidable fact of policing practice but one which creates difficulties in information exchange. Officially, steps have been taken to ensure that the OCGM information is not out of reach of the areas with identified activity impacts - 'data must be shared locally, regionally and nationally within and between partners' (College of Policing 2017); although it is unclear to what extent this actually occurs. Certainly, within the MPS OCGM related information is hard to access; several analysts described how they would put together significant pieces of work and bring it to tasking only to be told 'don't worry about that, it's being dealt with'.

The impact of organisational siloing of high level criminality was evident across my findings in the lack of knowledge or understanding of the processes involved by many practitioners; a situation comparable to Fordist models of production where actors are alienated from the wider process and experience, ensuring the 'displacement of knowledge from labour to management' (Ruggiero 1995: 132). Another consequence of siloed working practices is the external impact on local communities who saw only the targeting of young gang members as the police aiming only for the 'low hanging fruits'. This theme is explored in the succeeding chapters.

Part Two: Perceptions of Prediction and Prevention

The first part of this chapter has highlighted the cyclical processes and mechanisms which seek to identify and prioritise gang offending, demonstrating how the rigidity of their construction is at odds with the fluid nature of the violent interactions and criminal activities they seek to order. The second part of this chapter explores in more detail the perceptions

of process and end-product of the practitioners as they construct these mechanisms and of the officers whose operational activity is directed by them.

'What is your problem? – Officer Perspectives

The extent to which intelligence actually directed policing practice was consistently questioned by the senior officers I interviewed. There was clear frustration at the loss of embedded intelligence resource at Trident, and scepticism that central intelligence had the flexibility and resource to accurately identify emerging gang issues:

> …I'm not entirely sure whether we have got it right in terms of ILP [Intelligence Led Policing]. I think there is a disjoin in terms of the intelligence end of the Met and how that feeds the operational piece; overall my view is that there has been a dumbing down of intelligence (OFF3)

The impact that a move towards generalist approaches and depleted resources had on willingness to appropriately action and take responsibility for intelligence was also highlighted. This was framed as a loss of shared purpose and operational focus, as one officer recalled:

> when we had our intelligence assets everyone worked under Trident, everyone knew what they had to do, everyone had a shared response and a vision around what the day job was so once you dilute that into one big intelligence function…I'm not saying that people don't care but because of the pressure of resources, because they are not working to a simple common purpose under a specialism, this intelligence gets treated like a piece of paper that needs to be moved, because once it's been moved to borough or another person it's not my problem anymore - it becomes a factory process for me (OFF3)

The nuances of intelligence directing operational activity were brought up by several interviewees. All recognised the benefits of predictive, proactive policing in preventing gang-violence, this was often framed in terms of the loss of embedded intelligence capability and the lengthy bureaucracy of the centralised process, as the same officer described:

> a) we haven't got that quick time functionality and b) the intelligence function doesn't sit within the operational response so there is a disjoin immediately y'know…if I need to find

> something immediately. If someone at DS [Detective Sergeant] level wants to task some research they have to send an email somewhere and it goes into a box and it is a bureaucratic process to get any intelligence if indeed that is forthcoming at all. The resources are so stretched that they can't possibly deal with all the requests (OFF3)

Whether or not the intelligence function sits with the operational response, that function – if embedded in a specialist unit – is still removed from the situational intelligence that is likely to be present in whatever location they are focusing their activities; thus, there is potentially a double bind of increased bureaucracy and increased isolation from the local environment.

The main harm and risk prioritisation mechanisms for individuals (Matrix) and gangs (GRITS, OCGM), were, whilst not uncritically accepted, generally felt to provide a reasonable indication as to where resources should be directed. There was little consideration as to the processes that informed them. The embracing of such overtly systematised mechanisms by officers underlines the extent to which risk and resource are embedded in contemporary policing.

There was a clear distinction between these and the more dynamic identification of emerging, nascent and thus theoretically preventable threats. One senior officer sums up the views expressed by several of his colleagues:

> I think [Matrix, GRITS] do direct resource well. The clever bit is the analysis. I think what we tend to do is a bit of tail wagging dog. We will say there have been three shootings in [Cerise Borough] can I have a profile on the [XXXX] gang. Now obviously that profile is going to say they are violent to some degree and they are involved in drugs and firearms to some extent. But, we pointed the analysis in that direction… so, what I would like and maybe it is too much but you've got to put the structure in place and the support into intelligence and I would like them to be defining where we should be going and that is the pure way of doing it. So, I would like them to say look there is some violence going on there, but everything is indicating this…we tend to sort of lead it and then there you go, told you! I don't know a gang that won't have violence attached to it and won't have drugs attached to it, but prioritising that and how we do it we could be a lot cleverer (OFF1)

‘Driving action?’- Analyst’s Perspectives

Whilst officers perceived the disconnect between intelligence and operational action as a function of broader organisational pressures, analysts had more mixed perceptions. One centrally based analyst put the onus on the organisational cultures of units – essentially their customers – in understanding the benefits of analytical product:

> I think it is more organisationally driven. There were certain business groups which would on the whole be more open to analysis. The reasons for that are complex. I think there is a business view, they have a view of a business and I think it is a long term – it is not like for instance, let’s say a Chief Superintendent coming to a unit and changing it, it is a whole culture of relying on analysis or not relying on analysis (AN2)

He highlighted Trident as being particularly receptive to analysis, believing the work he had done for them ‘did drive action’, although other analysts were less convinced. Another analyst with experience working on Trident and centrally, agreed that the direction of operational resource was dependent on where you worked. For her the daily Grip document [intelligence scanning] did direct resources appropriately, particularly in enabling the rapid deployment of resource to quell emerging tensions or threats. For longer term gang related operations, she felt this was less the case:

> I didn’t feel like the analysis really directed the activity it was almost like we were told; “these are the gangs”. We did have to look at the top gang members and look at statistics. It didn’t really direct activity, so in terms of the nominals they were targeting they had already made up their minds to be honest (AN3)

This theme was apparent when practitioners discussed their own experiences of providing analytical product on gangs. Several analysts believed requests for problem profiles or other analytical products could sometimes be simply to fulfil bureaucratic requirements:

> Basically, we want you to do the analysis and we’re going to do what we going to do anyway. Analysis was a requirement to get jobs agreed. They already knew what they were going to do (AN7)

For some, the knowledge and exclusivity of the covert intelligence accessed by officers was simply a part and parcel of policing, and appeared to add to the esteem and mystique in which their roles were generally held:

> Some police take intelligence led operations; obviously sometimes they know who they are going to target regardless of what you tell them. When that is the case it is normally for good reason. They need the analytical work for the funding bid, DSA [Directed Surveillance Authority] or whatever (AN1)

Officer understanding and action relating to gang issues is not solely gained from analysts – they have their own intelligence feeds. The bypassing of analytical resource was a common theme highlighted both locally and centrally:

> In terms of the juicy stuff – they ignored us, you'd say things like your top ten gang members who aren't interested in, who don't have any … markers against them, who aren't in custody they'd ignore them they would have got their intel from someone else and decided already. It was a little bit pointless (AN3)

The practice of officers merely paying lip service to analysis in favour of their own 'juicy stuff' described by both analysts above supports the observation of recent research into intelligence led policing practices which suggests that:

> Crime analysis and the practice of policing through flows of data has changed the symbolic nature of policing while reaffirming traditional ways of knowing and policing (Sanders & Condon 2017: 13)

It is also indicative of the organisational silos which gang policing criss-crosses; analysts complained that they were not involved in operations concerning organised crime groups or privy to confidential intelligence generated by specialist units outside their direct line of enquiry. Frustration as to the rigidity of the organisational mechanisms and structures in gang policing was not confined to analysts either. Officers indicated that the need to box everything into specific crime types or activity frustrated both the analytical presentation of problems and the organisational response. However, there was also a somewhat

contradictory perception that specialisation generated a more finessed understanding of the problems, as the following section explains.

Intelligence Quality and Quantity

Gang policing, from accurately identifying gang members or networks and monitoring harm and risk, to emerging tensions and investigative analysis is dependent on good quality intelligence. There was consensus across officers and analysts that there has been a gradual decline in the quality and quantity of intelligence around gangs. Most put this down to cuts in resourcing; several officers particularly highlighted the lack of intelligence from informants:

> We just don't seem to have that a lot, regarding the intelligence that is coming through from CHIS [Covert Human Intelligence Source] or wherever it is coming from – that varies massively – I don't think it is what it used be. They have had cut backs and all. They often have nothing close (OFF7)

And similarly:

> Yeah, they've [police informants] all thrown in the towel because they are not getting paid which meant we are not getting the results we used to. It's a murky world because you are paying criminals, but we used to get really good results out of it (OFF8)

This was particularly bemoaned by reactive officers who, unlike the proactive officers whose work is predicated on consistent good quality intelligence and therefore prioritised, often had little to go on at the beginning of investigations where witness and victim co-operation with police is minimal (Clayman 2011).

One officer suggested that the lack of intelligence might be down to the level of criminal involvement of the individuals involved in some investigations, re-emphasising the wide spectrum in criminality that comes under the 'gang' banner, whilst still suggesting they were 'professional criminals' in the making:

> That might be a function of the fact that a lot of my clientele are children they are not professional criminals ... yet… they're 14-year olds stabbing each other and the intelligence

> isn't there in the first place if it is you get it from school's officers rather than the intel world (OFF8)

The Impact of Centralisation

Analysts also noted the deficiencies in police intelligence, recognising the necessity to draw on wider sources – and task for further collection – when developing analysis:

> Yeah so if you're doing in depth analysis you'd look at intel, local authority, key members and their phone records; it has to be multi-faceted. You can't just rely on CRIMINT cos there are loads of gaps (AN3)

The increasing need to look wider than internal sources of intelligence was also emphasised, particularly in terms of partnership intelligence:

> There are things that we haven't got a clue about. This was highlighted when I worked with Partnership in [Lilac borough]. You can make your inferences but sometimes they can just be completely wrong. I think that there is a lot that we don't know and Partnerships are the best placed to fill those gaps (AN6)

Despite this there is no routine analysis or sharing of partnership data at a central level – the onus is on police intelligence. This frustrated both officers and analysts. One officer, described a typical exchange with a partnership agency when an analyst had completed a specialist profile:

> …he'll do the profile and be immediately told "that's clearly underreported, it's not accurate" … the information is not forthcoming (OFF1)

The reasoning behind the centralisation of intelligence in the face of significant budget cuts and wider austerity measures was understood by analysts and police officers, 'more for less' was a typical refrain, but there was a unanimous view that this was detrimental to intelligence processes in gang policing and caused significant difficulties with dissemination and operational action. An analyst explained:

> I don't think you'll find an analyst or an officer who thinks it's improved. You need to know when they are going out, you have real ownership of the job and know it inside out from beginning to the end when you're presenting evidence in court (AN3)

The recent centralisation of area intelligence hubs caused more consternation, with analysts seeing it as a final blow to local connections, informal communications and intelligence feeds, essentially 'situational intelligence' that helped to better understand 'what happened and why' (Innes & Roberts 2011). One analyst saw this disconnection in terms of geography as well as local officers:

> If you are not there looking at the place, talking to officers, talking to people who know the nominals personally. You are becoming detached from both the officers and the knowledge of the area (AN7)

Similarly, another analyst noted the benefits of immediacy to the 'action' in providing nuance and detail to what is occurring locally:

> I tried to maintain contacts. When you're in a room full of officers you get a flavour of what is going on. What people are panicking about? You're in the borough bubble. I did try to keep in touch with [Investigating Officer] as much as possible…It is a lot better when people are in the same office as you (AN6)

Summary

This chapter has highlighted the numerous pathways through which individuals and gangs become mapped on police indices; mechanisms and processes which are often self-reinforcing and invariably subjective. My findings support those of Fraser & Atkinson (2014) in highlighting the significant power of the analyst to label both gangs and gang members.

An important finding was the perception that the mechanisms to monitor gang members and gangs were relatively static and inflexible.[30] This rigidity, whilst necessary to standardise scoring processes, had the impact of conferring homogeneity onto a phenomenon which practitioner perceptions suggested was anything but. This caused particular frustration with some of the officers who were effectively customers of the intelligence products created. This

[30] See Figure 5 for a graphical representation of the construction of gang statistics.

frustration is offset by recognition of the need to prioritise and an acceptance that 'it's what we've got'. Generally, officers did not have the option of ignoring the Matrix, GRITS or the OCGM because they were fundamental to the tasking process, and recognised as necessary for 'efficient' resource allocation. This was not always the case – several analysts highlighted officers bypassing the analytical process to go after 'known offenders' (Innes et al. 2005) that officers had identified from their own sources.

The organisational separation of the central intelligence hub appeared to create specific difficulties, isolating analysts from the situational intelligence that could provide a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics they were trying to make sense of. The processes by which they attempted to get around these issues – such as social media analysis – often merely re-emphasised this dysconnectivity. More generally poor intelligence appeared to be a significant concern, with the nature of intelligence gathering highlighting the breadth and level of criminal involvement to which gang terminology is applied.

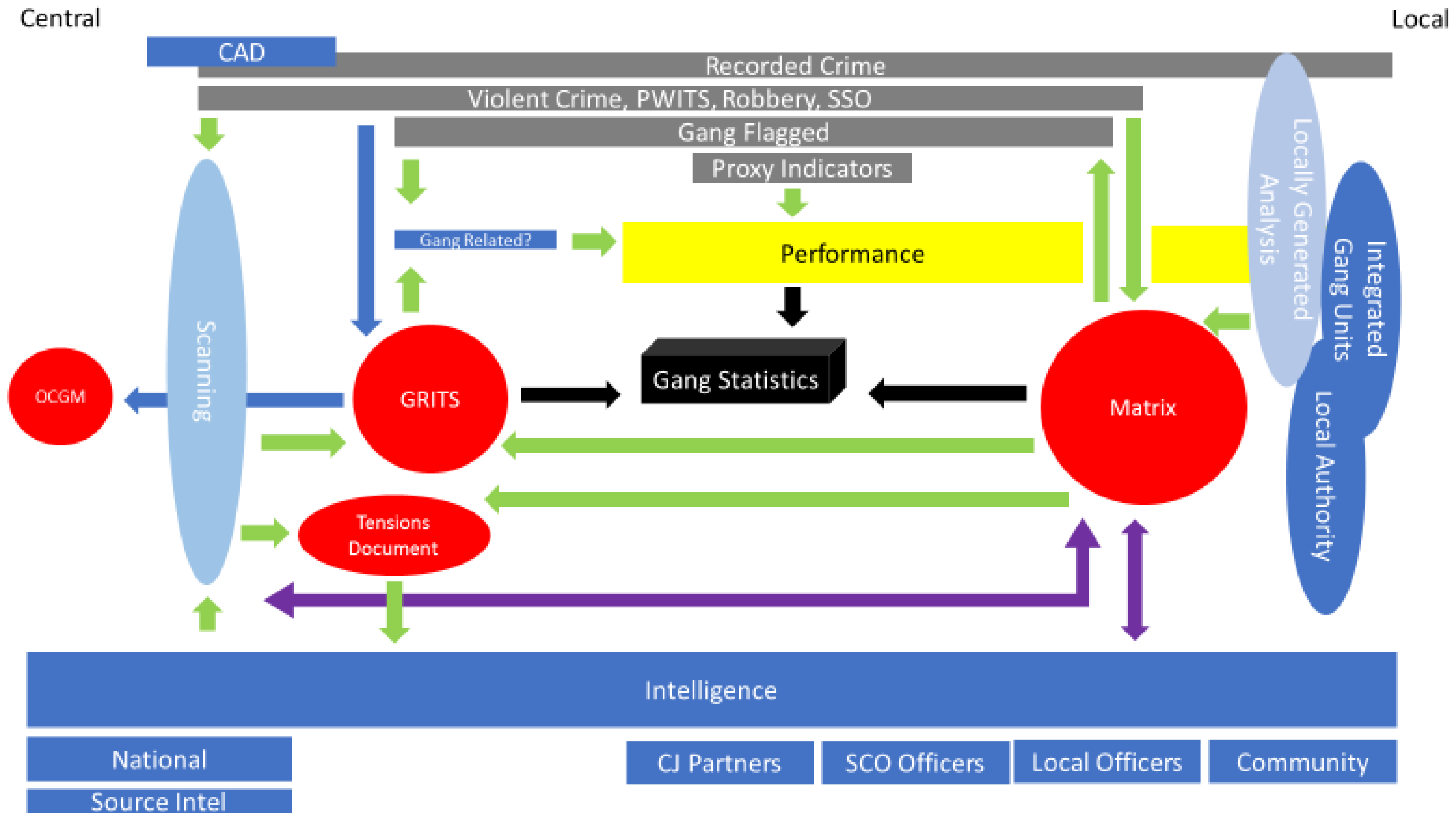

Figure 5: Synergy and Circularity in the Production of Gang Statistics

Chapter Five: Policing Gangs – The Evolution of a Specialist Unit

The previous chapter outlined the key centralised intelligence-led mechanisms for identifying and prioritising 'harmful' gangs, criminal networks and individuals, exploring practitioner perceptions of the processes involved. A key finding was that whilst technically developed, the mapping processes were reliant on limited intelligence, and presented a rigid framework deeply embedded in operational procedure. Practitioners questioned whether the current organisational structure was designed to identify emerging issues effectively. This chapter focuses on officer perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the specialist operational policing response to gangs, which since 2012 has been overseen by Trident Gang Crime Command.

The chapter is split into four parts; part one locates the current specialist response within the historical context of weapons-focused specialist policing, outlining the evolution of Trident from 'Yardie Squad' to 'Gang Crime Command'. Part two explores the processes by which investigations are allocated to Trident organisational structure of the specialist response to gangs, exploring the command's objectives, remit, and the influence of performance measurement and management. Part three discusses the operational response, focusing on the use of proactive drug enforcement tactics to target gang associated individuals. Part four considers how Trident has presented itself externally, focusing on how Trident has signalled its objectives to the environment in which it operates.

Part One: Trident Origins

The specialist policing of gangs in the UK is a relatively new phenomenon, but one in keeping with an overarching move towards specialism across all areas of policing, as Chapter Two outlined (Roberts & Innes 2009). Densley (2012: 148) identifies the emergence of anti-gang taskforces as the 'strongest evidence yet that Britain is at least beyond its state of denial about

gangs', and whilst the presumed efficacy is moot, the creation and very public launch of Trident Gang Crime Command in 2012 certainly provides the clearest example of *public signalling* that gang crime was a problem, and the MPS was tacking gang crime robustly.

Yet this was not the creation of a new 'gang busting unit' but a rebranding of a long-established specialist unit with historic focus on firearms crime 'in London's black communities'. Secretive specialist units had long existed to tackle specific criminal activity, and the influence on elements of the contemporary 'transparent' operational approach to policing street gangs is inescapable. Experience provides many positive reinforcements for focused reactive investigation and innovative, dynamic intelligence-driven pro-active policing. Some of the less progressive practices and cultures are harder to weed out, harder still when they become written into official protocol. Operation Lucy (colloquially known as the 'Yardie Squad') was formed of only a dozen detectives running in the 1980's but disbanded in 1989 (Kalunta-Crumpton 2003).

The evolution of Trident #1: 'Black-on-black' gun crime

A spate of particularly violent shootings involving mainly Jamaican born males fighting over crack markets in the 1990's saw a media frenzy around a 'new type of criminal' with predictably racist undertones, drawing public attention and clamour for action. At the same time, the MPS – and UK policing more generally - was under increasing pressure related to the systemic failings in their handling of crimes involving black and ethnic minority communities identified through a series of enquiries culminating in the damning MacPherson report which labelled the MPS 'institutionally racist' in 1999 (Lea 2000). The policy response was dramatic, controversial and expansive; a specialised operational command unit (OCU) was set up specifically to deal with so called 'black-on-black' gun violence; a far cry from a few officers operating from a dingy corner of Scotland yard, Trident was instead a brigade roughly akin to the size of a provincial borough force, consisting of some 400 officers and staff. The

characteristics of those were being targeted had already begun to change, as the then head of Trident Mike Fuller described:

> ”On the street, no one really talks about Yardies anymore,” …“That's not what they call themselves. It's all crews and possess. The vast majority of the shootings we are seeing now are the result of conflicts between rival gangs of British-born blacks.” (Thompson 2001)

Officially launched on 24th July 2000 (although effectively operational for several years previously), its publicly stated aim was to tackle ‘black-on-black gun and drugs related violence’, soon adapted to focus on ‘all firearms murders and shootings within London’s black communities’ (Home Affairs Committee 2007: 368). The rush to address the concerns highlighted by MacPherson, specifically providing a tailored response to firearms homicide investigations (but not other types of homicide[31]) meant that initially at least, the units approach was not well thought through, but instead evolved *in vivo*; first developing a proactive element based on the Flying Squad model,[32] and later a third prong focusing on partnership and intervention (Roberts 2011).

Trident had by now established a reputation not just as a successful police unit but as a publicly recognised ‘brand’, to Londoners at least, and certainly the media. Throughout the noughties the characteristics of those involved in Trident investigations continued to change markedly. In 2003 only 16 per cent of victims were aged under twenty, but in 2008 the proportion had reached one third. In conjunction, the proportion of Jamaican nationals decreased year on year form 40 per cent of murder victims in 2001 to just eight per cent by 2008 (Davies 2010).

[31] See Foster et al. (2005).

[32] Essentially taking reactive investigations and attempting to turn into proactive opportunities (Roberts 2011: 8).

The evolution of Trident #2: All gun crime

By 2004 the remit had changed again (though noticeably less publicly) with the introduction of Operation Trafalgar to 'investigate all non-fatal shootings where there is evidence of discharge of a lethal barrelled weapon, regardless of ethnicity.' Confusingly, a racial division still existed for murders; Trident had their own Major Investigation Teams (MITS) and were assigned 'all homicides where both victim and offender are from London's black communities'. In practice, this made for some confusing – and at times mildly ridiculous – triage where police officers and analysts were scrambling to identify the likely ethnicity of the suspects and cases were passed back and forth between Commands like hot potatoes; delineation of investigation based on ethnicity continued, in part due to significant support from individuals with influence in London's black communities.

The changing demographic of those involved in gun crime to predominantly young, British born black males both drove and facilitated an emphasis on community engagement. A Trident Independent Advisory Group (IAG) had been set up from the outset to act as a 'critical friend' – with community activists going so far as to take credit for Trident's creation (Webbe 2012) and was highlighted as a successful model of engagement (Centre for Social Justice 2009). Trident's focus on black violent crime was not universally welcomed; the Trident brand has been (and continues to be) referenced in derogatory terms in London-produced musical commentary and other offerings and has come under attack from community activists who were not party to the original consultations.

The evolution of Trident #3: Trident Gang Crime Command

In February 2012, to much media fanfare, and with a grinning Mayor Johnson and a giant 'do not cross' police barrier tape (see Camber 2012), Trident was rebranded 'Trident: Gang Crime Command'[33], an incendiary appellation if ever there was one. Brand promotion continued to

[33] Trident is currently known as Trident and Area Command.

be a key strategic concern. A new logo was created, with the 'T' of Trident forming a crosshair, and an array of merchandise - from sweatbands to mugs - shipped in for promotional and community events (and the staff kitchen). The launch – and subsequent disbanding of its still ethnically focused murder teams in 2014[34] – caused public dissention from founding members of the original advisory group (Webbe 2012), both in terms of 'abandonment' of London's black communities , and the perception of the hijacking of Trident as a political stunt by Mayor Boris Johnson to 'co-opt London's black community into his enforcement led war on gangs' (Jasper 2012; Jasper 2013).

Current Structure, Aims and Objectives

Trident is split into several distinct units reflecting a tripartite approach of proactivity, investigation and engagement. **Reactive** (investigation) teams respond to and investigate all non-fatal shootings whilst **proactive** syndicates are tasked in line with Trident's priorities in the prevention of shootings and gang violence. **Trident Central Gangs Unit** provides resource and advice to boroughs, to facilitate best practice in the policing of gangs; they will often be based on a borough with current gang issues for several months and also have a response team to provide ad hoc support to assist with proactivity and reprisals. The **London Crime Squad** is a pan-London team focusing on cross border issues and higher level organised crime and offending. The **Partnership Unit** works with gang affected boroughs, focusing on bespoke community, statutory body and third sector engagement and liaison. The **Trident Independent Advisory Group (IAG)** acts as a sounding board, providing independent advice and developing and promoting community awareness and support.

Along with their remit, Trident's aims and objectives continue to change over time, and as such are discussed throughout this chapter. Definitional and remit related semantics

[34] Fatal shootings are investigated by the Homicide Command (SCO1).

notwithstanding, the overarching aims of the Command continue to be summed up in those stated on the website in 2015:

- Reduce levels of homicide, firearms discharge and serious youth violence.
- Reduce the harm caused by street gangs and organised criminal networks across London.
- Effectively identify those gang members that pose the most risk from their involvement in gangs and serious youth violence.
- With others, deliver interventions to prevent young people from becoming involved in gang crime and serious youth violence.

  (MPS 2015)

Likewise, Trident's overarching mechanisms for achieving these aims have remained relatively consistent throughout and form the structure of the remainder of this chapter:

- **Tasking and coordination** - through monitoring armed and gang-related activity to ensure the right resources are quickly in the right places.
- **Enforcement** - by identifying and pursuing the most harmful gangs and gang members through proactive investigations and operations.
- **Prevention and diversion** - through identifying young people on the periphery of gangs and working with partners to divert them away.

Part Two: Identity Crisis - The Complexities of an Ever-Expanding 'Specialism'

As the following section will demonstrate, Trident occupies an awkward position in the MPS organisational structure being subject to significant and evolving internal and external pressures to police a problem which is poorly defined, subjectively identified yet inflexibly quantified by the harm ranking of GRITS and the Matrix. This is in stark contrast to the previous primary focus of gun crime, as one officer recalled:

> we are siloed but by definition, where we work well is when we focus on something. A lot of departments have been born out of challenges in the past. So, the murder teams through Stephen Lawrence, SCO17[35] through Worboys[36] and the other offences that have taken place… and Trident again was dealing with vast numbers of shootings taking place. That was defined and it was quite clear. You then had an evolution and that's where it becomes challenging, because they were never marked as gangs, they were marked as individuals that were shooting each other. The gangs just were not mentioned (OFF1)

When Trident first morphed into a specialist gang unit, its primary role was to provide advice and co-ordination to local gang responses, assisting with enforcement when required, whilst maintaining its firearms specialism. Provision was made to investigate serious gang-related violence other than shootings as 'the exception rather than the rule' (MPS 2012b). The degree of involvement - a tiered response spanning advice to full investigation – was dependant on the seriousness and potential for increased tensions, relative harm of the individuals and gangs involved, and the capacity or ability of the borough. To be considered for a Trident response, the violence has to be identified as a 'gang incident' which as chapter four outlined, is not straightforward. Official guidance demonstrates the complexities involved:

[35] SCO17 is the Sexual Offences, Exploitation and Child Abuse Command.

[36] John Worboys is a convicted serial rapist, known as the Black Cab Rapist. An IPCC investigation found systemic failings in the investigatory process which prompted significant organisational change to the investigation of sexual offences (IPCC 2010).

> Defining a gang incident should always be considered on a case by case basis, using all available intelligence and professional judgement. A gang member involved in a criminal offence does not in itself make this a gang incident, however an incident involving one of more gang members and motivated by gang tensions would clearly be a gang incident (MPS 2012b: 4)

Figure 6 below illustrates the official process for allocation of non-firearms gang incidents to Trident:

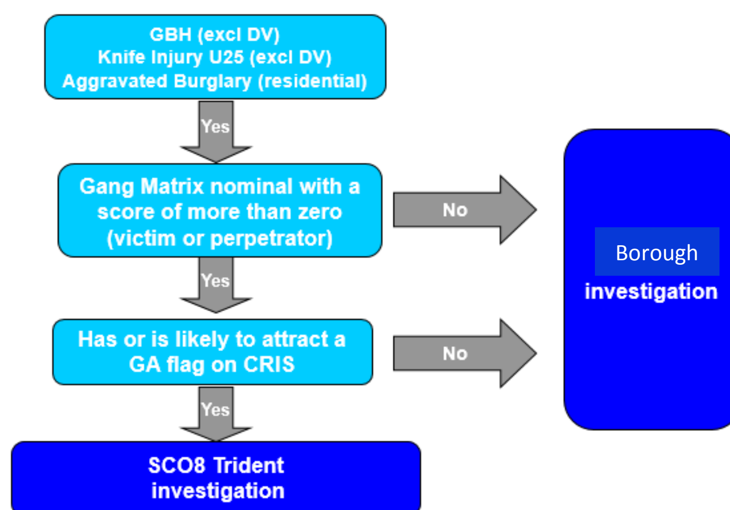

Figure 6: Trident Investigation Allocation Process (MPS 2012a)

The decision-making process is dependent on (a) the outcomes of previous decisions relating to the individuals involved (i.e. did a borough place them on the Matrix; did an officer flag a crime as gang related); (b) the decision making of those conducting the live scanning of incidents (identifying the types of violence and researching for gang links) and ultimately (c) the opinion of both the Trident and borough senior officers. They are reliant on intelligence and information being upwardly disseminated from practitioners involved in intelligence scanning, which is necessarily pared down at every stage, another example of the 'vertical entropy' described in the previous chapter (Manning 2004; Roberts & Innes 2009).

Resource Pressures and 'Gangflation'?

However, the imperfect process of incident allocation can be completely usurped by orders from above. To begin with, the remit for expansion saw a relatively small number of stabbings taken on, in line with the process above and at the discretion of the supervising officers. As concern around knife crime grew, senior Trident officers recalled increasing intervention from ACPO ranks instructing Trident to take on jobs which were less clear cut in their links to gangs. This was framed as primarily a resourcing issue, as one experienced officer described:

> we tend to - I don't want to use the term dumping ground - but often there will be a fine line between whether a particular incident is gang related or not and we - because of the pressures on boroughs the tipping factor tends to be well, "you're Trident you've got more resources…", so quite often from a senior officer perspective when we have had an almighty weekend with a number of stabbings – we're instructed by ACPO level - it would be "I don't want to hear your argument - you're going to take this investigation (OFF3)

There was a feeling amongst Trident officers that the combination of corporate ownership of the 'gang problem' and increasingly stretched local resources, meant that boroughs were always keen to shift investigations Trident's way, even if this meant manipulating the mechanisms that dictated allocation. This might be through identifying tenuous gang links or artificially boosting an individual's harm score on the Matrix:

> As a Trident officer, sometimes you get a bit sceptical about boroughs making people red nominals because they want those people to be taken on by Trident. It all comes down to resources if you can shift the problem to another department that has more resources… (OFF7)

Officers also recognised the appeal to local gang units of having Trident's proactive unit based on their borough:

> You do get some boroughs see it as a huge benefit. Having Trident support doesn't mean you necessarily have a huge amount of experience that is going to come to you and solve all of your problems, you tend to have some good experience but what you have is fifteen police officers that you didn't have before which is bigger than most borough's gang units, so it is a massive uplift, it's absolutely phenomenal for them (OFF4)

It was suggested there was an incentive to escalate harm in order to gain proactive Trident support by linking more individuals to a specific gang so that it would be flagged as needing specialist assistance, thus directly impacting on the organisational measurement of the prevalence and harm of gang issues. One officer was sceptical that the intelligence to indicate gang affiliation always existed:

> Hang on a second are these people [in Gang X]? Where is the intel? Because I do think that you get some boroughs who are very… kind of… you get some boroughs who will put everyone on the Matrix all the time, and you get some boroughs who are very resistant to it… so there is a kind of perverse incentive in terms of intelligence management to say actually 'who has got the biggest gang problem?' (OFF2)

Aside from inflating the perception of harm and risk of gangs, the increased use of Trident resource was seen by Trident officers both as impacting negatively on their firearms focus, and meaning that the same level of investigatory attention Trident prided itself on could not be given to the high volume of stabbings, as one senior officer explained:

> We do get consumed with taking other people's problems on but obviously if you have a particular mission focus around gangs, particularly if you are taking volume from other areas of the business, then that can have an impact in terms of your own focus and what you are seeking to achieve… so inevitably when you look at the amount of stabbings we have had to take, we have gone from a no-stone-unturned specialism response to almost a volume crime response (OFF3)

This was seen by some officers as impacting on the level of respect and consequently legitimacy Trident had built up within the organisation as a thorough and successful firearms unit.

Frustrations around remit expansion / Identity Crisis

There were clearly frustrations amongst front line Trident officers about this expanding remit, with some questioning whether the level of resource was justified for what they saw as often relatively minor stabbings:

> My biggest thing is that most of the time the knife in the street -- someone with stab wounds … you put an awful lot of resources into investigating that. Some of us in the office think – what's the point? You get a firearm off the street, that's important. You get a knife off the street – so what? He can get himself another one (OFF9)

Another officer, whilst recognising the negative impact it had on resourcing of firearms operations, framed the widening of remit in terms of public risk. Implicit in this is the view that firearms violence is more likely to be targeted at other 'professional' criminals whilst knife violence could just as easily involve young people with no such 'full time commitment to crime' (Hobbs 2013):

> If you have two or three firearms investigations, that will keep you busy every day whereas if you take on a number of stabbings as well, well you're not going to be able to give them the amount of time and you have to focus on the stabbings because they are more of a public risk potentially (OFF7)

Another officer supported this view, suggesting that many of the individuals arrested and charged for firearms offences do not feature on the Matrix, and have no links to gangs but are involved in organised crime.

> The sort of shootings we investigated were around Turkish or Albanian…really complex. And organised hits, really instrumental, really organised. It's a different type of crime (OFF2)

The contrasting views highlight the differing perceptions of weapons-based risk and harm, even amongst Trident officers. The duality in approach led one Trident officer to ponder about what he saw as TGCC's conflicting objectives:

> It is interesting, therein lies a question around what are we set up to do? Is Trident a Gang Crime Command in which case we should focus on gangs or is it a gun crime command and therefore we should focus on guns? They're different things (OFF2)

The perception of the operational effectiveness of Trident as a gun crime unit was strong amongst officers. Several strongly believed the organisationally stipulated shift in Trident's focus to gangs and knives crime was a contributing factor in the subsequent increase in recorded gun crime in the capital:

> We always felt that when we took on knife crime this was always going to have a negative impact on gun crime. So, when gun crime went up that was not a particular shock… it was a way to help borough because they were really struggling with the number of stabbings that they have (OFF7)

Although there is of course no way to prove whether or not this was the case, comparable increases in firearms offences in similar forces make it unlikely (Flatley 2016). Debates about the investigation of 'volume crime' aside, investigatory officers generally put far less emphasis on the gang element of the violence they were investigating, for them it was about the mode of violence rather than the pseudo-contextual parameters which they saw as often imposed rather than evidenced in reality. The enforced classification of offending as gang related or not was a theme constantly returned to by the officers I spoke to, including those whose roles revolved predominantly around gang enforcement.

Internal and External Performance Pressures

At the outset of EGYV there was significant external, and consequentially high-level internal, pressure to map the gang problem, however poorly defined, and to provide evidence it was being addressed. As the external face of gang policing in London, it fell on Trident to provide the answers, necessitating a drive to label, map, chart and control:

> The problem we have got is that the exam question that was being asked was how many gangs have you got in London, how many gang members are in those gangs, how many of them are violent? …these are questions that were defined and asked for as a sort of performance measure. That is what drives a lot of it – performance – how do you measure it? (OFF1)

The rhetorical question – and the frustration that clearly emanates - allude to the core themes this thesis is exploring. The organisational solution was to first ensure that the Matrix was adequately populated, as one senior office recalled:

> There was an intrusive drive from above to make sure that those individuals were scored and put on the Matrix (OFF3)

And second, incorporate the pro-active targeting of nominals into Trident's key performance indicators, both in terms of outputs (securing judicial controls and restrictions against gang members) and outcomes (convictions resulting in custodial sentences for gang members). However, as one officer contemplated:

> Those numbers have gone up and have remained relatively stable but gang and violent crime is going up [so] the question has to be posed – are we effective in terms of trawling that intelligence to understand the gang problem effectively enough in the first instance? (OFF3)

Within both the organisation and its institutional environment, the bottom line for assessing performance in policing is always recorded crime statistics; increases in crime - however unfairly cited as 'poor performance' - will invariably generate a swift organisational response. The MPS reaction to short-term increases in the 'proxy measures' of gang violence has generally been to implement highly publicised crackdowns; this generates a complex intersection of organisational priorities and overlapping action, with Trident at the centre. In June 2015, official statistics indicated short-term increases in both shootings and youth stabbings, so the MPS announced a time limited pan-London 'crackdown', targeting gangs, gun and knife crime across London, named Operation Teal.[37] The cross-unit approach was widely publicised, as were the outcomes of police activity with bombastic claims of '1000's arrested in ten weeks' and rolling press updates on gun and knife seizures. At its core, Teal was a reinvigoration of the initial drives to proactively target individuals placed on the Matrix, promising both 'enhanced enforcement and judicial controls' (MOPAC 2016c).

Teal was deemed so 'successful' it was incorporated into the permanent Trident operational practice and oversight; recoupling some of the intelligence functions that were lost through centralisation, and aiming for greater connectivity through partnership data sharing (MOPAC 2017). It marked an official widening of Trident's objectives to reducing youth stabbings

[37] One month after the launch of Operation Teal, Operation Sceptre was initiated in 2015 as the overarching response to knife crime, driving 'intelligence-led weapon sweeps', focused targeting of 'habitual knife carriers'; hotspot patrols with intelligence led stop and search (MPS 2017)

regardless of gang links and gun discharges MPS wide, the fairness of which was questioned by officers:

> To give Trident responsibility for knife injury 'Under 25' it's so wide, it's unreasonable. It's outside of the gang remit. It may be an indicator, but y'know there could be other ways of looking at it (OFF2)

The widening responsibility could be interpreted as a tacit acknowledgement that 'the gang' is not suitable as a primary focus of police activity, however as the previous chapter demonstrated, once the gang genie is out of the bottle (Hobbs 2013) it is very hard to put back; rather than revert focus to weapons- enabled violence, there are signs that the gang – through implicit and explicit association with organised, national and international drug supply - is becoming elevated to the status of organised crime group, as the next part of this chapter argues.

Evaluating Success

As the previous section indicated, evaluating success in gang policing – and indeed policing more widely – is predominantly based on apparent rather than actual performance. Given its lack of definitional clarity in the first place, gang related criminality presents a particular problem in this regard. Methods of evaluating operations are rudimentary – from experience, and by no means unique to Trident – usually consisting of looking at whether measures of violence had gone up or down following Trident's operations; statistical tests were rarely utilised, and quasi-experimental evaluations unheard of. One officer described the instant impact on local crime statistics (referred to as borough scorecards) demanded of his team:

> The CGU was the Trident team for whipping in terms of performance. We used to have a rigid performance regime. You would be deployed to a borough for three months and you would be expected to turn their borough scorecard from red to green, simple as that...we did used to feel pressures a lot, I remember feeling personally very stressed and anxious about changing the colour of a performance scorecard whilst deployed on the borough because

> ultimately, I would sit at a management meeting and the DCI's would say "right, OK - what are your arrests like, what are you stop and searches, all the rest of it, what percentage of gang nominals have you charged, how many gang nominals are in evidence for covert ops….'. You target the hotspots and it resulted in focusing on things outside of gangs in some respects [one borough we were allocated to] had a big problem with knife point robbery so we had to target knife point robbery to basically turn the Knife Injury Under 25 from red to green. Doesn't matter whether gangs are involved. You've got to think of something (OFF2)

One analyst responded to the question of what works best in enforcing against gangs with a question of her own which neatly sums up the dearth of robust evaluations in gang enforcement; 'I don't know because you can say it worked well but how do you know it worked well?' (AN3).

Output measures – particularly the perennial favourites of commodity seizures and arrests - are generally used as evidence of success, both internally and publicly. Longer term impact or sustainable outcomes are rarely considered, as one analyst reflected:

> When they [Trident] talk about it now they talk about completely dismantling the [South London] gang and when you look at intel reports, yes it has splintered off but it is still going on and it is just under a different name, so really what have we done? So, I'm not always convinced… yeah we might have disrupted them for a bit but I think on most of the ops we did the phone line was back 'up and running' after a bit (AN3)

> …to be honest I think they just wanted to make the arrests, their motivation is just, I get it because you have targets to hit and pressure and so on, but I don't I think it is satisfying if they can't say they disrupted a gang, but as long as they're seizing drugs and making arrests that's all positive for them (AN3)

Some officers indicated that some of the more stringent elements of the current performance regime might be in the process of changing, as priorities shift and vulnerability and exploitation begin to gain more traction in the operational policing environment.

Part Three: Action and Understanding Once on the Trident Radar

Once investigations are tasked to Trident – whatever the proximal or distal motivations of that decision – the impact is usually considerable. This section considers the elements of the enforcement response, focusing on the evolving police tactics and their symbiotic relationship with police understanding of the gang.

Not only does the allocation of Trident resource matter in terms of the statistical presentation of gang harm and risk within the organisation, it also matters in terms of the investigation itself; officers who had previously only dealt with firearms investigations have to get to grips with the dynamics of 'volume violence', conversely the victims and offenders involved were suddenly subject to a level of investigatory scrutiny that borough led investigations would rarely be able to provide.

The resources of Trident are significantly greater than would be allocated to a borough led investigation. Therefore, if an individual comes onto the Trident 'radar', whether through reactive investigation, scoring highly on the Gangs Matrix or through an operation on a 'high harm' gang on GRITS, the level of attention they receive is heightened:

> Typically, if you look at the average experience of the investigator compared to borough you'll have a more experienced investigator, the second point is that we are more likely to be able to throw more resources at it, and take that investigation further down the line, and take more time on that investigation because of the sheer 'volume crime' element in borough investigations. So, on two levels I think the experience, the amount of time and resources we can throw at it (OFF3)

From a reactive perspective, increased resource is intended to assist with complex investigations that are made more difficult from the lack of co-operation of those involved. As the introduction noted, victim and witness reluctance to assist in investigations was one of the drivers for setting up the original Trident response and whilst detection rates have improved from the pre-Lawrence era (Roberts & Innes 2009), this problem has persisted (Clayman & Skinns 2012; MPS 2012c):

> They [victims] very much fail to engage with us they refuse to give any sort of account. They are a victim today, [then] they are a suspect, the following day they are a victim again. Their consistent interaction with police is that they refuse to co-operate whatsoever. Even if they have life threatening injuries, even if they have lost use of an arm or whatever, we've had people with horrific injuries and they won't engage with us whatsoever (OFF7)

Such barriers add to the difficulties in understanding – and ultimately labelling – an incident as gang related. For the reactive officers I spoke to, gang association might mean an investigation is directed to them but it has little impact on their actions after that. Awareness of GRITS and the OCGM was limited, and the Matrix was something of a mystery. Perhaps because of this, reactive officers had a much more varied perception of what was driving the violence they investigated, echoing Hallsworth & Silverstone (2009) overlapping typology of 'successful' violent career criminals, and far more volatile street-based 'on-road' young men:

> The motive and the gang issue I often don't really care. Sometimes it is good to use it at a trial and set a nice story for a jury but if I don't have it I am not going to lose sleep over it. …The motive isn't the same all the time. It's petty quarrels or control of a drugs line. It may be associates of associates. Motives change. And between boroughs because each borough has a different layout they all have a different layout – this estate falls out with this estate up the road (OFF7)

Proactive Gang Policing: Targeting Individuals, Gangs and Locations

Proactive gang enforcement is predominantly carried out in two ways. First, the targeting of individuals using an array of tactics dependent on their harm score and willingness to engage with diversionary services. All Matrix nominals are sent letters informing them of their inclusion, offering support services and warning them of the enforcement consequences should they continue being criminally active. The lower harm (amber and green) individuals will be managed locally, with more focus on intervention and engagement. Any outstanding

criminality is proactively pursued, should none be evident, then 'Al Capone'[38] tactics might be deployed, effectively targeting individuals by any means necessary, ideally resulting in a custodial sentence. High harm (red) nominals are usually managed by Trident. They are often subject to daily enforcement and partnership activity against them, weekly home visits, increased 'attention' when on the street and considered for all types of proactive development.[39] Being on the Matrix, theoretically at least, makes a difference.

Gangs and gang locations are targeted via suppression-based proactivity. Trident only become involved when boroughs request specialist assistance which may draw on a range of tactics with the objective of making an immediate impact on levels of violence and gang related criminality in an area. Tactics are selected from a variety of options and might include weapon sweeps, increased stop and search, vehicle stops as well as more individually tailored targeting. Gangs are also targeted proactively in longer term operations, as the latter part of this chapter details.

Drugs and Gang Policing: The Fine Line to Organised Crime

The barriers to gaining successful prosecutions for violence discussed in the previous section meant that the police needed to find alternative methods to enforce against those individuals they believed to be most violent: in enforcement terms, the desired aim is incapacitation through incarceration, whatever the offence; pre-crime policing writ large (Zedner 2007). This is most often though targeting drug supply, as one officer explains with an instrumental slant typical of the prevailing proactive perspective:

> The problem that Trident always had was that we were looking at gangs and we knew that looking at gangs, the whole reason for their existence was drugs and making money out of drugs so we had to justify our existence. So the way we took gang nominals out and the way

[38] Targeting or disruption via civil means such as TV licensing, housing, utilities bills or parking enforcement.
[39] For instance, targeting under the Proceeds Of Crime Act (POCA).

> we take them out is evidencing them, not for violence but for drugs, because nine times out of ten they stab each other and they don't talk to us (OFF4)

Test Purchase Operations

One of the most common forms of drug focused proactive policing have been 'test purchase' operations; the use of undercover officers to buy drugs from suspected dealers in order to gain evidence of supply. The tactic formed the basis of Trident Central Gang Unit's enforcement approach, based on perceived – though unsystematically evaluated - successes,

> What you had was this groundswell. It was starting, we don't necessarily know where it was going, but it was groups of youths who were causing lots of problems on borough so that to me was a TP [territorial policing] issue rather than a specialist crime issue. Um, and we started looking at this. So, we said "how can we take out networks like this?" and we were doing our usual techniques in Waltham forest which were tried and tested and probably over tested now – test purchase etc. Having significant success and what we found there was when you looked at it, it was a drugs problem, it was a pocket and the violence came to protect [the] drugs market (OFF1)

As the officer hints, the tactic has been deployed frequently in the MPS over the last few years, generating a large number of arrests, charges, sentences and seizures used as a marker for success. Drug enforcement was also incorporated into performance targets, such as the widely publicised 'dealer-a-day' (see for example, Razaq 2013). Many of those arrested were under 18, but seen as legitimate 'targets' because of their believed gang connections and vis-à-vis potential for violence. Unsurprisingly, dealers have become wary of such tactics and one officer suggested that the level of organisation of a gang could be inferred by their awareness:

> Well-established gangs are very cautious about who they deal to and will challenge users to smoke crack in front of them. As soon as they dealt the product they'll want people to shoot up or smoke there and then which makes it quite challenging cause they know [undercover officers] won't do that (OFF2)

The overuse and/or 'success' of proactive drugs-focused policing was seen by officers as a direct driver for the expansion of drug activity outside London. One officer describes the time honoured and unremarkable evolution of criminal strategies to stay one step ahead of the

law and seek new markets (Hobbs 2013):

> Initially in the noughties, gangs were using cuckoo addresses - you know, vulnerable drug users addresses taken over and drugs sold out of those addresses. In London now I think that a lot of that came out of police tactics – crack house closure y'know, Superintendents authority to close the address down and the dealing moves onto the street, people mouth drugs to each other and small bits are taken out at a time, they can claim it was percy [personal use]. That is in itself an evolution, from that the MPS have targeted those gangs through undercover operations, test purchase operations, regular warrants, stop and search, supposing you've got a group that keeps getting targeted by a range of tactics they're gonna move out to the counties which is what I think is a reason for the evolution of county lines dealing, the other part of the reason is the abundant market and that there is not really resistance and lots of customers (OFF4)

County Lines

Similarly, another officer suggested that it was a combination of the EGYV policies – the attention across criminal justice partners and changes in legislation – that prompted the perceived gang expansionism, mirroring closely Densley's (2013) gang evolution perspective:

> But then the gangs evolved and you have this thing where there is a lot of targeting in London. And elsewhere, so West Mids., Merseyside, Greater Manchester through EGYV. And through MOPAC. And then they started moving to the counties and maybe that was because of the attention they were getting in the cities. From police and the prison system. Five years' mandatory for firearms and more recently two strikes and out; by moving out that changes the culture of the gang itself. It became more business-like, more supply and demand (OFF1)

The common thread is the perception that drugs supply is the gang's *raison d'être*; officers reason that the perceived increase in instrumentalism and market expansionism driven by police tactics is seen as evidence of their rationality and organisation. In contrast to the varied motivations for violence perceived by reactive officers, when policed through the drugs and organised crime lens, violence was seen as almost exclusively drug related. As one officer admits, the complex interactions and relationships render motivation virtually beyond the police grasp, this did not stop him seeing drugs supply as key:

> It is a too difficult thing to understand. If I was, just personally giving my opinion, I would say it is 80-20 towards drugs [markets as motivation for violence], if not more. [Dynamics] around girlfriends and respect and dissing is very much highlighted. We have great examples certainly in the county lines piece where two gangs from London have gone to a county force and saturated the market and there have been two murders, three murders over a six-month period. Um, do young kids fight over their piece of housing estate for no other reason, they might do when they are very young because it might be cool to be in a video and look up to your peers but in reality, they are protecting a market because the demand in London for drugs is still huge (OFF1)

By definition, this would logically make many gangs ‘organised criminal networks’. The following excerpt from a recent MOPAC Police and Crime committee illustrates how embedded the perception has become:

> That is also one of the biggest changes that we are seeing to the scene that young offenders operate in. Instead of the market being Peckham, Brixton or wherever it is they live, the market that they can sell drugs in is now huge. It does mean that we have what were definitely urban street gangs heading towards being serious organised criminal gangs because the amount of money they are able to make is that much greater (Police & Crime Committee 2017: 7)

Interviewees were all very aware of the County Lines phenomenon and many provided anecdotal examples of London ‘gangs’ being found to be dealing in ever more far flung corners of the UK; established London gang names were consistently referenced as being ‘up in Edinburgh and Aberdeen’, ‘over in Cardiff’ or ‘operating in Europe’. What was less clear was whether this was a function of the ‘gang’ (almost always a long-established name recognisable to anyone in the gang field) or merely individual endeavours by those with some form of association to a recognised gang in police eyes; a point one intelligence analyst highlighted:

> County Lines is not a gang phenomenon, it is a phenomenon of people involved in drugs supply, and again some people get a bit confused with that (AN1)

Such confusion may lie in the various reports which all mention County Lines and gangs in the same breath (Fuller 2015; Hallsworth 2016; NCA 2015b), and is inextricably linked to the wider

definitional conundrum. The intelligence around County Lines, as these reports suggest, is limited and has the potential to suffer from what Sheptycki (2004: 321) refers to as 'defensive data concentration'; a surfeit of poor intelligence generated from an organisational focus generating duplication of poor quality data. Focus on County Lines is, as one analyst described, very much 'flavour of the month' in national, regional and local policing policy and practice. When EGYV was replaced by Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation (EGVE) in 2016 (Home Office 2016), 'County Lines' became a central feature of gang policy, with a shift in focus towards the vulnerability and exploitation associated with young people who may be coerced into transporting or dealing drugs, whether locally or further afield.

Dismantling the 'Gang': Developing Long Term Operations

The methods of proactive enforcement have evolved over the five years of Trident GCC. Interviewees outlined changes in the way proactive resources were deployed against gangs in London by Trident, in line with national policy. Focus has shifted from suppression tactics to long term operations aimed at completely dismantling what might best fit – from a police perspective - the super-articulated gangs described by Pitts (2008). Something that although previously aspired to, was not usually fully realised:

> I think that some enforcement tactics [the MPS use] look at, y'know, quite often the top tier or the middle tier level, just a single aspect, with the view of taking the whole gang down whereas sometimes there's a more effective tactic in terms of picking off smaller players (OFF3)

Crucially, these tactics utilise what the officers describe as a holistic approach, with full Local Authority and Partnership support and an emphasis on assisting, rather than criminalising, those vulnerable individuals that may be being used by the network. One officer involved underlined the interwoven policy and policing dynamic:

> It seems a bit chicken and egg really because it seems that at the time we were establishing this project there were a lot of press about County Lines, Teresa May's speech not long after coming into power talking about Modern Slavery, it was interesting to see the political flavour

> of the month…the Home Sec has been saying "not on my watch in terms of exploitation" in the paper (OFF2)

The same officer identified the cultural shift within gang policing needed to go from seeing fourteen-year-old drug dealers as 'easy wins' to understanding - and not arresting - them as victims:

> …that's the thing for us culturally here…this has been a challenge… this is a new area of work…I'm saying to my team who have been focused for years on drugs and guns and basically incarcerating gang nominals…OK, look at these individuals, … that they identify who are the street dealers, they identify they are 14 or 15 years old, they arrest them for PWITS [Possession with intent to supply] Class A drugs. Those people to them are drug dealers. Before. Now they're victims (OFF2)

The aligning with central and local governmental policy appears to have also brought back some of the lost intelligence resources for the teams involved:

> The problem with this is that things get centralised and then we get around the fact that it has been centralised. Trident would previously have an intelligence development team. When we established [this operation] I was asked what is your wish list? And my wish list was an intelligence development Team. I got it (OFF4)

According to officers involved, the dedicated analytical support that became available through policy alignment, and addition of enhanced partnership intelligence, enabled a deeper, more nuanced and 'holistic' understanding of the gang - or rather relational networks - than the one-dimensional mapping that would usually occur. Although couched in gang terminology, the officer actually described 'nodes' in a network (Hobbs 2013; Hallsworth 2013) – gang affiliation was not always present:

> The permission to allow us to focus on specific gangs and individuals for a longer-term period has allowed us to understand street gangs better than before. A good example is the current operation whereby we are working on the [XXXX], they are rated as the number one gang in London for 18 months. From the met intel perspective – let's be honest it's based on what is recorded on the box [intelligence database] … the gang was reasonably chaotic and they were street gangsters that run a particular postcode area and this that and the other…what we have found is that there are individuals that are far more organised, there is large scale fraud being

> perpetrated, there are gang nominals that are specialists, like operating on the dark web to purchase firearms and purchase drugs to get stolen credit card details to set up fraudulent accounts to arrange logistics nationally (OFF2)

The in-depth analysis of the individual and their connections changed officer perceptions of the criminal behaviour of the gang members, or what previously undeveloped intelligence had indicated. A degree of apparent organisation and professionalism which had not previously been associated with the gang was identified, in an almost too perfect depiction of the super-articulated gang:

> Tom – So, you're talking organised crime now?
>
> Properly, when people talked about this gang before, nobody, because we hadn't had time to look at these individuals who are the higher echelons or higher echelons of the street gangs, not the suppliers but those who are actually running the show and tasking kids going to the counties etc. If you look at those individuals who are like the mid-tier who are the people that often start appearing quite high on the gang's matrix because they are involved in a lot of criminal intelligence etc. some of those individuals are actually a lot more specialist than we've thought in the first place. So, by focusing on those individuals we have gathered evidence on different offences which we wouldn't have looked at recently like online fraud up to the value of £200 thousand. Massive. (OFF2)

Another proactive officer gave a similar account in terms of gang involvement in County Lines, extending the reach still further into the realms of terrorism. He placed gang 'elders' at the crossover between middle market supply and street dealing. For this officer, the money being made from the lines (he cited up to £2000 per day) was being funnelled into organised crime and 'potentially if it was the right gang, terrorism' (OFF4). There is increasing academic focus on the overlap between organised crime and terrorism ((see for example Madsen (2009); Makarenko (2004)). However, ambiguity around such 'hybrids' remains, and as Ruggiero (2017: 10) observes, '[t]he crime–terror nexus has emerged at times as strong and undeniable and at other times as tentative and ambiguous, depending on the work examined.'

The above examples demonstrate the complexities in mapping and policing the phenomenon, but also highlight the inherent dangers. To the officers, the gang became mappable again,

enabled through resource intensive and complex intelligence development and analysis. Through the mapping of networks – which it should remembered is ultimately designed to gain convictions – the street gangs they were working on suddenly became networks of organised professional criminals. Although the officers recognised that they were dealing with interconnected networks rather than one gang behemoth, the terminology employed was gang-centric.

A major aspect of the operation described above was the ambition to involve partnership agencies and gain key strategic local support, both to increase the flow of community intelligence and increase the legitimacy of enforcement led interventions. As part one explained, the Trident approach was originally based partly on gaining legitimacy in communities affected by gun violence, the following section explores this further.

Part Four: Communication, Partnership and Community Engagement

Public Communication of Aims and Objectives

As part one explained, Trident was built on a model of community engagement designed to provide legitimacy for enforcement actions by building trust. It was hoped that this would garner crucial intelligence from affected communities thereby enabling focused targeting of those causing most harm. The broadened remit of Trident to encompass gangs – and the 'identity crisis' this has engendered - has impacted on Trident's external signalling, manifesting in complex ways. On the one-hand, the portrayal of the unit as an elite squad focused on the serious and 'professional end' of gang and gun crime is designed to assure communities that the most serious criminals are being targeted, as well as signal to the criminals that Trident is on their case. On the other, the widening of the enforcement net to young people on the periphery of gang involvement – or who simply live in the areas in which

Trident predominantly operate –has caused community tensions and accusations of 'easy pickings' from the affected population.

Mixed Signals to the Community

Officers were keen to draw attention to the community engagement side of Trident, but less sure as to efficacy of its efforts. Several suggested that the Partnership and enforcement aspects of Trident were effectively siloed from each other, with the potential to send mixed messages. One officer portrayed the expanded remit as positive in that it enabled Trident to cover all bases in gang-affected environments, from the kids dealing drugs, to the young men carrying guns through to the international criminal networks that were perceived to supply and control them:

> I think we are one of those units that doesn't sort of ride into town and ride out, like the Flying Squad do, we have an indelible footprint in local communities, and I think we buy into that concept of truly local to global in terms of what we try and achieve (OFF3)

Whilst a local authority practitioner was less certain of positive community engagement outcomes:

> [Trident just] rock up do three months and go again; no follow through. In some case this can be disruptive to local partnership. There's good intention, but [enforcement and prevention] is not something you do to the community -- it is a two-way conversation (AN4)

For many of the communities with which Trident seeks to engage, enforcement is perceived as biased towards the young boys from the area who may or may not dabble in drug dealing – or be co-opted by professional criminals. These 'low hanging fruit' present a particular enforcement conundrum for Trident in terms of gaining community buy-in. As the 'available population' (McAra & McVie 2005: 27) some will invariably get caught up in drug operations which are ostensibly designed as a means of enforcement against 'the most violent', as the previous section described. Communicating the work that is being done, whilst not comprising operational integrity appeared to be problematic. As one officer described:

> It's the community – they think no one is doing anything about it. I've had families who have suffered, saying why is nobody doing anything about this person? - he does it over and over again (OFF8)

Borough police officers also felt that more could be done to explain that the MPS were paying attention to the upper echelons of organised criminal activity;[40] they also felt that Trident could better communicate their activity to local police suggesting that organisational siloing impacts on both internal and external information channels. One local officer, more than likely referring to the ill-fated Shield gang intervention (Davies et al. 2017), suggested that poor communication via the media gave an impression that the MPS did not understand the issues at hand:

> The central message from MOPAC and the MPS, through the media, does not currently focus on the causes or the effects of gang affiliation and activity. This hinders community engagement as we do not sound as though we are aware of the issues as an organisation (SR-129)

A similar difficulty exists with the proactive targeting of firearms. Often these are being held by third parties, for example, girlfriends who may be either unaware, uninvolved or forced into doing so. Several officers expressed frustration that the resources were not available to develop such operations further thus link with drugs supply – the weakest most accessible end of the chain gets punished, which can present a similar perception of 'easy pickings' to the public; 'You have to remove the firearms because no matter how innocent the person is you have to get the gun off the street' (OFF7).

One officer was acutely aware of the vicious circle this creates in terms of community engagement:

> What we need to start doing is targeting the offenders that we all agree are the hardened criminals. It is a two-way thing - we will say that the community don't tell us anything but the

[40] 49% (n=38) agreed that 'The MPS could be better at communicating how Organised Criminal Groups are targeted', only 21% (n=16) disagreed.

> reason that they don't tell us anything is because they don't trust us with the information and what we are going to do with it…and it is all built on trust (OFF1)

There appears to be an increasing recognition within senior officer ranks as to the challenges that the 'gang' label poses whether in terms of internal definition or external communications:

> It causes challenges within communities about being labelled as a gang member and as we know it is not an offence to be in a gang, but there is a stigma attached to it, certainly from certain communities who see it and perceive it as a way of targeting BME [Black and Minority Ethnic] youth (OFF1)

It would be unfair to suggest that responsibility for community engagement, and the understanding of local dynamics that this has the potential to enhance, should all be placed on Trident. It is the local police, local gang units and Community Safety Partnerships which are best positioned to this effect. They have the responsibility for deciding who are the most violent and at-risk individuals. The following chapter details findings from this process.

Summary

This chapter has demonstrated the often-overlapping specialist and organisational responses to gangs policing in London. In the face of significant external and internal pressures, Trident has evolved in terms of remit and responsibility. The prioritisation of increasingly scarce resource to tackle the most harmful gangs and individuals is fundamental to the policing approach and is reliant on the accurate identification of such using the intelligence mechanisms outlined in Chapter four, as well as the fair appraisal of risk by boroughs who are competing for Trident resources and are thus given a perverse incentive to exaggerate their gang threat. As chapter four described, rather than being the objective, precise and 'scientific' measures of harm and activity they are presented as, the mechanisms and statistics which

guide operational response are fallible and open to influence and manipulation outside Trident's control.

The dual focus on gun and gang crime has also caused tensions. Within Trident, officers have questioned the impact of dealing with what they perceive as 'lower level' criminality on both the efficiency and legitimacy of the specialist approach. Externally, the approach continues to expressly link firearms crime and youth violence creating an overall impression of increased risk.

The tactics of targeting suspected violent gang members for drugs supply offences were also explored, and raised the possibility that practitioner perceptions of the pervasive nature of drug dealing in gangs are influenced by such pervasive and often indiscriminate targeting. Finally, the chapter explored how proactive units have adapted their approaches in line with changing government policy, securing resources and legitimacy, and suggesting a further stage of evolution in the life of the unit. This is connected to a realisation amongst some that the focus on the gang may be detrimental to community engagement.

The previous chapter highlighted some of the nodes of distortion in intelligence led approaches, problem analysis and problem identification experienced by analysts and police officers centrally. The following chapter takes a closer look at the primary mechanism for monitoring harmful gang members and directing resource - the MPS Gangs Matrix.

Chapter Six: Local Policing Response and the MPS Gangs Matrix

The previous two chapters have illustrated the processes and mechanisms which combine to shape the organisational understanding of and operational response to gangs at central and specialist levels, exploring perceptions of the processes from the perspective of both analysts and Trident police officers. Both raised questions as to local processes and motivations for labelling incidents and individuals as gang related and the relative harm assigned. This chapter explores how gang understanding and response is shaped locally. Arguably, it is at borough level that the police processes are most malleable to the influence of external stakeholders - of which there are many - often with competing aims and objectives. The scale, complexity and variance of local policing responses to gangs necessitates a filter; the perceptions and understanding of the MPS Gangs Matrix provides this, presenting a window into both partnership and policing processes in the gang field. The chapter is split into three parts. Part one briefly reviews the policy and directives that shape the localised responses to gangs, before exploring variations in approach to Matrix processes across boroughs. Part two considers the impact of intra- and inter-organisational structure on the process, in terms of both information flow and technical resource. Part three considers the different perceptions of harm, risk and vulnerability within the police and across partner agencies.

Part One: Matrix Process – Policing in Partnership?

Background: Police Policy and Directives

Specialist gang units within the MPS also operate at borough level. Although local partnership orientated approaches existed prior to EGYV,[41] the establishment of Trident Gang Crime

[41] For example the Haringey Gang Action Group was established in 2009 (Haringey Local Authority 2009)

Command in 2012 saw the requirement of all 'gang affected' boroughs to establish a police gang unit, as one senior officer involved in the process recalls, 'dependent on their current challenges' (OFF1). The *Tackling Gangs Operating Model* (TGOM) outlined the preferred – but not mandated - governance structure and processes for local boroughs response to gang crime, recommending that the police units should where possible be integrated and co-located in the Local Authority's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) structure, who should have ownership of strategy and operations (MPS 2012a). Gang problems should be 'owned' locally with assistance from Trident provided when needed, notwithstanding the shootings and latterly 'gang related' stabbings that fell under Trident remit as discussed in the previous chapter.

As of early 2017, 20 of London's 32 boroughs incorporated variations of Integrated Gangs Units (IGUs). Local structures and monikers vary but IGUs are typically part of a wider Offender Management Unit or embedded within a local crime squad and referred to as a 'Gangs Task Force'. Boroughs without 'fully' integrated approaches usually still have a small number of officers dedicated to policing gangs, and partnership input will still be identifiable although processes may not be as developed. Precise remits and roles vary across London.

Boroughs were instructed to dedicate four per cent of officer and staff strength to tackling gang activity across the overlapping strands of enforcement, intelligence and partnership (MPS 2012a). Several interviewees felt that this created tension locally as gangs were seen as something Trident should be dealing with. Officially, gang unit strength across the gang boroughs ranged from four Sergeants and thirty-four constables (Lambeth) to one Sergeant and eleven constables (Barking & Dagenham) (MOPAC 2016a).[42] In practice, units vary in

[42] It should be noted that workforce numbers have decreased substantially since then due to budgetary constraints.

officer strength, and can fluctuate dramatically with local gang officers routinely being sent to aid other units or boroughs to meet organisational demand.

Borough gang units do not have investigative primacy on non-Trident remit gang related crime but instead rely on local job allocation processes similar to that of Trident's, usually built around the flagging of gang incidents and Matrix inclusion. Local police units will undertake a variety of proactive and reactive enforcement roles, as well as more pastoral diversionary work such as home visits and community engagement. Delegation of these activities varies between boroughs; with the enforcement and engagement teams sometimes operating independently which, as will be discussed, can cause tensions and misunderstandings. Mediation is offered by some gang units as well as support across a number of needs from assistance with housing, employment, education or mental health needs. The IGUs have the ability to draw on a range of criminal and civil enforcement options for those deemed not to be engaging.

Matrix Management

In addition to enforcement and intervention, borough gang units have responsibility for their local gangs Matrix. Centralisation of intelligence resource has meant that over time Matrix administration has shifted from analysts and researchers within the local intelligence infrastructure, to a dedicated police officer within the local gang unit. The TGOM recommends multi-agency gang-specific meetings designed to co-ordinate resources locally and inform gang matrix selection, dedicated Police Officers, Gangs/Youth workers, Senior Probation Officers, Youth Offending Service Officers, ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) Enforcement Officers, Housing, Jobs and dedicated analytical support. Again, local processes differ but all gang-boroughs have a version of the following:

- **Monthly Partnership Gang Nominal Meeting –** to devise offender management plans for Red and Amber Matrix nominals.

- **Weekly Operational Review Meeting** – to review gang activity and coordinate resources to address emerging gang tensions or issues.

The previous chapters have demonstrated the centrality of the Matrix to gang policing in London. It is the primary mechanism for identifying, monitoring and directing both police and partnership resource to the most violent gang members on each borough. It informs the central MPS intelligence picture of who these individuals are, feeding mechanisms such as GRITS which are designed to monitor gang harm, and is central to Trident resourcing decisions. Officially, it is communicated as both an operational policing intelligence tool and a 'wider partnership document' (MPS 2014). This chapter explores the extent to which it can be described as such, recognising the importance of understanding local processes in its construction.

Purpose, Aims and the Politics of Knowledge

Unsurprisingly, the official purpose of the Matrix was well understood by the police officers that used or administrated it; the 'language of risk' (Garland 2003) was roundly employed by respondents, with the predominant view that, in keeping with the official purpose, the Matrix was designed to target the category of most violent gang members and used to justify allocation of resources towards them. A smaller proportion of officers also specifically mentioned intervention and help for those being victimised as an aim of the Matrix. However, descriptions of its actual use and perceptions of veracity did not always tally with 'toeing the line' about official purpose, as will be explored below.

Interviewees and survey respondents highlighted the wider misconceptions about the Matrix, which may have consequences beyond mere semantics in terms of shaping gang perceptions within the institutional environment. At an ACPO level, the Matrix is consistently referred as

a list of all gang members in London and there exist numerous examples of this in the media[43], by politicians[44] and in policy documents (HMIC 2017). Misrepresentation or misunderstanding is unsurprising when Trident's own *Tackling Gangs Operating Model* uses the Matrix as a proxy for all gang members; 'According to our information, there are 250 recognised gangs in London, comprising of about 4,500 people' (MPS 2012a: 4).

Variations and Commonalities in Local Process

Different boroughs have different inclusion criteria for their Matrix. This can vary according to the partnership policy; for instance, Croydon has publicly stated that it does not include female gang members on the Matrix, as the borough's 'gangs lead' describes:

> We do not hold girls and young women on our local matrix…The reason behind that is because we do not consider that girls and young women hold decision—making powers or authority within a gang structure or an organised criminal group structure, by and large. We would describe girls and young women as being 'gang—affected' as opposed to being 'gang—involved.' (Police & Crime Committee 2015: 13)

Whilst gender is incorporated in the selection criteria for at least one borough, it appears to be an unwritten policy for the majority; most local police practitioners thought that female gang members were under represented on their local Matrix.[45]

Similarly, some Partnership structures incorporate the integrated gang response within the 'youth violence' or children's services areas of the CSP, which is somewhat divergent to the generally non-age delineated police approach; a stark example of this impacting police understanding is clear – Apricot borough (a 'non-gang borough') only includes under-25s on their Matrix, pointedly ensuring that the integrated response is referred to as 'youth

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[43] A recent Guardian article describes it as all individuals in London 'known to be in a gang, suspected of involvement, or at risk of joining a gang' (Dodd 2016a).

[44] MP Chuka Umunna refers to Matrix as a list of London's gang members (HC Deb 29 January 2016).

[45] 68% (n=54/79) believed female gang members were under represented; 32% 'about right'. No one perceived females as over represented.

violence'. For both these boroughs, the influence of the Local Authority is clear on Matrix policy. Several interviewees highlighted the reticence of some Local Authorities to label any of their violence as gang-related, suggesting the decision was mainly on reputational grounds. Sometimes it was just a question of perspective:

> Some Local Authority's would have this fixed definition and some would say that they are not a gang they are a group of kids dealing drugs or robbing people on an estate because they don't have a name for example…very inconsistent (AN3)

Whilst the examples given were mostly around the nascent period of the EGYV programme, one officer suggested that such issues were still occurring whilst describing his own perceptions of where gang activity was being displaced to:

> It is clear there has been displacement of recent gang problems into what ethnically would be non-gang boroughs, and the feedback we have been getting is that the local authority who are obviously key strategic partners in dealing with these sorts of gangs have distanced themselves for the fact they have a gang issue. So, there has been that problem and from a policing perspective to effectively deal with it you've got to persuade political partners or key strategic partners that you have a gang crime problem (OFF3)

Findings indicate that the police value partnership input in providing a more holistic understanding of local group and individual dynamics, and partnership intelligence was also highlighted as being frequently used to identify gang member affiliation by a majority of boroughs.[46] However, it is less clear how much influence partners actually have on who is included – or removed – from the Matrix. Boroughs with developed partnership processes emphasised the collaborative approach, such as the one described by an officer from Lime borough:

> …it gives the whole panel, which includes Youth Offending Services, Probation, Local Authority, Safer London, Youth Services, Education and Health, a sense of ownership and inclusion in the decision making (SR-120)

[46] 71% (n=20) of responding boroughs indicated partnership intelligence was used either frequently or often to confirm gang involvement.

Yet well integrated gang boroughs were also keen to highlight that partners were not always consulted. Others were even less convinced of non-MPS input:

> The Matrix is seen as a policing tool rather than something to be shared with Partners let alone the community (SR-37)

Different Community Safety Partnership (CSP) structures meant the professional role of partnership leads varied. For example, one borough made inclusion decisions in consultation with the local head of the Youth Offending Service (YOS), whilst for others it would be the Local Authority Head of Community Safety; differing priorities and objectives are likely to influence decision making. Police practitioners indicated very mixed views as to whether the police and partners were always in agreement over who should be selected, underlining the subjectivity involved in gang member identification. [47] One borough indicated that partners played a greater role in selecting minors, another similarly observing that:

> Partners are much more willing to monitor juveniles on the matrix, and less willing to support the monitoring of adult gang nominals (SR-10)

As a police database first and foremost, it is unsurprising that most decisions were based primarily on policing imperatives; these were varied, emphasising the uneven application of operating procedures. For boroughs without an IGU, the decision rested solely on the police and appeared to be more influenced by performance and 'looking good' to senior management. One administrator highlighted his frustrations to this end:

> I have been in the role for two months and given the political nature of the Matrix, can understand why Sapphire Borough has over 80 nominals on the Matrix. The majority were targeted [and subsequently convicted during a series of ops]. So, it would appear they were added once it was known that a judicial disposal would arise (SR-99)

[47] 39% (n=30) indicated police and partners were not always in agreement about who should be added to the Matrix, whilst 32% (n=25) highlighted general agreement.

Removal

Decisions on which individuals to remove appeared to have greater variation and little Partner involvement across boroughs. Along with the standard, relatively uncontroversial reasons for removal (e.g. that the individual had moved out of the borough, died or been imprisoned for a long but unspecified period) respondents had varying responses when it came to cessation or reduction in offending or a belief that the individual had desisted from gang related criminal activity.[48] The time periods for 'not coming to notice' ranged from three to twenty-four months but were mostly unspecified.

Risk aversion was a common reason for non-removal meaning that individuals with no recent offending or victimisation history could be kept on, 'just in case' something happened, as one officer described:

> There is an element of fear that if a person is removed completely and they then become a victim or suspect of serious gang related violence there would be heavy criticism (SR-53)

Others indicated that although some individuals should perhaps be removed, management would not allow them to do it:

> I have attempted to remove over twenty subjects from the matrix who do not conform. I have been told I cannot and they will fall away naturally (SR-99)

Findings indicate that reluctance to remove individuals also relates to the Matrix's use as a long-term gang intelligence tool - a pathway to digital immortality. The information age, as Jacobs (2009) notes, makes it far harder to destroy digital evidence leaving the distinct possibility that those labelled gang members will be indelibly etched into the digital tools of the police, a feature ominously described by one respondent:

> [The Matrix] provides a corporate memory - individuals are remembered, highlighted, discussed and either engaged with or targeted (SR-144)

[48] Most boroughs specifically stated committing criminality, though several just discussed intelligence and 'association' to the gang.

For many officers, it presented a 'easy point of reference' to identify an individual's gang affiliation.[49] Similarly, one borough indicated that 'elders' were kept on the Matrix despite zero scores as an intelligence tool to ensure newer officers were aware of their affiliations, also demonstrating the variety of individually on there and the assumption that desistance is unlikely:

> Just because a matrix nominal scores no points does not mean he is not criminally active. We have gang elders that would be totally unknown to new gang staff if they were not on the matrix (SR-47)

The belief that it was virtually impossible to leave the gang was evident in many officer responses, relating to removal from the Matrix, the following was typical:

> Even if you have actively engaged with such a nominal and they have 'left' gang life behind and not just playing lip service, they are still a legitimate target for rival gangs. It is extremely difficult for any nominal to totally leave 'gang life' (SR-53)

Resource issues appeared to have a discernible impact on how many individuals were maintained on local Matrices; however, these related to the number of people that boroughs had the capacity to manage rather than inflation to gain Trident resource, as suggested by officers in the previous chapter (something that local practitioners would of course be unlikely to admit to). One practitioner on a borough with a history of gang issues confirmed that resourcing dictated numbers on their Matrix, to his annoyance:

> I would choose more staff to deal with those we identify in gangs, instead we try and keep the gang matrix population below 200 as beyond this, it becomes unmanageable (SR47)

Although too sensitive for the survey data, resourcing was an issue for Matrix practitioners across boroughs; nearly half the respondents agreed that 'Local resourcing issues and/or policing priorities can affect the number of people included on the Matrix'.[50] One officer

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[49] 77% (n=62) of officers used Matrix as indicator of gang membership 'Frequently' or 'Quite Often'.

[50] 45% (n=32/76) either strongly agreed or agreed that 'Local resourcing issues and/or policing priorities can affect the number of people included on the matrix'; 29% (n=22) disagreed.

described how his borough has not had the resource to carry out audits to ensure individuals are removed:

> It was agreed that if the person had zero points and had not come to police notice in a year, they could be removed, but we have not been able to audit the list (SR-138)

Local auditing and oversight practices highlighted the contradictory views presented in terms of organisational protocol and procedure; boroughs overwhelming indicated that their local matrices were refreshed regularly, yet this did not mean in practice individuals were removed.[51] There was little indication of any robust local oversight of the Matrix process other than the multi-agency panels that might decide inclusion. This was particularly evident on poorly resourced and non-integrated boroughs where Matrix oversight is essentially within the gift of the Matrix SPOC who often has little resource or time to audit.

Exploratory data analysis on a dataset of monthly snapshots of the Matrix supports findings that boroughs take very different approaches to refreshing and updating their matrix. Lemon borough, an EGYV borough with a developed integrated approach, has kept over half of its population on the Matrix for the entire period whereas Cerise, a borough with a similarly developed 'gang response' infrastructure, kept only 24 per cent of individuals on for the same period. Whilst it is possible that the two boroughs were managing very different types of offenders, or that Cerise borough had a particularly transient or churning gang population, it is more likely that these figures highlight differing local policies.

Similarly, two EGYV boroughs with similar average Matrix populations, showed very different proportions of individuals always 'live'.[52] On Coral borough 72 per cent of individuals appearing on their Matrix were always live, compared to 33 per cent on neighbouring Cyclamen borough. Essentially, the 'live' nominals are not committing – or getting caught for

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[51] Of 28 boroughs with valid responses, 75% (n=21) indicated their matrix was refreshed regularly; whether weekly (n= 11) or monthly (n=21).

[52] 'Live' refers to individuals currently at liberty as opposed to those currently in 'Custody'.

– offences that might place them in custody. Analysis of why this may be the case is beyond the scope of this thesis – it does however signpost a likelihood that some boroughs simply keep the same individuals on, regardless of evidenced offending activity. Once they come to notice – they stay on police notice – this might also explain the reticence of some partners to share information on their clients, a theme highlighted in the following section.

Part Two: Information Flows in Complex Structures

The previous section demonstrated how local policy at police and partnership level, resourcing, and risk aversion can all influence who goes on - and comes off - the Matrix. Officers also indicated that there are a number of organisational characteristics which might influence their ability not only to decide which individuals should be included on the Matrix but also local understanding of gang issues more generally; specifically, the relative integration of the unit within both the MPS and Partnership structures and subsequent impact on information flows, and the availability of localised technical resources.

Siloed by the Gang Remit

Just as gang violence is perceived by some as a Trident 'remit' problem, so criminality presumed to be 'gang related' can be seen as a local gang unit problem by other officers on the borough. One gang unit's DCI referred to PCSOs and Neighbourhood Policing Teams as routinely refusing to investigate low-level criminal damage such as gang tagged graffiti as they believed it fell within the gang unit's remit. This can work both ways; whilst working within one well established Integrated Gangs Unit, I overheard a very loud discussion as to whether an incident came under the unit's remit: a young man had been assaulted the previous evening but there was a lively debate as to the genesis of the violence, which ended with a 'no, we'll leave that one – just another drugs robbery'.

Communication between neighbouring gang units was highlighted as particularly good, allowing for management of individuals who offend across local borough boundaries although this became a source of frustration when boroughs felt they were responsible for crimes being committed on other boroughs. This is more indicative of the siloed nature of London's borough-based policing set-up than anything else.

Local officers were generally negative in their assessment of information sharing between local units on the borough too; this appeared dependant on where the gang unit or team were placed within the local organisational structure, with some teams feeling completely disconnected whilst others highlighted the benefits of working closely with other units. For example, the Missing Persons (Mispers) Unit, was described by one officer as a 'dumping ground' for PC's on restricted duties,

> ...because the mind-set is - people frequently go missing - what can we do? it is social care's responsibility' but this officer also highlighted how 'Mispers' should instead be used as an intelligence goldmine for 'gang related' County Lines exploitation, adamant that 'what is happening for sure is that those frequent 'Mispers' are dealing drugs (OFF2)

Frustration was evident at the intelligence flow locally,[53] particularly from neighbourhood officers, the following being a typical response:

> There is a lack of intel being fed back from local officers. I have lost count of how many times I have been approached weeks or months after a piece of intel was obtained but the officer did not put it on CRIMINT. There is little motivation for officers to input what intel they have gathered unless they are obliged to, like Stop and Searches (SR-53)

Some highlighted the lack of locally available analytical product, tacit acknowledgement of the problems in recording situational intelligence 'outside the box' locally and across London:

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[53] 33% (n=26) agreed that 'Different MPS units communicate information about gang members effectively', 32% (n=25) disagreed with the statement, 34% (n=27) were neutral.

> There is no place to look up a gang, see where their territory is, who their rivals are. This is poor. All this information is well known to individual borough gang units and almost too obvious to record anywhere (SR-47)

Several officers expressed their frustration that they were gaining no intelligence from PNC flags on locally managed gang nominals, which again hints at policing by remit and the operational and information silos that gang units unwittingly contribute to establishing. Although complaints mainly revolved around a lack of intelligence coming into the gang unit, the Matrix is itself not disseminated widely to local officers, something that the majority of respondents thought should change.[54] The risk would be in its use as just another confirmatory intelligence tool for gang membership, however the potential for it to be used as an opportunity for feedback from local officers as to the accuracy of an individual's gang affiliations or harm score exists.

Community Intelligence

Matrix practitioners generally felt that 'gang affected communities' were not aware of the Matrix, and those that were did not understand its purpose. Most officers did not perceive the existence of the Matrix as having any negative impact on community relations, also suggesting there was no need for the community to be consulted.[55] However, responses illustrated the varied opinions in terms of transparency. Some argued a more transparent approach might increase public fear of gangs, or give the wrong impression of the extent of the gang problem:

> It would have a far more alarming impact than needed as the community would not understand how it reflects on crime (SR-15)

[54] 68% (n=54) agreed that 'The identity of local Matrix nominals should be shared more widely within the police'.

[55] 68% (n=50) disagreed that 'Gang affected communities in my borough are aware of the Matrix'; 80% (n=59) disagreed that 'Gang affected communities in my borough understand what the Matrix is for'; 45% (n=32) disagreed that 'The Matrix has a negative impact on police-community engagement', 41% (n=29) were neutral; 67% (n=50) agreed that 'Local communities should not be consulted on the Matrix, it's a confidential policing tool'.

> Being a non-gang borough any suggestion of the Gangs Matrix or its use locally would potentially paint a misleading picture concerning gang activity locally (SR-59)

Others saw possible benefits to community relations in terms of legitimising police action:

> If the Matrix became accountable and open to all, it could be a useful tool in Police and the Community targeting gang members, especially if assisted in grounds for Stop & Search, Warrants, and stiffer sentencing (SR-16)

Despite practitioner reticence about sharing the Matrix, most believed that the community was a good source of intelligence on gang members. Some, however pointed out barriers, highlighted what they believed to be issues in public reporting relating specifically to gang violence:

> The community in [Indigo] borough does not co-operate with Police investigations especially in relation to gang incidents; there is a fear of reprisals coupled with "snitches get stitches" culture (SR-47)

Interestingly, one officer did not think that the local community perceived groups of young people as gangs in the same way that the police did. For the officer, this was framed as a failure to 'see' the gang for what it was, rather than a cause for questioning whether the police label was the correct one:

> I am not convinced local communities provide good intelligence about gang criminality as they see a group of youths hanging around, smoking drugs, as a gang rather than an actual gang. They are good at association, but not about an actual gang (SR-86)

Two local ward officers gave a similar account:

> These gang members don't really disrespect the local community. We've been at community meetings where people don't acknowledge there is a gang problem. They've turn around and said "what? Where? I walk down there all the time. They open the door for me and then they move their bike for me." (OFF6)

Similarly, a Trident officer described how the public on one borough simply did not see the groups of kids as gangs in the same way officers did:

> [Lilac Borough] does have gangs, but not when you speak to the public. Centred on organised mobile phone thefts, groups of kids from 10 or 11 [years old] upwards to 17,18 on mopeds and bicycles. They are clearly what we would describe in the Met [MPS] as a gang because they were clearly working in conjunction with each other (OFF7)

Partnership Communication and Information Sharing

Whilst the barriers of the well documented, historic and organisationally endemic 'silo mentality' were raised by some officers (James 2014; Sheptycki 2004), the benefits of partnership working in the gang domain were widely espoused. They highlighted the rich insights gained from areas that the police simply would not know about or angles they may not have even previously considered. From my own experience, violent incidents were often able to be placed in a motivational or situational context that explained why they occurred, rather than simply assuming that an incident was 'gang related' and that this is context enough. This often came from the Youth and Gangs workers who had direct contact with the individuals involved, developing rich understandings of their life worlds rather than just their offending behaviours. Officers were keen to emphasise that it was the co-location, or regular face-to-face contact and the personal relationships that developed that were key to information sharing, rather than specific intelligence tools or databases (SR-15).

Generally, officers were far more complimentary about information sharing arrangements within the Local Authority and probation - particularly the Youth Offending Service. External agencies (e.g. education, health) were seen as sharing less information, with little difference in perception between gang and non-gang boroughs. Most of this rich vein of information was shared in the context of partnership meetings, informally and verbally.

It would appear that local officers were gaining a great deal of situational intelligence around local gang and violence issues, however, how much of this information goes onto police intelligence systems is unclear. This creates a situation where local response and understanding may – in boroughs with well-integrated gang units – be good and directing

resources towards the right people but there is no outlet for this to be represented centrally. Even if there was, officers expressed doubts that the mechanisms which ultimately direct resources – including the Matrix – are sensitive enough to reflect this.

An Absence of Police Analysis

Simply having good access to information and intelligence does not in itself mean good problem understanding; it needs to be *interpreted* to generate an effective response, something not all boroughs had ready access to; much to the frustration of one practitioner on a 'gang' borough:

> 'We don't have analysts. Can't access CRIS. Only analytical support is through a police officer on restricted duties. The best police officers, they're not very analytical…it's ludicrous and it's creating risk and it's not helping us deal with issues, I don't think we're very dynamic around knowing what is going on because there isn't analysis.' (AN4)

Confidence amongst local officers that the individuals selected for the Matrix were always gang members – or that the gang assignation was correct - was mixed.[56] Whilst this is likely to be a reflection of the complexities of the phenomenon being mapped, it also suggests a lack of analytical product. The centralisation of analytical resource outlined in chapter four appeared to have a significant impact on local ability to understand gang problems; local officers had mixed views as to whether the centrally produced intelligence products reflected their local understanding of gang problems or facilitated the identification of potential gang members. [57] [58] Some were unequivocal: 'There is no central intelligence product' (SR-12).

[56] 58% (n=46/80) of officers agreed that 'It is often difficult to confidently assign gang affiliation', whilst only 20% (n=16) disagreed with the statement.
[57] 21% (n=6) of boroughs used Central/Specialist analysis either 'frequently' or 'quite often' to identify gang members for inclusion in the Matrix.
[58] 28% (n=22) agree that 'Central intelligence products accurately reflect the gang related problems on my borough', 29% disagreed (n=23), 42% were neutral (n=33).

Of forty-three descriptions of local processes in identifying gang members, only one mentioned analysis at all. For many boroughs, this has meant an increasing use of officers in analysis roles, which appears to be increasingly common across the MPS as resources have become strained. One PC on a small 'gang borough' described his work in such terms:

> I link violent offences together…produce i2 [Analytical Software] association charts and assist with sorting through mobile phone data and use MapInfo [Analytical Mapping software] to produce maps to support investigations undertaken by our gang team (SR-43)

Whilst another appeared less enamoured with the expansion of role: 'the term used is; "do all the research yourselves or it does not get done"' (SR-15).

The combination of poor intelligence and a lack of analytical support appeared to be impacting on some boroughs ability to map specific gang problems. The TGOM stipulates that boroughs should provide a clear intelligence profile and picture to enable Trident to advise and assess (MPS 2012a). Findings suggests that this is not always readily available, or clear, as one Trident officer explained, hinting at the overlap between police and analytical work:

> What I've found from our side [proactive] is that we'll go to a borough and there isn't a great intelligence picture and we have to do it ourselves (OFF2)

Another officer highlighted the lack of any kind of overview of current gang problems:

> In [Lavender Borough] for example, no one seems to have an overview, an example, an i2 chart of what gangs there are, who interacts with who, no one is developing that product, it just doesn't exist (OFF4)

He viewed this as not just a deficit of analytical resource, but of supervisory police officers who were actively involved and engaged with developing local intelligence pictures:

> A lot of things are centralised you don't have BIUs [Borough Intelligence Units] with a DS, DI or DCI who owns and are interested in that problem (OFF4)

The plethora of rich information available within the partnership structure offers significant potential to understand gang and youth violence issues in a more nuanced and holistic way,

not least by consideration of the situational context in which they occur. Unfortunately, the barriers to doing this in a systematic way are significant. In addition to the lack of analytical resource described above, these include the unstructured and complex nature of much of the information, data is not always easy to access or collate, and stored across a myriad of incompatible systems:

> There's lots of data out there but I don't think it is very well organised, there is not really the capacity for analysis unless the local authorities do it (AN4)

However, a number of local gang units were found to be overcoming local resourcing issues in police analysis by using Local Authority analysts to build up an understanding of gangs on the borough.

Bridging the Gap? The Local Authority Analyst

Local Authority analysts are taking on an increasing range of practices once the sole domain of the police. Their cross-cutting role allows them access to a wider pool of data and information channels than possibly any other practitioner in the gang and youth violence field, whilst they are by definition best equipped to make sense of it. Having a 'foot in both camps' as one analyst described, appeared to bring numerous advantages in understanding the nuances of the gang problem at a local level. This did not mean they were necessarily any less likely to perceive a gang problem than their police counterparts, just that their perception of local dynamics was markedly different. Just one quarter of boroughs used local authority analysis to help confirm gang membership on a regular or frequent basis although it this may have been because they do not have access to analysts.[59] One officer on a borough that did have such access underlined their centrality in mapping gangs and gang membership:

[59] Half (n=14) of the responding boroughs indicated they used Local Authority analysis only 'occasionally' or 'rarely/never' for the same purpose.

> [Gang members are] identified through the use of the [Turquoise] Council Gang Analyst who researches the Police CRIMINT system / YouTube etc. and creates I2 charts. Without him, with the lack of engagement completed by the Police Gangs Unit, we would struggle to identify new gangs / nominals as the unit is too under staffed to keep on top of the workload whilst researching open source etc. (SR-73)

Where previous research has suggested that for police analysts, "the 'gang' may represent an abstract entity, comprised of records from a database understood through the lens of a given definition" (Fraser & Atkinson 2014: 57), the Local Authority analysts I interviewed presented a view almost diametrically opposed. They described instead how they would go out into the field, emerging from the 'insulation' often experienced by police intelligence analysts:

> Myself and [a colleague] are going into the community ourselves now, making connections with third sector providers and schools; when it comes down to it we need to get the intel first hand instead of third hand. I'll go and meet youth workers and schools, I've been away with people from the [local third sector provider]; went away for the weekend. I done a workshop around YouTube videos and it was really good to meet some of the up and coming gang members (AN5)

Trust

A recurring theme in the conversations I had with Local Authority Analysts was trust. There is a wealth of intelligence and information they are privy to that police officers are not meant to have access to, so that building trust through personal relationships and a shared understanding of what action was appropriate were critical. As one analyst explained:

> It's back and forth – so it is the police understanding that 'right you've told me this, and I will put it on a CRIMINT as source intel but we are not going to act on it the same way we would do from intelligence from another source.' (AN4)

As with MPS analysts, personal relationships were fundamental; one analyst described a police officer who had gained the trust of non-police practitioners by demonstrating he handled the intelligence they provided discreetly: 'He's such a nice man, the youth workers feel really comfortable sharing intel with him' (AN5). The same analyst described how one officer created barriers to information sharing by prioritising enforcement activity:

> …he had zero respect for the partners and that put up a blockage because they would stop sharing information with his teams because they would be worried about what he'd do with it. We had an office where the people on [various community orders] go to and there is an agreement where you don't arrest there, but his team turned up and arrested (AN5)

Another Local Authority analyst reported similar experiences, hinting at the complexities of integrated approaches in terms of balancing the (often competing) priorities of the agencies involved:

> Sometimes the police acted quickly on information that was sensitive, for the right reasons but hadn't realised or seen the multi layered effect that could have (AN8)

Whilst Local Authority practitioners generally tended to be more intervention focused, the analysts I spoke to perceived the gang problem to be significant; they saw gangs just as officers saw them. One described how they maintained additional lists of 'potential gang members' or those 'at risk' that they were not willing to share with the police for fear of unnecessarily criminalising individuals that may not have come to police notice:

> My colleague has identified over 200 individuals that might be associated. The problem comes in 'do these names get shared with police?'. I would say no, not at the point, they need a dedicated youth work team to work with them quite intensively. Although my team is good here at understanding this – we need to be nice, they are not yet criminals, that opinion won't be held by the other [police] teams on the street (AN5)

Despite definite signs that information sharing is improving, barriers still exist, causing frustration to both sides, as this Local Authority practitioner angrily remonstrated:

> The worst bit … is making it difficult for council staff to get trained on police systems. If you want to protect the 32 thousand [officers] and that's your red line so you're trimming the fat until there's not much fat left. If you then get rid of analysis yet you're trying to run a modern police service it's utterly stupid unless you're going to empower partnerships… we don't have analysis! (AN4)

Of course, trust works both ways, and the police are (necessarily) cautious about sharing information and intelligence such as access to Matrix and police databases or privileged

information on operations. Gangs officers across boroughs indicated that many of their units maintained additional local police databases tracking gang members 'on the periphery'[60]; whilst it is not clear whether these were shared with partners, the proliferation of gang monitoring mechanisms well beyond that of the Matrix raises familiar concerns around civil liberties and appropriate targeting (Aldridge et al. 2008).

Part Three: Matrix Use and Value

The Matrix generated mixed opinions across local officers and interviewees. Despite difficulties with analysis and information sharing, and misgivings around gang member identification, local officers were reasonably confident that the most violent gang members were captured on the Matrix, [61] and valued its use as a general reference tool. However, local officers were less positive that the Matrix helped to reduce gang related violence across London,[62] or that it accurately reflected the harm and risk of those placed on it.[63]

Responses suggested that this perception is likely to be based on the different understandings of harm and risk, and over what type of offending should be prioritised. There was clear frustration that the 'hands off' senior or 'high level' individuals believed to be running drug supply networks and 'directing violence' were not always captured on the Matrix;[64] and when they were did not score highly. The following comments represent the general consensus:

[60] 50% (n=14) of responding boroughs indicated they maintained additional lists of 'Those at risk of becoming involved with gangs'; 46% (n=13) of 'gang associates'; 32% (n=9) of 'unconfirmed gang members'; 11% (n=3) of 'non-violent gang members'.

[61] 74% (n=57/77) thought that the Matrix captured 'The most violent gang members on your borough'; 10% (n=8) thought violent gang members were over represented and 16% (n=12) under represented.

[62] 19% (n=14/75) agreed that 'The Matrix has helped to reduce gang related violence in London'; 32% (n=24) disagreed; 49% (n=37) were neutral.

[63] 27% (n=21) believed 'that Matrix scoring adequately reflects the harm/risk of gang nominals'; 50% (n=39) disagreed; 23% were neutral (n=18).

[64] 58% (n=45/78) of practitioners thought 'Senior/High-level gang members' were under represented; 38% (n=30) believed representation was 'about right'.

> The issue is that a lot of the green nominals are likely involved in county drug lines that isn't measured and less likely to come to notice (SR-134)

> I feel often these people fall off the radar and are clearly operating at levels where they influence drug markets and linked serious violence (SR-59)

> Possession with intent to supply should be a scoring tool to give a true reflection on a person's vulnerability and rank position within a gang (SR-15)

This confusion of risk of violence versus a perception of harm caused through drug dealing related criminality was a common theme amongst local officers, and acknowledged but accepted as 'part of the process' by central intelligence:

> The younger ones are often the Reds – they are the ones trying to prove themselves and are going to be on the street. If you have someone running a gang or an elder more likely to be involved in supply in cocaine and heroin. A lot of the elders will be scoring green even though they are a key member (AN1)

Of course, scoring can also be skewed the opposite way, as one officer recalled:

> We had one guy who had been pushed up because he got arrested for a few violent offences. At one point, he sat at number one on the MPS Matrix and we all thought that was utterly farcical because he is basically a fat kid flying round on his bike, he deliberately went through red lights to get officers to chase him. He is not like, you know, the [X gang] who have got firearms and are planning criminality around firearms… that is real gang to me. Not these kids that are dallying on the edge (OFF9)

Interstitial Ordering

Findings at the local level highlight the organisational siloing by remit and perceived seriousness. Frustration was evident amongst local officers that they are not always party to the operational activity carried out by Trident and other specialist units, and also that they are cut off from centralised analytical resource. Several officers mentioned the 'gaps' that gangs or groups operate in between levels of MPS response:

> That level – they float too low for Trident and too high for borough resources to deal with, they're quite clever (OFF9)

This echoes the warnings of a decade earlier when the MPS gang definition was first introduced; the conclusion of an internal document outlining procedure cautions:

> A point worth repeating is that the most problematic groups and individuals to categorise will almost certainly be found at the boundaries between the Hallsworth and Young definitions, for example essentially social peer groups being drawn into conflict with other similar groups, or gangs moving into organised criminal activities. In these cases, it will be important that *balanced judgements* [their emphasis] are made about the risks presented by such groups so that the police and other agencies implement appropriate responses. There are risks associated with both under-acknowledging and over-defining the scale of offending related to gangs and other criminal groups and the framework presented here should at the very least help to establish the parameters of these decisions in a consistent manner (Hales & Muir 2007 : 3–4)

Local officers described their frustration at not being able to go after the individuals at the more organised end of what was perceived to be gang related criminality. The difficulties in reconciling an organisational approach which seeks to divide 'organised' criminality from street level violence with a practitioner's experiential-based belief that these worlds overlap in complex ways was clear. Trident officers, in contrast, emphasised the need for boroughs to get the basics right – arguing that the Matrix was the most efficient way to curtail violent interaction:

> A lot of operational practitioners at DS sort of level feel quite passionately about those people who are in the slightly higher echelon category directing supply without getting their hands dirty and they are the people they are quite passionate about getting evidence about and I can understand the reasons for that. At the same time actually what it boils down to a little … is what is the objective of our work? why are we doing what we are doing? For me I think that focusing on the most violent people is the correct way… if you focus on the top of the tree you might remove that person but someone will always replace them and that person at the top of the tree was never going to fire the shot or stab the person so they're not the violent person, in some respects what they are doing is harmful and is driving a problem – the drugs for sure is the driver for the violence but is it an efficient use of our resources to target that individual? … I'm not sure it is (OFF2)

Intelligence analysts were far clearer on the purpose of the Matrix to monitor violence. One central intelligence analyst explains why some older individuals might remain on the Matrix, highlighting the static nature of the mechanism explored in Chapter Four:

> One of the problems when the Matrix started was it was that it was always seen as something that would grow, whereas when we got into it being around for a few years maybe some of them had moved onto other criminality. Not that they were no longer criminals, maybe effectively become more of a drug supply network. Rather than tit for tat gang violence in their local area. Some of them tend to move on when they get into their late 20s or early 30s… they should be managed in different ways. The Matrix is not the platform then to manage those individuals. Um... but it gets difficult because we don't have intelligence saying they're no longer in gangs. That's where it should be reviewed by the boroughs to make a decision. All the intelligence is drug supply related (AN1)

Thus, in practice this means that very different types of offender are banded together at 'green' - the lowest harm band - from low scoring youths 'on the periphery' to seasoned professional criminals, therefore requiring very different responses. In addition to the distinct possibility of 'risk amplification', this can have some unexpected consequences in itself; for instance, inexperienced PCs being instructed to conduct 'diversionary' home visits on 'senior' gang members:

> Low scoring gang 'Elders' are visited by non-gang experienced officers because they have to and have no idea what they are supposed to say or do to just tick a box for their sergeant (SR-47)

Opinions were also mixed as to whether the Matrix directed local police resource appropriately.[65] Some practitioners believed that the Matrix was given too much of a priority by local senior management, and that it meant that violent individuals who were not gang associated did not receive the same level of police attentions – operational 'coverage' in police parlance:

[65] 46% (n=36) of officers agreed that 'the Matrix helps direct local police resource appropriately'; 28% (n=22) disagreed.

> We tend to have a lot of individuals that are involved in street robbery, knife crime, drug dealing that we have no knowledge of gang affiliation…these violent individuals do not get the same coverage of those on gang matrix (SR-134)

One analyst highlighted his frustrations at the lack of analytical input into who is selected for the Matrix, as well as the dominance of recorded offending activity over intelligence. This was a common complaint across interviewees, casting doubt on its utility as a primarily predictive tool:

> It is lacking more intelligence, there is a heavy focus on hard measures like CRIS, the intel score and the victim score which is good, but it needs more intelligence. There should be an analytical input into whether people are chosen or not…it is the first effort to systematise gang membership so in that sense it is good. It is not the perfect tool. And it is driven to performance, it's driven to action (AN2)

The absence of analytical input or good quality intelligence was perceived to limit its use as a tool for prediction; instead – as the analyst suggests, and the previous chapter explored, a major function of the Matrix was as a performance management tool. This was confirmed by local gang officers; nearly two thirds indicating frequent usage this way to monitor enforcement actions.[66]

Intervention and Diversion

Publicly – and amongst police practitioners – the Matrix is portrayed as a multi-faceted intelligence tool, which allows for the appropriate prioritisation of policing and partnership resource. At the low-harm end, this generally means attempts at engagement; home visits, 'we know what you're doing' letters; and offers of diversionary activity. Although most practitioners did not see the Matrix as providing individuals with better opportunities to exit the gang life,[67] several perceived an imbalance in the support that was offered, between

[66] 63% (n=49/78) used the Matrix frequently or often as a performance management tool.

[67] 47% (n=37/79) disagreed or strongly disagreed that 'Being on the Matrix gives individuals a better chance of exiting gang life. 28% (n=22) believed that it did. 25% were neutral (n=20).

'gang' and non-gang documented young people, indicating the possible positive impact of being on the Matrix:

> If someone is on the Gangs Matrix they get a better response i.e. YOS [Youth Offending Service] / Police offer all available tools to them for diversion etc. Trident take investigations from borough which means they have more persons looking at the crime rather than a single borough CID officer (SR-73)

The Matrix's use as a tool to direct interventions and offer assistance is regularly referred to by senior officers in defence of the Matrix, and a majority of local police indicated that they were informed of intervention and diversion work.[68] However, this is not formally communicated outside the borough and crucially will not usually include any indication of the outcomes of the interventions.[69] Knowing whether someone is actively engaging is likely to impact how officers interact with the individuals, and the level of discretion exercised on any encounter, possibly leading to trust issues discussed in the previous section.

Officers saw the Matrix as doing a reasonably good job of identifying gang members most at risk of violent victimisation.[70] Its use as a mechanism to monitor violent victimisation was seen as the least frequent use by practitioners, contrary to the view of senior Trident officers:

> There have been political moves to suggest it might be skewed in terms of…even suggestions of racial profiling not intentionally. This is absolutely not the case because it is victim focused as much as suspect and it is about who our victims are and it is about protecting the vulnerable…and trying to reduce youth and gang violence (OFF1)

[68] 59% (n=47/80) either strongly agreed or agreed that they were informed of intervention and diversion work with matrix nominals. 16% disagreed (n=13).

[69] Phelps' (2015: 173) study on the impact of mediation on gang member violence raises some interesting questions regarding outcomes. One of his interviewees, an MPS analyst whose role was to ensure that 'high risk threats of immediate violence' were referred to mediation, commented that one 'low risk' gang had been pushed up the harm/risk scale due to in-fighting: "I was really worried that we were actually sorting out their internal HR issues as a gang, as an organisation, and maybe making them a better gang at the end of it!"

[70] 63% (n=47/75) believed the Matrix representation of those most at risk of violent victimisation was 'about right'; 31% (n=23) saw this group as 'underrepresented'.

The differing and often competing priorities of partnership agencies involved in the processes of gang offender management were a source of frustration for both officers and local authority analysts. The fact that much of the information is difficult to quantify, or is recorded on disparate systems in unsystematic or easily extractable ways, is certainly a barrier to a holistic assessment. However, more fundamental is the different assessments of risk in the first place, as one officer describes:

> …a lot of people…don't see the subtle difference so if you talk about probation they'll have their scores of reoffending etc. Which is different to looking at violence and will throw up different people, so if you look at people coming out of prison and you do an exit interview and there is a difference between 'will they reoffend?' and 'will they be a violent gang member?' (OFF1)

Another officer highlighted the risk and vulnerability information police are not privy to:

> So, somebody who is on the Matrix but has not been convicted, stopped a lot etc. They will have the other information that will flag it up to them, they'll have schools involved, so we had a job a couple of weeks ago - a 14-year-old stabbed – he was OK – within a couple of hours of the Merlin [vulnerable child report] going on, the world and his wife was phoning me – strategy meetings developed, head of child services – he had loads of Local Authority flags whereas in my opinion he is one of many – yes, he is vulnerable - but so were the last few I have had and where were you then? But for some reason they feel that he is worth it. The borough social services will look at the Merlin and then they have far more information than we do (OFF7)

Interventions and diversion cannot be split between 'high harm' and 'low harm'; there is ambiguity and crossover; the young person on remand for murder is also vulnerable, probably more so than some of the individuals on the periphery. Of course, intervention and diversionary work is by no means only focused on those on the Matrix; each agency within the partnership structure will have their own clientele sometimes overlapping and sometimes not.

Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that despite being utilised and externally disseminated as a pan-London mechanism for identifying harmful gang members, there is much variation in who is placed on the Matrix and why. The Matrix is populated differently across boroughs, dependent on a variety of factors including: force level directives; local policing and partnership policy; police risk aversion; operational activity; resourcing; recorded offending activity and intelligence; the perceptions and beliefs of police and practitioners from a variety of agencies (not necessarily evidenced or recorded).

On the one hand practitioners see the benefits of the tool in presenting some kind of order in an environment which they know first-hand is chaotic, fluid and ever changing. But on the other, there is clear frustration at having to label and box in the first place, as well as a feeling that this is not capturing those involved in organised drug supply. These paradoxical perspectives suggest an imposition from above of ‘process’ over ‘analysis’.

Chapter Seven: Practitioner Perceptions of Gangs

The previous chapters have demonstrated the processes by which incidents, individuals and groups are gang labelled, as well as the police action this generates. This, the final findings chapter, presents practitioner perceptions of the gang. Part one draws on practitioner interviews and responses from the Gangs Matrix survey; it highlights key themes, focusing on defining features, structure, organisation and criminal involvement, considering all in relation to changes over time. Differences in perception between distinct groups of police practitioners are discussed. Part two presents a case study of the policing experiences of two local officers based on a ward with a recognised street gang, considering gang policing outside the specialist gang unit 'bubble'.

Part One: Perceptions of Gang Structure and Criminality

On Definition

Local gang officer views on the validity of the MPS definition were mixed; whilst two thirds believed it to be useful to some extent, and no one described it as not reflecting their experience of gangs whatsoever, just under one fifth described it as being 'of limited use'.[71] The definition's failure to capture the influences of 'elders' who respondents saw as controlling gangs was a commonly stated criticism, including a failure to specifically mention drug supply, emphasising the perception of drug supply as the *raison d'être* of the gang:

> The control of drug lines is paramount and the violence committed by these is mostly in relation to control of these drug lines (SR-62)

[71] 68% (n=62) of respondents believed the definition was either 'very useful' or 'of some use'.

The potential for the application of the definition to mislabel was raised by a small number of officers, as one respondent describes: 'a group of young school kids who are committing ASB type offences are quickly labelled as gang members' (SR-13).

The predominant perception was, as reflected by several interviewees, that the definition did not adequately capture the changing nature of gangs in London towards instrumentality and being 'organised'. Perceptions of the extent of this change ranged from, '[t]he priority in every gang in London is drug dealing' (SR-31) to a more considered:

> the…definition is from an era when gangs were identified by the area they lived. In my experience the new breed are more transient and are not defined or constrained by boundaries (SR-87)

Heterogeneity between gangs within boroughs and across London was emphasised by some, with an acknowledgement that:

> Gangs can vary massively from one to another. I do not believe it is possible to have a definition to encompass all gangs in different geographical areas (SR-24)

Gangs as Prevalent

Several analysts took the view that the public were blissfully unaware of the true extent of the gang problem. One observed that 'it's quite scary when you work with this information' (AN1) whilst another suggested:

> If they knew how many gangs there are on GRITS they'd be shocked. For me, I think; 'yeah, we do have a gang problem but it's nothing new', whereas a member of the public might be quite shocked (AN3)

As the above quote suggests, many practitioners did not see the problem as worsening, but rather evolving, thus on gang violence 'we didn't have a worse problem after the riots than we did before' (AN3), but the vast majority of practitioners perceived an evolution towards drug supply, yet perhaps not in a way quite as clear-cut as Densley's (2013) evolutionary thesis suggests.

Defined by Drugs Supply

There was an overwhelming perception among both interviewees and survey respondents that drugs supply was the foremost defining feature of gangs across London. Local officers ranked drug supply as the number one defining feature of the gang, whilst drug market related violence (3) and County Lines drug supply (5) all featured in the top five.[72] The following were typical:

> The control of drug lines is paramount and the violence committed by these is mostly in relation to control of these drug lines (SR-62)
>
> The priority in every gang in London is drug dealing (SR-31)

Conversely, 'connections with Organised Crime Groups' did not rank highly in defining features for local gang officers; this might suggest that practitioners do not perceive most gangs to be as connected as some research has suggested. However, it could also indicate that these connections are not perceived as important determinants of the gang, or that due to the organisational siloing they are simply not aware of links. To most officers and analysts, the financial gains derived from this activity was the fundamental basis for gang existence. A few respondents expressly linked this to the 'respect', 'power' and 'influence' that they believed ultimately motivated the gangs. Almost all interviewees indicated that over the time they had spent in their roles, gangs in London had 'evolved' (a commonly used term), initially to become more violent and territorial, and latterly through increased involvement in organised drug supply, ultimately towards out of London 'county line' drug dealing.

For all officers, and the majority of analysts, the 'business' (i.e. drug dealing) aspect of gang

[72] Survey respondents were asked to rank the top five most common defining features of gangs in their area from the following: Age; Connections with OCGs; Drugs supply; Ethnicity; Family ties; Friendship; History/Shared background; Nationality; Other; Other criminality; Outside London drugs supply (i.e. County Lines); Sexual Exploitation; Street based; Territoriality/Shared geography; Violence - Drugs markets; Violence - Gang rivalry. Using weighted scoring on rank, Drug supply scored highest, accounting for 20 per cent of the total ranked scores (n=287/1410). Gang Rivalry (18%); Violence – Drugs Markets (12%); Territorial/Shared Geography (12%); Outside London Drugs Supply (10%).

life far outweighed everything else, with several officers noting a shift in offending from robbery and phone snatches to organised drug dealing. Reasons given for this change varied; one officer put forward the predominant view, namely rational choice as a 'safer' option for earning money:

> I think that gang dynamics has changed into more organised things and drugs as there is more money and it's a bit safer, you're not just robbing someone for £15 and leaving fingerprints and photographs and god knows what else…I think it has shifted into that and with that comes more responsibility and therefore more maturity (OFF6)

The involvement of younger individuals in serious violence and drug dealing, whether through choice or coercion was also consistently raised by interviewees and highlighted by survey respondents. Yet there were some dissenting voices. For one analyst, the polar opposites of sociality and violence – rather than drug dealing – defined the gang:

> I would say that what it is about is just like the social experience [but] with criminal connotations and above all, violence. I would leave it as that, and probably the existence of a name [although] I have seen some gang-like structures that have all the 'seasoning' [characteristics] but they don't have a name; I would say socially based and violence based… that would be for me the important bit of the gang (AN2)

Organisation

The overarching perception of gangs as drug dealing businesses appeared to influence understanding of organisational structure, but also noted clear contradictions. The most typical view from local gang officers was of that of the age-graded, loose hierarchical structure, with 'youngers' involved in street level dealing and violence, and 'elders' operating at a higher level with a 'hands off' approach, resorting to instrumental violence when necessary, very much in the Pitts (2008) and Toy (2008) vein. One survey respondent succinctly captured this pervasive view:

> Gangs appear to be clearly defined in terms of 'elders' and 'youngers'. The 'elders' do not lay claim to a territory / postal area and are therefore less prominent on the streets. The control of drug lines is paramount and the violence committed by these is mostly in relation to control

> of these drug lines. The violence is less frequent but more planned and extreme (use of firearms etc.). Elders are predominantly 20 plus and keep a lower visible profile. The 'youngers' are more street based and are generally 15-18. They identify more readily by area and overt gang affiliation, primarily dis tracks and use of Social Media. This group are responsible for most of the street level violence, stabbings and acid attacks, and this primarily centres around making a name for themselves to the 'elders' and so to move up the chain of command. It is these members that will habitually carry knives and use them (SR-23)

Yet whilst this (perhaps too) neat encapsulation summarises the predominate practitioner view, the blurred boundaries between street based and 'hands off' were very apparent, as was the confusion over what activities crossed into organised crime. Over the course of my research it became abundantly clear that even the most experienced gang officers and analysts found the pinpointing of links between street gangs and organised crime challenging, and that only a small number could be identified with confidence as having the 'super articulated' structure put forward by Pitts (2008). As one experienced senior officer explains:

> I think that there are only a few gangs that operate at … national and international levels. Although we are seeing more street gangs in terms of the county lines, you do get aspirational development of some gangs to widen their network (OFF3)

The 'aspirational' aspect described above can be interpreted in the comments of another senior officer who saw the younger generation as entering established drug markets on their own terms, identifying a more business minded, but paradoxically more volatile slant:

> I think … the gangs have evolved. When we first started, the gangs were self-defining…there were a lot of colours, there were a lot of bandannas. There were a lot of videos going on. I think for me what happened there was that you always had drugs networks but then the younger people got involved and they brought the street element to it (OFF1)

Senior officers, due to their experience and access to confidential information, tended have a greater awareness of the more organised end of gang related criminality. The apparently bifurcated approach between organised and street level activities is extrapolated on further by OFF3, who saw the top-level organisation becoming increasingly sophisticated – professional criminals doing what they have always done and evolving with the times to keep

one step ahead of enforcement. Here, a perception of interconnecting nodes, joining together when needed and operating separately when not, is very much in evidence;

> I think they are becoming more organised in terms of trying to stay one step ahead in terms of law enforcement - so that is a constant throughout history and they will constantly evolve in that regard but I think it has become less hands on – in terms of firearms trafficking and money laundering and drugs – they are operating more online with technologies such as the darknet and so in that regard you will see more people operating as lone operators rather than some sort of Al Capone hierarchy…You do see that hierarchy, of course, but more in street gangs. When you start getting into criminal networks I am less convinced. Moreover, there is a group of people that operate together for a common purpose and are less hierarchical (OFF3)

Removed from first-hand experience and interaction, and operating mostly in the 'overt' intelligence world (I did not interview any analysts based in covert units), analysts draw on a variety of sources to shape their understanding of gangs. Intelligence, particularly that relating to street based violence, plays a fundamental role and it was clear that there were frustrations with seeing only part of the picture.

'Messy' was a common adjective used to describe gang structure by analysts, perhaps unsurprising given they are the ones tasked with ordering the 'mess'. A number of analysts noted the difficulties in mapping those operating at a higher level, for example:

> You get people that do move away and they are sitting effectively at the top of the tree. It is very difficult to understand when it gets to that level because these individuals are very good at what they do and if they weren't they would be in prison by now. The 'in-between' bits are sometimes very difficult, and too much for us to understand (AN1)

All the analysts I spoke to saw gangs as conforming to a predominantly age-driven hierarchy:

> they generally fit a similar model in that you have the older ones that keep their hands clean, the middle ones that do a lot of the dirty work and the youngers… generally that vague model has fitted to all gangs I have worked on (AN6)

Cultural background was also raised by one analyst as a resource from which gang members could draw specialist skills, echoing Swidler's (1986) 'toolkit' providing 'strategies for action'. For one analyst, the diversity of gangs was underestimated:

> …gangs are coming from certain parts of the world that are traditionally very good at trade, and they're coming from a violent country. And that combination makes them unique; the ability to having a trading heritage as well as a violence heritage (AN2)

The influence of cultural background on organisation and structure was also perceived by some officers, with one seeing particularly distinct differences dependant on:

> …the diversity of the borough you were dealing with, so if you went to Tower Hamlets there were a lot of Asian gangs and the Asian gangs are far more business-like. So, they would within the drugs supply pay wages and people would have wage slips and receipts for 'food' [slang for drugs]. And this was Bangladeshi gangs. If you look at African Caribbean, it was slightly more chaotic there wasn't natural leader, it was far more linear (OFF1)

Going Solo: Individual Interests with the Gang

Officers and analysts recognised that within the general milieu of illegal economic activity there also existed independent players that were 'allowed to coexist with other gang members' (OFF1), operating their own drug dealing ventures separate from any overarching gang control. This further muddies the waters of structure, definition and hierarchy. The integrated, fluid and embedded nature of drug dealing, gangs and street orientated criminality are further recognised by one local authority analyst:

> It's probably very difficult to deal drugs in London without being cognisant of those that might be seen as gangs that deal drugs nearby. You might not be a gang dealer but you associate with individuals that might be gang members (AN4)

One senior officer took this ambiguity a step further, highlighting independent players but also questioning the validity of the police conception of gangs:

> We assume there is this strong hierarchy and you ask people who do you work for and they say 'I don't work for anyone' and they don't…but they're allowed to deal in there… but they don't answer to them and they don't give money over to anyone… when you look at the county lines it is along similar lines; you can run your own little industry and you can have three or four youths working for you and there's an independence… So, what we are finding now more and more is that the gangs themselves are splitting, if they ever were a gang (OFF1)

There was a perception amongst practitioners that the fluidity of gangs and allegiances between them had increased over time,[73] which to some degree contradicts the organisational hierarchies described above, bringing to mind the arboreal versus weeds debate in academia (Hallsworth 2013; Pitts 2008) and perhaps demonstrating the heterogeneity of gangs in London. Linked to this, the level of cooperation between gangs was also perceived to have increased,[74] again interviewees expressly linked this to gangs furthering their 'business' interests.

County Lines

Almost all survey respondents perceived a substantial increase in involvement in County Line drug dealing activity by gangs.[75] This was also a common theme raised by interviewees, although many saw the changing focus to vulnerability and exploitation as drawing people's attention to these issues rather than these being new issues *per se*.

The recognition that teenagers and children were being exploited by older individuals to deal drugs was noticeable across interviewees. For some interviewees - notably those with direct operational experience - this shift to 'organisation' was exemplified in the gangs operating drug lines outside London, referred to by enforcement agencies as 'County Lines' (NCA 2017).

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[73] 62% of survey respondents believed there was more fluidity between gangs or networks (n=54/79).
[74] 60% of survey respondents perceived a greater degree of 'co-operation and organisation between gangs' compared to three years ago (n=51/80).
[75] 90% of survey respondents perceived increased involvement in outside London drug supply (i.e. 'County Lines') compared to three years ago (n=78/86).

Language notably changed when officers with experience of County Line drug dealing operations recounted the set up as they saw it, using hierarchical, militaristic language such as ‘lieutenants’ and ‘chains of command’ in their descriptions of how the lines were run. The reeling off of associated criminality from one senior officer reads rather like a Home Office policy document:

> We are dealing with people, and people who are criminals will do whatever they need to do. So, if you take a County Line you’ve got CSE [Child Sexual Exploitation] to criminal exploitation, to drugs supply to adult mental health, to domestic abuse, to peer-on-peer abuse and so the list goes on and [includes] serious sexual offences as well as well as firearms for protecting the business (OFF1)

Whilst they were quite clear on the structures of particular drugs lines, how the gang fitted into them was less obvious. There was recognition from both analysts and officers that County Lines were far from an activity exclusive to gangs, but were often conflated with each other. This opacity was extended to how the younger individuals involved in street dealing and violence linked in with the older, seasoned and professional criminals: the crux of the difference between the super articulated (Pitts 2008) and the arboreal perspectives (Hallsworth 2013).

Violence

Violence committed by and against gang members is the base measure of harm and risk; controlling it is the primary objective of those policing gangs. Local gang officers perceived a significant increase in knife carrying and use compared to three years ago, reflecting the currently termed ‘knife crime epidemic’[76]. For most interviewees, the vast majority of violence was linked to illegal drugs markets. This is a major shift in perception from a decade ago, when ‘respect’ and ‘revenge’ featured just as heavily as motivating factors in gang related violence than the ‘revenue’ of drug dealing. This fits with the prevailing policy

[76] 94% of survey respondents believed that ‘Knife carrying and use’ has increased compared to three years ago (n=82/87).

conceptualisation of gangs as organised drug dealing enterprises. One senior officer estimated in interview that at least 80 per cent of gang related violence was related to drug dealing disputes (OFF1).

> [Gang culture] became more business-like, more supply and demand, and as I say, people don't defend an estate that is run down in London because that's their battle ground; they are protecting an industry…which is drugs (OFF1)

However, not everyone concurred with this hyper-instrumental view of drivers for violence; several officers based on gang affected wards saw a different reality, though all perceived younger individuals becoming increasingly involved in serious violence.[77] The perceived separation of instrumental and expressive violence was described by one officer:

> Street violence is slightly different because there are a number of different ways that could come about - you know, you could obviously have your drugs debt, you could have a feud or a long-standing feud, that's never gonna go away, that side is almost separate from the business side of it (OFF4)

Likewise, violence relating to gang rivalry was ranked above violence relating to drugs markets by survey respondents. Differentiations were still made between street orientated gangs and organised criminal networks, both in terms of the type and perceived instrumentality of the violence:

> The sort of shootings we investigated were around Turkish or Albanian; really complex with the phones - one person calling it on and on, as you can imagine, properly organised. And organised hits, really instrumental, really organised. It's a different type of crime (OFF2)

The officers who had regular, virtually daily contact with multiple members of a single gang highlighted the lack of choice in some violent involvement:

> I think that there are varying levels of criminality that you can choose to be involved in or not but there is some criminality that you must be involved in. For example. if you're standing on [home turf] and 50 [rival gang members] turn up you can't just slip away. Just at the minimum

[77] 80% of survey respondents believed that under 18's were becoming more involved in serious criminality compared to three years ago (n=70/87).

> level you have to be involved because violence can come to you. And you have no option and you have to get involved, you know where the weapons are stashed (OFF6)

The idea of the gang as a safety net to call on when problems occur, as opposed to a group consistently operating in concert was raised by several officers, particularly in the context of drug market disputes, echoing the findings of Densley (2013):

> So how far and how important the gang is I don't know; unless someone else attacks them. I think more is the case (TC)

Although very rarely referred to across practitioners, with the exception of the analyst who had produced a sexual violence profile, survey respondents perceived sexual exploitation involving gangs to have increased over the last three years whilst nearly half of respondents also reported an increase in the number of female gang members over the same period.[78]

Location and Territory

Perceptions around the influence of location and territory were mixed. Territoriality and shared geography was the fourth most common defining feature put forward by survey respondents across boroughs. One officer from a North London borough highlighted the practice of laying claim to territory as the fundamental indicator of gang involvement, surmising; 'Having [an individual] state that he is not safe to go to a particular area is a clear indication that they have a gang affiliation' (SR-47).

Similarly, for one officer who had been working on a long-term operation against a prominent North London gang, geography meant everything in terms of defining the gang. This was a common theme amongst officers who became familiar with specific locales:

> 100% its real postcode territory in [Postcode] [this is Gang1]. If you go there from the [Gang2] they'll expect you're going there for violence, it's as simple as that. It's very, very kind of… it's

[78] 62% of respondents believed that there was 'more' or 'much more' sexual exploitation involving gang members compared to three years ago (n=54/80); 48% of respondents believed that there were more female gang members compared to three years ago (n=42/79); 38% saw no change (n=33/79).

> a community…. It's the sort of area which is … I was talking to my other DSs about this …it's quite a kind of like uneasy feeling if you're around that area if you know what I mean…. (OFF2)

In contrast, one extremely experienced Local Authority analyst, highlighted what he saw as a breaking down of traditional territorial allegiances, with children lured by the perceived glamour of gang life making up their own gangs to generate new rivalries and reputations, with serious consequences:

> [We] mapped them all and they have no geographical connection and it is just literally kids playing at wanting to be in gangs. They have no connection at all with the elders, they are literally just emulating the established gangs. There has already been one serious stabbing between the two [new gangs] – a 13-year-old stabbed by a 12-year-old. If the wound was just an inch across he would have died (AN5)

A large proportion of survey respondents perceived online visibility of gangs to have increased dramatically over the last three years.[79] Again this is slightly at odds with perceptions that gangs were purposely withdrawing from public view so as not to draw attention to their criminal activities.

The evolution of gang behaviours in London was discussed by several officers in terms of declining visibility on the street. Interviewees perceived this as an increasing savviness regarding police tactics and a desire not to be overtly identifiable. One officer describes how all except one gang on his borough stopped 'hanging around' publicly:

> To a point now when you hear the [Gang] are doing this, it's all kind of behind the scenes you can't go there to find them. My experience is that the only one place that you can now go and see gang members specifically is [Uphill]. You go to the areas where the other gangs used to be hanging around you don't see anyone (OFF6)

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[79] 80% of respondents believed that there was 'more' or 'much more' gang visibility online compared to three years ago. (n=70/85)

Varying perceptions of territorial allegiance highlight the apparent heterogeneity of gangs in London, where allegiance can be based on growing up together, cultural background or shared purpose. One senior officer explained:

> some gangs are based on where your parents and grandparents are from and where you were placed when you came to London … But what you also have is territorial gangs which are a mixture of white, black, Asian…. Whatever, which is literally where you live. Who you went to school with (OFF1)

Summary

In line with the definitional conundrums outlined in the literature review, and the processual distortions discussed in the previous findings chapters, perception of gangs and gang related criminality varied across units, roles and ranks. A perception of gangs as age graded hierarchies, matching the accepted understanding of a decade ago, was still identifiable, mainly from local gang unit officers. However, the overarching perception of practitioners was of a change in the structure and characteristics of gangs in London. Gangs were becoming heavily involved in organised drug supply, increasingly utilising instrumental rather than expressive violence, and younger individuals were becoming more involved in serious criminality. The decreasing visibility of gangs on the street was juxtaposed with an increasing online presence. Increasing fluidity and co-operation between gangs caused some to question whether the current organisational definition was still valid, whilst others pointed to the heterogeneity of gangs across London as making attempts at definition redundant. A perception of both sexual exploitation and the coercion of vulnerable individuals into organised drug supply was also evident.

Part Two: Community Policing of Gangs outside the 'Gang Bubble'

The policing of gangs also occurs at a local level, outside of the Gang Unit structure, within local communities. The assignment of dedicated officers to every ward in London was a key promise of the previous Mayor, forming part of the Local Policing Model aimed at reconnecting police and local communities (MOPAC 2016b). The following section is a case study of the experiences and perceptions of policing gangs of two Dedicated Ward Officers (DWOs) on a North London Ward.

Introduction

The ward, which I will refer to as Uphill, is located in an area of a North London borough with multiple indicators of deprivation and historical issues with gangs, organised crime and police-community tensions. Uphill has one recognised gang, known as the Uphill Mob, who have been associated with the area for at least 15 years. The ward regularly features as one of the most violent in the borough in terms of recorded crime; particularly violence with injury and knife crime, and is in the top five per cent of the country for some indices of deprivation. It has a younger than average demographic and a higher than average proportion of black and minority ethnic residents.

Julie, in her early twenties and new to policing had spent her entire first year on Uphill. She was partnered with Steve, an officer with over a decade of experience across all major Territorial Policing roles, including Emergency Response Teams, the Robbery Squad and CID - always on the borough. Julie and Steve had been working together as the DWOs on Uphill for just over a year when I interviewed them.

Their typical day on the ward, a nine-hour shift, involved checking emails from local residents, checking police databases such as CRIMINT and Airspace[80] for any emerging local issues, planning their visits and then spending the rest of the shift out on the ward. Steve estimated that they conducted around 3 hours admin work a day, one third of their shift. Resourcing – or the lack of it – was a major concern to both of them; since January 2016 their team had been cut from six to two, although this was not reflecting in official workforce figures, as Steve put it; '…for one of the most deprived wards in the UK to have just us two is nothing really…'. Steve also suggested the ward was recognised as dangerous by colleagues:

> A lot of people are amazed we just walk around Uphill on foot, we walked round there last week, just half an hour after there had been a call for emergency assistance, where gang members have attacked police

Steve described the situation when he joined in 2004, when his perceptions of gangs was that of the Krays in the UK and the Blood and the Crips in America - 'proper gangs', as he put it. He recalls a time in the MPS when his and his colleague's first-hand experience of gangs was not in line with wider public perceptions:

> The difference is America admitted they had a gang problem but when I joined the Met, London was still like, 'we don't have gangs, gangs don't exist in London'. I was quite shocked to find out that there were eight quite large gangs just on [Cerise Borough] … so I'm thinking OK well, are we trying to keep this away from everyone or what?

Gang Evolution

Drawing on his experience of interacting with gang members across a number of police roles, Steve noted the changes he had witnessed over time, particularly in terms of gang visibility. Where once groups of youths would congregate predictably at specific locations day-in-day-out, now this was a rare occurrence across the borough:

> And then it was like the coloured bandanas. XXXX being the green gang, you could go anytime day or night, every gang had their loitering spot and you could go during the day, there'd be

[80] Case management system for anti-social behaviour

> up to twenty and 3, 4, 5' o clock in the morning there'd be four or five or six. You could be like "right let's go and turn over some gang members" back in the day yeah and you'd know exactly where to go. They all had they're bandanas round their faces or round they're heads in some way or hanging from their belt. You could drive to any territory and you'd know who the gang members were because there would be a colour on display in some way. There was a lot of gang violence; we had a lot of activity

The exception was the Uphill Mob, who he and Julie saw and interacted with gang members on a daily basis. Whilst this group were perceived by Julie and Steve to be the Uphill Mob, the younger gang members now refused to talk about their believed allegiance. Where they used to be blasé and even proud and overt about gang membership, now they would deny it:

> **Steve:** The strange thing nowadays is that if you go up to any group of youngsters in an area that you know is certain territory for a gang and you say are you in a gang they'll deny it. Same with the Uphill Mob; they used to seem pretty proud. They say to us 'why are you always doubting?'. They'll sit there and contest for five minutes 'I'm not a gang member, why are you saying I am a gang member?
>
> **Tom:** How are you so sure they *are* a gang member?
>
> **Steve:** I know 100 per cent they are a gang member

Steve drew on his previous knowledge of these individuals and their associations whilst Julie pointed to a more current source of indication of gang affiliation: 'social media is still there, especially for the Uphill Mob – they're on all on Pac-Man TV [internet TV channel] with brackets [displayed on screen] with their street names'.

The strength of association between the Uphill mob and the area they congregated in – essentially a small stretch of one road - was for Steve and Julie so great that they entirely associated this area with the Uphill Mob, to the extent that they believed it was virtually impossible for young people to be seen there without being part of the gang:

Tom: I'm still trying to picture, where are the non-gang members?

Steve: What I'm saying is if you are in a certain age bracket, say 15-17, you just don't hang around the street because if you're not with them, you're against them. And I think a lot of parents know that, and the ones we speak to would say I'll never let my child hang around here… I can't ever recall seeing any good-natured teenagers around that stretch.

Julie: If you want to hang around in the street, then you're with these lot because if you're not, you're such a big victim; you're robbed.

Criminality

Whereas the Trident officers all saw gang denial as an instrumental response to protect themselves from police attentions, Steve believed that denial was linked to an image they wanted to portray about elevated criminality:

> It's almost like they want to seem like they're more adults and they're organised. If you go into "oh I'm a big drug dealer and I do County lines", you can't call yourself a gang member because that's like almost like silly [local] stuff that you done when you was younger. That's the perception I get if they were to turn around and go "yeah I'm a gang member", they almost feel like they are being immature.

Steve and Julie emphasised a degree of choice in the criminality that the group might pursue, especially amongst those that were a little older. Julie mentioned some degree of specialisation, but not in a way that would affect group cohesiveness:

> I've spoken to them and a few are involved in moped snatches but they'll turn around and say well James doesn't do Moped snatches, he's not about that, but he's still our mate.

Yet Julie and Steve both thought choice was diminished for younger members who were co-opted or groomed into working as runners:

> If you're 15-years-old and a 24-year-old comes and tells you to sell weed in my view that person wouldn't have a choice he couldn't turn round and say "nah, I ain't selling weed". Very, very quickly they have a lot of pressure on them (Steve)

Drug dealing was pervasive amongst the group, who the officers saw as working together to take forward their business. Julie explained:

> The majority are concerned in the supply of drugs but the majority are not concerned in the physical act. I know that a lot of the older members don't have any drugs on them. It will be the younger runners, a lot of the turnaround we see is the younger runners - we don't recognise them. "Hold on a minute you weren't here in January, what's going on here?" and there's no way you'd be allowed to just be hangin' around on a street corner, all day every day unless you were involved there. There's always one key runner.

Although the officers perceived many of the group as trying to 'act up' to Organised Crime, they also noted that many were well aware of police tactics. On one occasion Steve was surprised to find out the gang member he had been talking to already had the attention of a specialist unit:

> He says to me; "oh I've been followed for two weeks" and we say "oh you're just trying to make out you are a proper gangster and we're interested in you" and then I'll find out later that day [from a proactive officer] they're like "oh yeah we're following him but we keep getting compromised – he tells us he knows what we're doing."

The surveillance techniques also extended to watching out for rival gang members, as Julie vividly explains:

> You kind of experience it when sometimes like you'll speak to them and they'll talk to us and be relaxed and all of a sudden their faces will change and it's almost like the hairs on the back of their neck will stand up and they'll look at a car and we'll turn around and say "what's the matter are you alright?" and literally like they'll blank you out and they'll be like this [cranes neck and stares into the distance] and then the car will peel off and they're back. It's like someone hit a switch. They'll know something about a car that they don't recognise or the way it's driven. It shows you that they do actually live in fear and at any time there is going to be gun shots.

The Perceived Impossibility of Exit

Location played a definitive role in determining how individuals behaved. If you maintained a street presence, you were part of that gang, and according to the officers there was no way out. Denying gang affiliation had another perhaps unexpected consequence. For Steve, the

fact they were still there with their associates meant that they couldn't leave the gang; there was no way they could desist:

> **Steve**: 'they'd all be wearing - they were proud - their bandanas and saying yeah we're Uphill for life, we're Uphill all day long, throwing their symbols at you and you'd end up nicking them. But then six years down the line moving on to today, you know I go up to the same guys and say "mate I know you're a gang member, mate I nicked you about 20 times, you used to say that you were Uphill and you were Uphill for life", I was like "all of a sudden you can't just turn round and go [clicks fingers] I'm out of this gang - I'm just gonna socialise with them but I'm not in a gang anymore".
>
> **Tom:** So they can't decide they no longer want to be in a gang?
>
> **Steve**: They can't no. I can't think of any way that you could live in that area and socialise with them and legitimately say right I'm leaving this gang. You couldn't. I think a lot of that is because when you get there or when you form alliances with these people you don't officially say you are in a gang. You just are. So therefore, you can't officially say you are out of the gang.

This inductive reasoning highlights the difficulties with labelling gang members, and in turn points to why so many individuals remain 'in the system' despite their protestations or indeed the evidence to the contrary.

Interaction with Gangs

Being constantly on the Ward meant that relationships were developed with individuals within the Uphill Mob. Both Steve and Julie felt that had earned the gang's respect, to the extent that they would complain of mistreatment by officers from other units, as Steve explained:

> 'they'd be complaining to us that the officers who come up here half an hour before were disrespectful and they said this and that, and we'll go 'look you know the score there's no point resisting them, just let them do what they need to do if you've got nothing on you'. I think we have got a really good relationship with them because they see us as part of the local community.'

This apparent embracing of the officers into their community did not extend to other units, who the group treated with suspicion if not contempt. According to Steve, the gang had

very particular perceptions of different types of officers and would change their behaviours accordingly. A general wariness and dislike for uniformed police (Julie and Steve excepted) was apparent and unsurprisingly, specialist units were singled out for opprobrium. Steve was able to draw on his experience as a Response officer and a Community officer to see both sides of the situation:

> When you've got a response team they will show that officer a very low level of respect because they know that that officer probably don't know 'em. They know that officer ain't dedicated to sorting out issues in their area; he has just received a call and is there to have a bit of blue lights and a bit of fun.'

Echoing Densley's (2013: 25) interviewee's accounts of the police Tactical Support Group (TSG) units,[81] Steve goes on to describe the long running antipathy to particularly assertive policing practices, describing the games that are played with them:

> They call it the Bully Van, they have done for years – 'the Bully Vans here'. Sometimes when they have nothing on them, they'll look suspicious on purpose and they wanna get chased and they'll run and try and cause trouble. They don't like this van and they know what their [the officers] mentality is like.

Whilst Julie and Steve believed their relationship with the group was positive, the interaction almost always took place in a group setting; Julie identifies the difficulties in engagement when suspicions around being a 'grass' are high - getting a single gang member on their own to chat to them is next to impossible, and this was a significant barrier to directing them towards diversionary activities because it also meant Julie and Steve were very careful about their involvement in enforcement related work in the area. As Julie explained:

> …these kind of moments, are when you can talk to these kids and refer them to a youth club or intervention. Going to a warrant completely shuts that avenue down.

[81] Densley's interviewees referred to the TSG vans as '*boi dem'*, slang for the police (2013: 25).

Community Engagement

Julie and Steve both saw differences between how new and long-term residents perceived the group; Julie thought that longer term residents simply didn't see the collective as a criminal gang or feel that they are affected, for her it was mostly newly arrived residents that would complain:

> The people that have lived there all their life are the same people that they have watched growing up. They don't see these people as gang members or people that carry weapons they see them as Jimmy from number 10 and if Jimmy wants to wear his hood up or whatever they don't really see it.

Steve elaborated further, suggesting that the group did not fit older resident's perceptions of a gang:

> whenever you talk to people that are a bit older and you say explain what you think gangs are they'll come out with like Ronny and Reggie Kray. The old-school gangsters. When you have that perception and then you look at four 15-year-olds standing on the corner you don't see them as gang members.

Local businesses directly affected by gangs were described by the officers as being a mixture of 'complicit' and 'scared'; this appeared to be dependent on their own integration into the community. There was a willingness to admit that there was a drugs and violence problem but absolutely no willingness to provide any further assistance to police in terms of evidence, be that witness statements or CCTV footage.

Both officers concurred that the gang was very aware of local community relations, and ensured that community members (as opposed to outsiders) were treated with respect. This tactic (if that was what it was) appeared to work as officers reported community members at local meetings denying any kind of gang problem and saying how courteous the kids on the street were, opening doors and moving bikes out of resident's way.

For Julie and Steve, the gang's behaviour was purposeful and calculated to enable them to go about their drug dealing activities in the knowledge that it was unlikely that anyone would

report them. Steve commented that surveillance teams were shocked at how open the drug dealing would be when they conducted ops in the area; the community complicity created a substantial barrier to the officers being able to gather evidence:

> That's why it's so difficult for us because we know it goes on but to get the evidence is next to impossible as no one is willing to speak, it is one of the most difficult tasks.

Communication with Local Gangs Unit and Trident

The policing work described by Julie and Steve – despite daily interaction with a well-known gang involved in violence and drugs supply – was almost entirely removed from the work of both the local gang unit and Trident. They would regularly conduct proactive work such as weapon sweeps but these would almost always be self- generated, something they didn't object to, as Julie described 'you get a lot of creative space to deal with the issues that you have.' Intelligence and research was usually self-tasked and generated too, aside from the daily borough briefing which might highlight any officer safety concerns or notable incidents in the area.

Between them they had only been contacted once by the local gang unit during their year on the ward - around evidence for a Criminal Banning Order (CBO) which they were able to easily provide - despite the fact that the Uphill Mob were the subject of several specialist operations and interventions over that time period. They both gave several other examples of chance interactions with officers from other units that ended in them providing detailed information about incidents and residents on their patch.

Both Steve and Julie were frustrated with the lack of information sharing *within* the police, and identified divides between all units, not just gangs. One example they gave had particular relevance to vulnerability issues around relating to gangs and County Lines drug supply as Steve recalled:

> All units are siloed. Not just gangs. Only [had] contact from Misper (Missing Persons) desk once. Julie emailed back a massive paragraph – probably see loads of Mispers but don't find out about it. Misper doesn't speak to DWOs. We should be first port of call.

In terms of proactive operations, both recognised the need to maintain a sterile corridor with specific, often covert operations, but Steve highlighted additional dynamics where barriers were purposely created to maximise the chances of kudos for a unit whose operation generated a successful outcome:

> It's kind of like an unspoken - not feud - but barrier between the gang unit and proactive officers; they both do very similar work, they'd both technically be under the CID umbrellas but they try and compete so they know that if they explain to the other one or say "look we're going to do this", the other one's gonna look into it and maybe take a bit of the glory out of it. You don't communicate. And it is really bad sometimes because you would have so much stuff in your head, and you would gather all your own intel on a certain person or a certain address and you know the other team is interested in that person but you wouldn't share, and it's bad in an organisation in this day and age, but 100% that was there, but I think that every unit has got its own bit of eliteness about it, and it's like you feel that if you disseminate any information you've got you're not going to come out of it looking as much of a hero.

Summary

Although Steve and Julie had little contact with their local gang unit or Trident (supporting the findings of previous chapters relating to siloed working), and reported never accessing any central analytical products relating to gangs in their area, there are many similarities in their experiences and perception of gang activities. This is particularly true of their perception of drug supply as endemic, and their views of how the local community perceive the gang as a group of boys are similar to those of local officers discussed in the previous chapter. The pervasive street presence of the Uphill Mob is in contrast to the declining visibility of many other gangs in the area. Although both officers had no doubt the gang was heavily involved in drug dealing, the level of organisation and links to organised crime was not highlighted; indeed, Steve saw the younger members as aspiring to this organised criminality to the extent that mention of 'the gang' felt childish.

Chapter Eight Deconstructing Gang Construction

The findings chapters have provided an insight into the processes, mechanisms and organisational structure which shape the police understanding of and response to gangs in London, demonstrating the myriad of internal and external influences, and the extent to which the term 'gang' is embedded in organisational practice. Practitioner perceptions of gang criminality highlight a predominant belief that drug supply has become the *raison d'être* of the gang, causing some to suggest that the fluid networks described cannot be adequately captured by a definition that assumes a high degree of 'organisation', and casting doubt on the value of placing this notion of 'organisation' at the fulcrum of police decision making across a complex cross-section of criminal behaviours. This chapter draws on elements of interactionist and institutional theory to make sense of these complexities.

Two key themes emerge from the findings chapters in the form of tensions that may contribute to distortion. First, the tension between the perceived *evolution* of 'gang related' criminality and the *continuity and rigidity* in the overarching processes by which gangs and gang members are mapped (i.e. labelled) and policed. Second, and related to this, are the tensions created by the complex organisational configuration of gang policing between both local, specialist and centralised understanding and response to gang issues. These themes are explored throughout this chapter.

The chapter is organised into three parts, and in keeping with the theme of evolution follows a rough chronology. Part one considers the creation of the current organisational response to gangs, drawing on the concept of isomorphism to explain the external pressures to conform to a set of ideas and beliefs of the gang, and how it should be policed. The attraction of the gang as a mappable phenomenon in the context of an actuarial risk-management paradigm is then explored. Part two examines the key organisational characteristics which both form

and inform practitioner perceptions, highlighting what I term potential 'nodes of distortion'. The impact of these processes on the individuals labelled is considered to the extent that the data allows. Part three discusses the variation and similarities in practitioner perspectives of gang organisation and purpose with reference to the main competing theoretical perspectives of UK gang academics. The final section returns to the theme of evolution, drawing on institutional theory to suggest we may be on the verge of a new 'myth' of the gang; one that could generate both positive changes in policing practice or justify even greater controls.

Part One: Gang Unit Creation - External Influence

Chapter One described the media generated political debate which played a role in galvanising a holistic government response to the gang 'problem', sparked by a number of high profile murders of young people and an increasing involvement of British born youths in serious and deadly weapon enabled violence over the course of the 2000's. Although prevalence of the most serious offences was extremely low, both the harm caused and geographical concentration generated understandable concern. However, this violence became increasingly framed as gang-related by key actors, despite a lack of agreement on what the term meant or any systematic way of quantifying such assertions.

In contrast, a review of police documentation over the same period suggests an initially more considered approach to gang policing than the one explicated in my findings; this can be seen both in the cautioning against too wide an application of the gang label (Hales & Muir 2007; MPS 2006; Muir & Streeter 2007) and the decision to maintain specialist focus on firearms irrespective of criminogenic context. The police recognised the existence of gangs, and whilst localised responses existed, the gang was not pivotal to the policing of serious violence and weapon enabled crime. The dramatic policy shift suggests a more complex explanation than simply that of rational response to environmental contingencies.

Isomorphic Pressures

It is hard to over-emphasise the influence of key external stakeholders – sovereigns in the language of institutional theory (Crank & Langworthy 1992) - on the evolution of gang policing in London. In this context, sovereigns include the Government, Mayor, Local Authorities, interest groups, local communities and Criminal Justice partners. The organisational structure of the MPS is such that internal sovereigns can also be identified; Trident to some extent acts as a sovereign to borough gang responses, whilst the top tier of MPS leadership act as a sovereign to Trident. The significant organisational changes that occurred within the MPS from 2012 can in part be explained by the concept of isomorphism; the process of centrist organisational pressures that outweigh localised responses and force units to resemble each other (DiMaggio & Powell 1983).

Although the creation of the original Trident gun crime unit had been in part due to significant pressures from London's black communities, such pressures were largely absent when it was rebranded as the MPS lead for gang crime in 2012. Indeed, some viewed it as a cynical political move by the then Mayor of London Boris Johnson (see for example, Jasper 2013; Webbe 2012), designed to appropriate the legitimacy that Trident had gained in some circles to address the growing political and public concern around gangs. The veracity of these claims – as well as the true level of legitimacy Trident held within London's black communities – are beyond the scope of this thesis, and worthy of analysis in their own right. However, my findings suggest that there was certainly political pressure to signal that something was being done about gangs; this extended beyond a centralised unit and out to Local Authorities across London.

The Government's EGYV programme, and the Local Government approaches that aligned with it, prioritised the creation of localised integrated gang units wherever a 'gang problem' was evidenced, offering substantial funding if created within the partnership blueprint. This

can be seen as a coercive isomorphic force, particularly in the wider economic context of austerity. Although there is no suggestion that the boroughs that received funding manufactured a gang problem, it is likely that the mapping of gangs and gang criminality was influenced by stakeholder pressures to conform to the overarching gang agenda, echoing the findings of Katz et al. (2002). Other coercive mechanisms evident include changes in the law concerning gang injunctions – replete with a widening of the statutory definition of the gang, and enhanced sentencing for gang members encouraging the police to positively identify them as such. There was clear government pressure to use these new mechanisms, for example in the recommendation that a league table of gang injunctions should be created (Home Affairs Committee 2015: 3). This pressure was described by several of my interviewees and evidenced in the internal performance targets of Trident. Further, the pressures imposed on boroughs to list their most harmful gang members can be seen as coercive. This is explored in part two.

As well as coercive external pressures, the specialist gang unit approach adopted by the MPS can be seen as mimetic. The mimicking of 'best practice' in gang policing – regardless of the specific local problem – has been evident both nationally and within London, as specialist gang units emerged across the country at the end of the last decade, themselves based on American approaches. A chain reaction can be observed whereby both the structures and tactics of these nascent units were adopted by others whatever the localised environmental contingencies. DiMaggio et al. (1991: 67–68) argue that mimetic processes may occur if the environment 'creates symbolic uncertainty', and the different interpretations of the gang provide just that. Findings identified several boroughs where there was uncertainty about the nature or extent of the local gang problems, but which eventually adopted the approach recommended in the *Tackling Gangs Operating Model* (MPS 2012a), bidding to gain legitimacy by conforming to the ideas and beliefs of the sovereigns within their institutional environment.

Finally, external pressures to conform to a specialist gang focus can be identified as normative. The EGYV strategy, and the preceding years in which the gang was high on the political agenda, brought with it a cacophony of literature, gang summits, training, and conferences; as Hallsworth (2013: 93) describes, a 'gang industry' was created, and one that senior officers wholly engaged with. In London, Trident disseminated detailed operating procedures and manuals outlining guidance across all elements of the approach, from structure and governance, to enforcement and intervention tactics. The adoption of specialist gang units was what was expected in policing practice. Pitts (2016), ironically one of the loudest 'gang talkers', highlights the possibility that practitioners, in both the conception and response to gangs, may be simply replicating this 'received wisdom' and my findings suggest – given the uniformity of particular views on gangs – that this is likely to have played a role.

However, my research also shows that whilst most high-violence boroughs were quick to adapt their structures to accommodate the normative approach, some were more reticent. A complex dynamic which spanned political, reputational and resourcing imperatives was identified by practitioners to explain this resistance to conform. One borough refused to present its activities as gang focused, choosing to use the term youth violence. Another was identified by several interviewees as having a 'documented' gang problem but continued to resist describing it in normative gang-centric terms. Although most eventually succumbed to the status quo, the different approaches across London suggest very different conceptions of the gang, and the consequences that labelling youth violence as such might have on relations with key actors within the institutional environment. One practitioner suggested that gang problem acceptance is a continuing issue as enforcement activity has created a displacement of activity from inner to outer London boroughs; it remains to be seen whether these boroughs will adopt similar gang unit structures, although isomorphic theory suggests this is likely.

The Presentation of Order and Control: The Adoption of the Gang as an Explanatory Tool

The suggestion of some senior officers that mapping mechanisms were introduced because of external pressures - 'the exam questions asked' by the Government - fails to recognise the appeal of the gang and gang harm as a quantifiable phenomenon, and an explanatory tool. Whatever the aetiology of the 'gang-turn', once established as a legitimate threat the gang presented the MPS with an archetype which appeared perfectly suited to policing in the 'intelligence-driven crime control paradigm'[82] (Reiner & Newburn 2008, p.352).

The various typologies and 'hierarchies of risk' produced by academics provided a cogent encapsulation of a complex world; most importantly, they allowed for a neat and understandable quantification of risk from against which resources could be allocated. Thus, with an overarching framework already in place, the creation of gang databases was a logical step and one that appeared straightforward, not least because gang members – replete with coloured bandanas and loud claims of allegiance were initially easy to identify. The street gang as it was (and continues to be) defined by the MPS offered a powerful explanatory tool with which to map and understand group-based street orientated violence, as one analyst explains:

> The gangs are so much a picture of what is violence in London. And as well they are very easy to operationalise; this is something that we do understand because we have worked on that, if we look at other criminal networks we may not know as much as we do on gangs so obviously that is maybe part of what drives [the MPS] towards gangs. (AN2)

Mapping gangs in this way also offered other advantages. Just as the creation of Trident Gang Crime Command and its localised counterparts can be seen as signalling that action is being taken, so harm and risk can be mapped and attributed to gangs in a way that presents an

[82] Arguably the result of similar mimetic and normative isomorphic pressures given the approaches presumed rather than evidenced efficacy, (see Carter 2016)

appearance of order and control, whether directed internally or externally to other actors in the institutional environment. As such these tools can be seen as an attempt to maintain legitimacy across a range of internal and external stakeholders.

The Institutional 'Myth' of the Gang

The gang, my findings suggest, has become deeply embedded in police organisational practice. The mechanisms, processes and practice described in this thesis have combined to cement an institutional 'myth' of the gang as an explanatory phenomenon. A pervasive threat that can be decoded, processed, encoded (Manning 1997) and ultimately controlled, legitimising an array of intrusive tactics such as pre-crime preventative policing (Squires 2016b; Zedner 2007). Myths in this sense do not mean that the phenomenon does not exist – it clearly does – but that they influence ideas and beliefs that are shared by an orgnisation's institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan 1977). The static and reductive mechanisms for assessing gang and gang member risk serve to externally reinforce a perception of a homegenous, hierachical and violent entity.

Yet underneath this universalist presentation (Fraser & Hagedorn 2016), there exists a wide variety of perceptions and understanding of gang characteristics and behaviours. Contradictions abound, not only between understandings of the gang but also opinions of processes by which it is mapped. A frustration that the current organisational framework for mapping gangs did not adequately capture the changing dynamics of the phenomenon was offset by a comfortable reliance on the order that those mechanisms provided. Perceptions of the process were also pragmatic; there was an acceptance that actuarial mechanisms were a necessity in an environment where resource was scare. The need to task resource based on quantified risk was not questioned. All officers saw this process as increasingly necessary in the current financial climate. The embrace of such actuarial mechanisms over more

traditional policing approaches can be seen as significant in itself; it was not long ago that such measures would be roundly disparaged by more 'seasoned' middle ranking officers.[83]

The processes relating to the production of gang data, whether for internal or external consumption, are multifarious; there is great variance in methodology and motivation across the MPS. Whilst practitioners might brush off such 'administrative' concerns as the collateral damage of monolithic bureaucracy, they have the potential to seriously impact understanding of the problem, police responses and consequently the communities and individuals where attentions are focused. Drawing on both interactionist and institutional approaches, the following section examines what I term the potential 'nodes of distortion' present in the construction of gang data in the MPS.

Part Two: Nodes of Distortion in Gang Construction

Problem Understanding: Complex Organisational Configurations

The configuration of gang policing creates distortions in problem understanding, both in terms of designated remit and inter- and intra-organisational positioning. Institutional theory suggests that police organisations achieve optimal functionality in a loosely coupled configuration (Katz et al. 2002). That is, that the sub-units that comprise the organisation are connected enough to share the overarching values and objectives of the organisation, but that there is adequate room for discretion and localised decision making. Thus, ideally, specialist units are created to deal with a specific problem (e.g. gang crime), but one that is in line with organisational objectives (e.g. decreasing violent crime).

However, the MPS configuration is more complex, incorporating both a centralised, loosely coupled specialist unit (Trident) and decentralised gang units with which are situated within

[83] I remember meetings in 2013 where the rankings and harm scores of gangs on GRITS were met with snorts and chuckles by senior officers who placed far higher value on their experiential knowledge.

local police and partnership structures in a wide array of configurations, with varying degrees of integration. Organisational structure is further complicated by the decoupling of analytical resource from both Trident and local gang units.

Information and Intelligence Silos

However, my findings demonstrate that both local and specialist gang units may have become decoupled to the extent that they create intelligence silos, meaning that the knowledge they obtain is not disseminated within the organisation and understanding is inhibited; borough gang officers complained that they were not receiving gang intelligence from local officers, or local units on the one hand and Trident on the other. Similar observations were made by both Trident officers and analysts in central intelligence. The ward officers interacting with gang members everyday had never heard from their local gang unit. Here, the 'gang remit' may in fact limit holistic intelligence collection rather than aid it. Of course, the ambiguity of what is or isn't gang related only exacerbates such issues.

Both the position of a unit in the organisational structure and its remit will create barriers in intelligence flows which inhibit joined up understanding. Analysts complained of not being able to access situational intelligence that would help them to understand the nuances of the activities they were mapping and interpreting, whilst local officers felt that the gang remit isolated them from other local units and specialist units such as Trident. Yet barriers in intelligence flow are cultural as well as situational; units are competitive and often see the information and intelligence they generate as their own property of high corporate value, as Steve described in Chapter Seven. The effect this had was to limit broader understanding of problems and, in combination with the imposed mechanisms for monitoring gang activity, further essentialise the gang.

The austerity driven centralisation of analytical resource was framed by the organisation as a positive move to create a more joined up, efficient, intelligence-led approach, yet officers and

analysts were adamant that it is detrimental to gang policing in a number of ways notably by creating barriers to a nuanced understanding of local issues, whilst prioritising paradoxically inflexible [fixed gang monitoring mechanisms], yet generalist [majority of analysts don't specialise in gangs] approaches, which officers felt was not conducive to identifying emerging issues.

Identifying Risks to be Managed: Subjectivity in the Labelling Process

The impression of order, control and objectivity presented by MPS gang databases belies the fact that documenting gang members is a subjective process, reliant on the interpretation of data which is already likely to incorporate perceptual bias. The variation in the views of practitioners of what constitutes a gang, and the varying degrees of confidence they placed on being able to accurately establish gang affiliation are testament to this; problems replicated by those adding intelligence to the system in the first place. Individuals can be gang labelled at a variety of different levels: from raw intelligence 'on the system', to identification via tasked intelligence products, through to intensive monitoring and targeting if placed on the Matrix. Labelling through association was described as a common method of establishing gang affiliation, whether by officers on the street or analysts behind the screens, and raised concerns of net widening previously put forward by Medina (2014); renewed interest in Social Media monitoring means that this process is likely to be expanding.

Centrally, analysts are encouraged to seek out evidence of gang involvement, and whilst age and ethnicity alone are not quite enough to warrant the gang label (Alexander 2008), this criteria is employed as a sifting mechanism to cut down the large volumes of crimes analysts have to scan on a daily basis, creating an inherent bias.

Identification of individuals for inclusion on the Matrix raised similar concerns, whilst the involvement of a range of practitioners from partnership agencies presented an opportunity for a more balanced interpretation of who should be labelled.

As officers described, they have the ability to generate intelligence on whomever they see fit, leading to the possibility of simply targeting those 'known offenders'. Indeed, this was identified by analysts as a common modus operandi, bypassing analysis altogether. In mitigation, the resourcing restraints appeared to necessitate this approach, particularly on borough.

Problem Analysis

Not only does a deficit in analytical resource impact on the labelling of gang members described above, but it is also detrimental to nuanced understanding of localised issues. Risk management and problem understanding are two different things, requiring different types of analysis and significantly different levels of resourcing. My findings indicate an emphasis on the former over the latter; something which raises a frustrating paradox at the borough level; a surfeit of rich information may be available that has the potential to move analysis away from gang-centricity and instead provide a holistic understanding of complex problems, but a lack of analytical resource to make sense of this data in a way that can be usefully disseminated.

> What is your problem, Tom? What is the problem? Give analysts the chance to analyse and actually look into it, and once you identify the problem put the necessary resource into it, forgetting silos (OFF1)

Local approaches to problem identification and analysis differed significantly. Boroughs were unable to access central analytical resources in the same way Trident could and developed their own strategies to deal with this, often relying on police officers conducting analysis. The apparent isolation of local gang units from police analytical support raises questions about the interpretation of data if 'police knowledge is contextual and subjective, while crime analysis is conducted out of context to develop overviews of crime problems' (Cope 2004: 202). If police are the only interpreters of data, they may merely reinforce the perceptions, stereotypes and beliefs developed within police culture while, in contrast, the assessment of

the analyst is supposed to be more detached. Further, all this raises the possibility that individuals may be getting labelled as 'paper gangsters' (Weston 2015: 123), via raw and uncorroborated intelligence or unsupervised checks.

Local Authority Analysts: The Joined-Up Picture?

An emergent theme from my research was the role of local authority analysts in shaping organisational understanding of the gang. Because of their unique position within the institutional environment they were able to develop a far more nuanced and holistic understanding of the local gang problem; they did not always have the opportunity – or desire - to feed this back to the police. Crucially, their role meant that they did not have to constantly be conducting forward facing, predictive analysis; they were able to develop more nuanced interpretations of what was happening, and why.

Not only did they have daily contact with a range of individuals who interacted with local gang members (youth workers, probation officers), they were able to gain privileged information due to their role outside the police. Further, two of the Local Authority analysts I spoke to directly interacted with local gang members through workshops and activity days. Whilst perceptions of the prevalence of drug dealing were generally similar to police practitioners, one LA analyst saw a very different picture; one of young boys 'playing' at being gang members, of virtual gangs made-up and played out within the safety of bedrooms that would occasionally tip over into real violence. For him, drugs were not an issue – it was the excitement and allure of the gang way of life.

Learning from the Past?

The forward-facing nature of current policing practice allows little time for retrospection and thus learning from previous events. This is partly a symptom of the demand on analytical resources; in a metropolis of London's scale so much is happening at such a pace that the time available to review and digest previous decisions, incidents and events is virtually non-

existent. Only investigating officers and the analysts that assist them have the luxury of such retrospection, and even then, will most often relate to a single case. A deeper understanding of the evident environmental complexities holds little prospect of being pieced together by analysts too busy scanning for the next risk. In the Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (SARA) process, the final 'A' is often redundant, a familiar frustration to anyone who has reviewed the literature on 'what works' in UK youth violence prevention. Lack of recourse to retrospective analysis, also impacts on labelling: once information is added to an individual or incident there is little time or appetite to return and reassess, although the nature of the information technology revolution means even with the best of intentions it is difficult to remove or destroy (Jacobs 2009).

The Matrix as a Microcosm of Gang Policing

As Chapter Six explained, the Gangs Matrix is in many ways a microcosm of the wider processes of gang mapping encapsulating all of the potential barriers, distortions and benefits of the current MPS approach to gangs. Despite the protestation of some practitioners to the contrary, the Matrix is at the fulcrum of the gang mapping process in the MPS, both symbolically and functionally. It is thoroughly embedded in operational practice, taking locally generated decisions about gang affiliation (and harm) and inserting them in the central intelligence cycle as fact. It also serves as a key external signal that the gang phenomenon is mapped and controlled. Police practitioners view its functionality as a mechanism for order with resignation tinged with respect; 'it's what we've got', no less, no more. The principle that the Matrix was originally (and perhaps optimistically) built on – to target violent individuals 'with the focus *off* the gang' (MPS 2011) - has been drowned out by the gang-talk of the gang-centric environment it inhabits.

In line with the centralisation of analytical functions, the Matrix was effectively decoupled from both Trident and central intelligence; it is managed locally with only a modicum of

central oversight. The rationalisation of local administration appears sound, designed in part as a bridging mechanism to allow for local police and partner knowledge of gang members to be collated and used by the wider organisation. In practice, this means that the individuals on it are representative less of the most violent gang members in London, but instead of the mish-mash of local priorities, values, processes and structures that constitute each borough's approach to gang policing.

This means different criteria for inclusion, different processes of identification, addition and removal, all of which will have an impact on the individuals concerned. Findings show that these are influenced by a range of factors within each borough's institutional environment. These include the external influence of key stakeholders (such as the Local Authority and other partners, though not necessarily evidenced or recorded), but largely confined to policing matters; be they centrally enforced 'drives', local force policy, risk aversion, operational activity, resourcing, recording offending activity and intelligence, or the perceptions and beliefs of police officers involved in Matrix administration.

Local policies regarding the Matrix don't necessarily make a difference to its functionality locally; for example, including only males or imposing an age restriction. However, when they are aggregated centrally these divergent practices become problematic. My findings have also demonstrated how the Matrix is used as a gang database by central intelligence, and similarly by the partnership organisations it is disseminated to, such as the Secure Estate and the Probation Services, who will themselves use it as the basis for action. Because the Matrix feeds into other mechanisms which monitor and assess harm and risk in gang offending (e.g. GRITS), local distortions, much like duplicated intelligence logs, become cemented in organisational knowledge and action. Because the Matrix forms part of the symbiotic process of gang mapping so local variations are fed into the wider process or disseminated outwards without being flagged or caveats noted.

Decoupled Processes: Protection from Inspection?

Senior Trident officers complained of the lack of oversight they had on the construction of the Matrix, intimating that if it was under their control, every entry and removal would be meticulously checked for veracity. However, the decentralised nature of its composition actually protects the MPS from criticism over its construction. If authority is devolved, then it is the local boroughs concern if processes are not being followed and eligibility criteria met.

Just as gang units and analytical resource have been 'decoupled' so has the Matrix, and with it the exposure to evaluation or audit:

> Institutionalized organizations protect their formal structures from evaluation on the basis of technical performance: inspection, evaluation, and control of activities are minimized, and coordination, interdependence, and mutual adjustments among structural units are handled informally (Meyer & Rowan 1977: 357)

The consistent miscommunication and misuse of the Matrix is symptomatic of wider issues concerning the politics of knowledge in gang and youth violence policy. It conveys an impression that gang members can be mapped and controlled, and that violence can be predicted and prevented through such actuarial mechanisms. Practitioners uniformly agree that assignment of gang membership is far from an exact science, and acknowledge the inherent difficulties in 'pre-crime' policing, not least because this is reliant on good quality intelligence – a scare resource. As an intelligence mechanism it is inhibited by the paucity of intelligence included on it, both in terms of quality and quantity.

Risk Amplification

The organisational framework for identifying harmful gang members has the potential to both conflate low level and serious offenders in the way that they are mapped and managed. In addition, the risk averse and resource light operating environment of local policing presents significant dangers relating to risk inflation of individuals.

Local practitioners indicated their frustration that 'senior gang members' were scoring zero, and some were shown as 'low harm' when they were in fact believed to be operating drug supply networks. These individuals sit alongside young, non-violent individuals who are perceived to be 'at risk' of gang involvement or on the periphery; very different approaches are needed. Most importantly however, the continued presence of individuals who are involved in professional criminality contributes to an altered perception of what the Matrix is for. Arguably, the Matrix used in this way creates the perception that gangs are indeed super-articulated and quasi-corporate as in the conception of Pitts (2008), Toy (2008) and Densley (2013), but the reality may be a far more complex relational network.

My findings also demonstrate the potential for risk inflation: the 'fat boy' running lights who went to number one on the Matrix suggests that it is not always the most scientific indicators of serious harm. Equally concerning however is the potential for the risk to individuals to be inflated – either through unnecessary addition to a mechanism which undoubtedly has consequences of increased attention from the police and statutory agencies – or through the artificial inflation of one's score using the various mechanisms available to do this.

The problems described above are not novel, and have been thoroughly explicated in the more developed American research on gang databases (Caudill et al. 2014; Jacobs 2009; Spergel 2009). The MPS has managed to operationalise systems which, in the words of officers administering them, 'does the job', provides a 'good list of the usual information' or more prosaically, simply 'assist in the multitude of forms I have to complete'. Yet frustratingly, these mechanisms fail to address the well documented and often simple checks and balances that could help to address the obvious civil liberty concerns of such a variable and unaudited process whilst helping to ensure the right people are targeted, whether by enforcement or through diversionary activities (Jacobs 2009).

Static Systems: Adds to Perceptions of Homogeneity

A common observation amongst practitioners was a perception that desistence from the gang was virtually impossible. There is little movement on and off the Matrix, or any other systems – once documented on police systems, gang affiliation appears mostly intractable. Practitioner opinions here were illuminating. Intelligence rarely logs 'positive' information, so if police are reliant on information from their own systems, desistance means not coming 'to notice'. Just as Williams (2015) found in Manchester, where 'active' simply meant being seen on the street, for many London boroughs the same applied for continued gang affiliation on the Matrix – it was not necessary to offend, but merely to have the potential to do so, and the brazenness to go out in your own neighbourhood.

As my findings demonstrate, local matrices are rarely refreshed and individuals are rarely removed. This creates a static picture of the gang landscape within which the 'usual suspects' are the subject of continuing police attentions, regardless of their current offending behaviours. Many individuals have been on the Matrix for the entire time it has existed. Some of these individuals may have desisted from the 'gang life' they were believed to have been leading, whilst others will have turned their attentions to alternative criminal activities. A similar problem is evident with GRITS - much like its usage in the post-riots political rhetoric, the term 'the gang' has become a catch-all description which could include everything from a peer group (never mentioned in policing terms) to a multi-national organised crime syndicate. The gangs mapped on GRITS are exactly that; it is reinforcing the conception of a homogenised organisational entity.

Internal Pressures Impacting Understanding

Performance

In addition to pressures from sovereigns within the institutional environment, the policing response to gangs has been affected by significant internal pressures. My findings highlight

the impact of force level strategies across overlapping fields, echoing Katz's (2001: 30) findings that 'gang unit structure and operational activities were influenced and shaped by the inter-organisational system in which it is located.' Over the last five years the MPS has introduced various overarching strategic and tactical approaches in reaction to short-term spikes in violent crime associated with the perceived criminal concomitants of gangs, guns, drugs, and knives. Serving to signal 'something is being done' on a wider level than the gang whilst legitimising general policing actions, this organisational oscillation and that of the performance framework that accompanies it, can be seen to directly impact the production of gang statistics.

At the beginning of the 'war on gangs' (Smithson & Ralphs 2016), officers described the 'intrusive drives' from above to populate the Gangs Matrix and to ensure action was taken against the individuals on it. At this time, Trident's performance indicators mirrored the gang focus. More recently, weapons-focused pan London approaches have been adopted at the organisational level. This resulted in shifting priorities for Trident, first through organisational pressures to deal with stabbing incidents where gang involvement was moot, and then in the imposition of performance targets around knife crime which did not reflect their gangs and guns remit. These processes not only serve to cast the gang net wider – whether intentionally or not – but also cement a perception of endemic violence under a gang banner that is not easily undone.

Further, the organisational reaction to serious violence indicators generated some bizarre duplication such as Operation Viper, a bespoke specialist response to gun crime headed up by… the MPS's specialist gun crime unit! Although some of these internal pressures and shifts in strategic focus were resource dictated, they can also be seen as a measure of the conceptual confusion and organisational tensions over what to focus resource on with the

domain of youth and weapons related violence (the 'proxy indicators' of gang violence being a case in point).

Trident operates in an environment over which it has little control but for which it has much accountability; senior officers voiced their frustration at their lack of control and influence over unit priorities, despite their rank and experience, with one officer putting it succinctly; 'I feel disempowered' (OFF3). The lack of control extends to the key mechanisms for measuring harm and risk in gang policing; despite the organisational shifts towards a more weapon enabled focus, the gang continues to be a cornerstone of risk management in policing.

Evaluation: The Myth of Success?

A recurring theme throughout this thesis has been the paucity of robust evaluations of gang interventions of any kind, and especially those that are enforcement focused. Naturally, this has not prevented 'grandiloquent declarations of success' across stakeholders within the institutional environment (Medina 2011). For the police, overarching success in the field of gangs and youth violence continues to be gauged in simplistic terms, ultimately the measurement of violent crime. As Chapter Five demonstrated, official statistics provide the basis upon which the organisation reacts and implements strategies designed to both quell violence and signal to sovereigns that decisive action is being taken. A lack of understanding of what works in the field of gangs policing increases the development of the mish-mash of strategies and operations described in Chapter Five, which in turn makes isolating good practice harder.

The monitoring and accountability of wider police performance is becoming more sophisticated, for example the latest Policing and Crime Plan abolishes pan-London performance targets in crime reduction seeking instead to monitor localised priority issues (MOPAC 2017). However, this does not translate to the specialist and local operational activity of gang units. There is a continued unquestioning reliance on the various 'proxy' measures

which, as this thesis has demonstrated, are liable to considerable distortion. Further, there is a failure to adequately assess or evaluate the processes and mechanisms designed to both identify the problems and to direct responses (something this thesis has taken a small step to addressing). It may be that the police are reluctant to subject their operational activities to robust evaluation because they are worried it will erode hard won legitimacy. Equally, as this chapter has suggested, little has actually changed in the way that violent criminality has been policed; the usual suspects are still targeted in the usual ways.

The police inhabit a unique role in regard to 'success-claims' in the gang field and one that is made more difficult by their traditional role as arbiters of control. There is a tendency for them to excuse themselves (or be excused by other stakeholders) from robust evaluation of their activities because of the confidential, sensitive nature of operational activities and the intelligence that is supposed to direct them. This is particularly true of all aspects of police intelligence work, especially that which focuses on high harm or serious violence and criminality. Police 'success' has therefore been defined in the form of outputs – measurements of enforcement activity such as arrests and commodity seizures. As Rostami et al. (2015, p.214) urge, 'it is imperative that assertions of success be based on a critical analysis of operational out-comes.'

For gang policing, this line of thinking is starkly apparent, particularly in the early years of EGYV. 'Prevention' appeared to become confused with pre-crime and predictive policing, thus success was measured by the amount of control and incapacitation meted out to those believed to be the most harmful but as the officer in Chapter Five acknowledged, gun and gang crime did not decrease. Removing the fact that no attempt had been made to robustly evaluate these actions, his reasoning for the perceived failure is instructive of what should be the basis for any operation and evaluation; lack of a developed understanding of the problem.

There are plenty of evidence based approaches – many of which have or are being employed – what is lacking is evaluations that aspire to more than 'a bolt-on' to gain funding and legitimacy, but that provide rigorous, in-depth and holistic analyses of the problem in the first instance. The aforementioned 'Shield' gang intervention pilot provides a compelling example for this A developed evidence base exists which suggests that the Ceasefire/Group Violence Intervention (GVI) approach can impact on spikes in group-related serious violence in specific locales; this seemed 'promising' from the point of view of 'success claims-weary' social researchers. However, a rush to implement and a failure to properly understand or communicate either what the intervention was designed to do, or the problem it was supposed to be addressing, meant that it was doomed to failure (Davies et al. 2017).

Resourcing

The mechanisms, processes and organisational structure of gang policing are predicated on a belief that they will enable the efficient allocation of ever scarcer police resource. Limited resources create pressures which can have a direct impact on the presentation of the gang problem and is a golden thread that runs through all aspects of the police and partnership response. The opening section of this chapter demonstrated how external coercive pressures to comply to the overarching gang agenda included the allocation of resources to boroughs evidencing a gang problem, whilst the previous section demonstrated the impact of under resourced analytical functions. My findings also demonstrate that internally, harm and risk can be manipulated or shifted between units, in the interest of either gaining resource or minimising impact on existing resource. These processes have the effect of legitimising and cementing mechanisms such as the Matrix in operational practice; resourcing pressures mean that they may be seen by some as tools to manipulate rather than objective indicators of a problem.

Manipulation of Institutional Environment: Net Widening and Increased Risk

Lending support to the institutional perspective (Daft & Weick 1984; Katz 2001), findings suggest that local gang units may manipulate their institutional environments in order to gain resources (e.g. Trident support) and transfer risk by exaggerating the nature and extent of their gang problems using the various mechanisms used to assess harm and risk. It is possible to do this in various ways; none *necessarily* mean falsely labelling individuals or incidents, although this possibility cannot be entirely discounted. For example, CRIS reports could be flagged as gang related to a lower degree of certainty than they had previously been, or Matrix nominals could have their score locally 'adjusted' to reflect perceived risk. Alternatively, boroughs could decide to add more people to their Matrix than they would usually do, perhaps, as some practitioners suggested, adding gang associates or gang affiliation based on very limited intelligence. Intelligence can also be proactively 'generated' on individuals of interest, thereby boosting their harm ranking. These processes highlight the grey areas in policing through risk and the potential to continually target the 'usual suspects' (McAra & McVie 2005), thus actively engaging in the social construction of a gang problem.

The same process is evident in the application of gang-related flags to crime incidents; different boroughs have different motivations and processes for applying or not applying gang flags, creating an uneven central picture of the gang problem. As with the Matrix this can have localised benefits; a borough and partners might be in agreement and understanding of how flags are locally applied – but can create problems when the same data is disseminated outside the local environment, either back to the centre, to partnership agencies, or even to the public (e.g. MOPAC Gangs dashboard).

Additionally, findings indicate that some boroughs put a limit on the number of individuals they 'manage' on the Matrix due to the same resourcing restrictions, thus giving a false

impression of gang prevalence whilst potentially missing either harmful individuals or those that require support and intervention opportunities.

Cumulative Effects of Resource Management

For some Trident officers, the impact of being perceived as a 'bottomless pit' of resource by boroughs and the shifting of risk that engendered, was perceived as directly affecting the prevalence of firearms crime in London. Officers believed that being forced to deal with stabbings translated into a diminished grip on firearms-related activity. Although the ability to accurately establish this assertion is limited (discussed elsewhere in this chapter), the division of work based on both levels of harm and method of offending further contributes to a distorted presentation of the gang crime problem, as the next section explores.

Operational Configurations: Pieces of a Whole

Understanding is further complicated by a division of work based on a combination of harm, level of criminal involvement and type of weapon used.

Guns and Gangs

For Trident, structural and strategic decoupling is fundamentally built into their operating procedure. As the literature review highlighted the conflation of gun and gang criminality can be traced back to the earliest accounts of the 'new' gang problem (Bullock & Tilley 2002), and has continued unerringly in both policy and practice. The problems identified by Squires (2011) in aggregating youth crime with non-age delineated gun crime are present and correct in the remit and performance targets of Trident.

In addition to the possible co-opting of the perceived legitimacy of an established unit, the dual guns and gangs focus was based on assumptions of cross-over of criminal fields and efficiency. Both were challenged by reactive Trident officers who questioned whether the two

could be so easily placed together and suggesting the focus on knife crime imposed on them was having a detrimental impact on the prevalence of firearms crime in the capital. For others, the move to 'volume' crime (though stabbings can hardly be described as such) was framed as a loss of the perceived internal and external legitimacy Trident had built up over a decade of dedicated firearms investigation.

The contradictions in operational focus that the officers discussed are indicative of the difficulties in assessing harm and risk in gang terms when the concept is so amorphous. In many ways, gun crime – whether evidenced or indicated by intelligence – offers a reasonably straightforward, 'hard' measure of risk and harm. Of course, it is open to its own definitional confusions - one only needs to examine the guidance of what does and doesn't constitute gun crime to see this (Hales 2006) – but can at least be evidenced forensically, unlike 'gang' membership.

Harm

Information and intelligence flow is further complicated by the division of resource based on the level of harm or criminality individuals or gangs are involved in. This creates 'knowledge gaps' which artificially divide activities and incidents that may be interconnected in complex ways. For example, local gang officers voiced frustrations about individuals they believed to be orchestrating drug dealing and violence but who were seen as 'off the radar' because they were not scoring on the Matrix for violent offending. Whilst Trident – or another specialist unit – may be dealing with them, this 'high corporate value' intelligence is often never shared. The presence of such individuals on the Matrix may also reinforce a perception of hierarchy which does not in fact exist; individuals may still be around, but they may also have 'desisted' and left the gang. One officer succinctly conveys his perception of criminal hierarchy of individuals on the Matrix:

> You need the bit from early years' intervention which is potentially partnership but certainly borough policing. You then go into the people that might be being induced into gangs or the greens as we call them on the Matrix, they're the ones you are trying to divert (and to a degree the ambers). You then get to the people that are actually supplying the drugs and using street weapons to protect their ends and/or their business. And then you get into the ones that are supplying the drugs, and then you get to those that are supplying the guns, the drugs and that are fighting at a higher level for a much bigger slice of the market, now, that level there we're trying to take out but in reality, that level is being dealt with by about five different organisations and that is the challenge (OFF1)

In addition to creating barriers in information flows between local units, organisational siloing based on harm appeared to create tensions in terms of community engagement, and therefore intelligence feeds. Community-oriented policing emphasizes decentralization and de-specialisation, but the inherent specialised nature of gang units in many ways promotes the opposite (Maguire 2014: 76).

> Some gangs actually operate in that full sphere from an urban street gang member right the way through to organised crime group [But] I think that there are only a few… that operate at that kind of level in terms of national and international levels (OFF3)

> It is not the simple archetype that we have been sold by the United States … a really simple turf war, that is very easy to digest and everybody will swallow because there are no complications, it is very easy to understand -- but the reality is much more complex (AN2)

My findings indicate that siloed working to specific remits impacts on perception of the problem; snippets of complex worlds are seen by officers at different levels. If I had interviewed analysts working within the world of covert policing, an entirely different perception of the organisation of gang criminality is likely to have been presented. It is the unifying power of the 'gang' term that straddles all of these worlds, that presents significant dangers in net widening and re-enforcing a perception of risk and harm that more often than not is not there.

The impact of organisational silos in gang policing extends to the environment being policed. Officers noted that communities perceived Trident and local police as going after the 'low

hanging fruit'; believing that gang enforcement was directed against young boys in their communities rather than the professional criminals they saw as orchestrating drug markets. Thus, the legitimacy that Trident had worked hard to achieve within the communities they policed can be seen to be negatively impacted by both the remit extension to gangs, and the tactics used to police them (local gang units can be included in the latter); something of a vicious circle highlighting the problems with balancing enforcement and engagement.

Officers were certain that the Trident brand held sway with the individuals they were targeting, instilling a fear that the 'heat was on', and possibly causing criminals to alter their tactics or cease operations. There was some suggestion that taking on gang crime had watered down the symbolism of the brand to criminals. It is also possible that it had the unintended impact of cementing gang identities in creating a common and identifiable foe (Klein 1997). Several officers mentioned the frequency Trident was mentioned in music videos. The strong external signalling also had an impact on wider police engagement with the 'target population', inhibiting interaction and intelligence gathering, as the two officers from Uphill explained. For them, the term was toxic:

> It's just such a contentious point, so for someone that is trying to build community relationships I think that [Trident] is one word that you would just kind of delete from your dictionary (OFF6)

Senior officers also recognised the problems that targeting street gangs caused in terms of community relations. Particularly, the perception that the approach targeted the young boys and did not address the organised criminal networks that were orchestrating the drug dealing. Officers also identified the problems in gaining community support for intelligence-led targeted enforcement: the shift from being a firearms unit where the threat was quantifiable and accepted, to a focus on the far looser concept of gangs cemented this opinion.

Part Three: Practitioner Perspective: From Street Gangs to Drug Networks?

Although practitioner perceptions of the nature of the gang problem in London varied, views largely reflected the prevailing policy status quo, matching many of the findings from a recent survey of EGYV practitioner perceptions (Disley & Liddle 2016; Pitts 2017), and lending some support to the gang evolution thesis forwarded by Densley (2013) and the super articulated gang model put forward by Pitts (2008). For practitioners across technical fields, gangs had evolved, drugs supply was endemic and, for most, was the *raison d'être* of the gang. They saw gangs as becoming increasingly involved in organised local and County Lines drug dealing; increasing involvement of under eighteens and with a declining visibility on the street. For many, violence was predominantly linked to drug supply. The age-graded hierarchical structure was often utilised by both analysts and officers with some referencing the 'elder' 'younger' delineations that have been in common usage for a decade or so. Very few practitioners considered anything other than instrumental pursuits to be defining features of the gang.

However, practitioner perceptions also indicated some traits which appear incongruent to the 'evolution to organisation' thesis (Densley 2013). There was a recognition that gangs were becoming increasingly difficult to map – that collaborations and allegiances were being identified that were difficult to explain. Practitioners also identified an increased online presence, suggesting a lack of awareness that such activity would be monitored by the police. Notably at a local level, although drug supply was still emphasised, many practitioners did not seem so sure about the link between gangs and organised crime. Whilst the police defined gang remained a valid explanatory tool for many practitioners, the continuing relevance of the MPS definition was questioned by some in light of the changes described above.

> I think that the concept of territory will be crumbling at some point, I think the effect of social media is going to be important, that boundaries are going to vanish (AN2)

An experienced senior officer remembered first encountering gangs circa 2000, but didn't 'have any sense that there was any organisation to them', crucially, he acknowledges that he also did not have any 'framing' either. Thus, the operationalisation of the official definition – and the wider gang policing framework – may have allowed officers to understand gangs in a different, perhaps more orderly way.

Differing Practitioner Perspectives

Working environment and role appeared to have some influence on how practitioners perceived gangs in London, with perceptions of the level of organisation and control in drugs markets correlating roughly with the amount of professional exposure to mechanisms dealing with professional and organised crime, as one analyst in central intelligence explained:

> …there are differences because of how we work and what drives us. For example, what people do and how people work is going to help them build a perception. Let's say for example it is very easy to tackle a gang based on the drug dealing and the person is going to create a perception of the gang based on the drugs but in that sense their perception is going to be different to mine which is more violence focused (AN2)

Front line and middle management officers were more focused on the existence of definable street gangs whilst Senior Management took a more pragmatic approach, perhaps indicative of the external pressures from those questioning police labelling of gang members. A senior officer, discussing the validity of the current gang definition from *Dying to Belong* (2009) queried the current definitional status quo:

> Does it stand true now? Almost certainly not. If you look at the wording around defining and how they are defining gangs with colours it almost seems like a decade ago. How things have evolved, things have moved on. People say 'do we need a definition?'– well, as I explained we almost need to get away from the term gang now anyway because we have groups, organised criminal networks, drugs networks, County Lines, and they're not gangs most of them (OFF1)

Proactive officers have a vested interest in building an in depth and developed understanding of the structure and roles of individuals within gangs in order to gain convictions. The gang intelligence mechanisms presented a 'starting point' with which to do this, as well as a tool for justification, but there was clear recognition of their limits and the potential for manipulation or misrepresentation. As the tactics changed, proactive officers were granted privileged access to the analytical resource needed to build up a more holistic understanding of the gang, discovering the complex network of relationships and interactions, of which in many cases individuals who could accurately be described as gang members were only a part. Whilst they were keen to emphasise that they were not focusing on a 'gang' per se, the organisational terminology and embedded mechanisms made it hard for them to avoid the term. Conveniently then, the gang provides an explanatory tool to make sense not only of youth and weapon enabled violence, but also of drug supply.

Meehan (2000) describes several officers in his US study as holding constructionist views on the gang problem, and although none of my research participants were quite as blunt, several officers questioned the validity of the gang approach, and the reasons it was taken.

My findings certainly raise questions as to whether the gangs approach was ever the best method of addressing youth violence. It is possible that gangs in London have evolved to the extent that practitioners perceive they have over the past five years, however it is also possible that the original 'gang myth' around which the mapping of gang is based took over and shaped developments.

Drugs

The perception of drugs supply as fundamental to the gang transcended appreciation of heterogeneity and variation in gang structures. It raises interesting questions about the original conceptualisation of the gang, as well as the mechanisms for monitoring it. The two primary gang databases, GRITS and the Matrix, focus on violent crime. As one officer

ominously noted, 'we have other ways of dealing with drugs'. One officer underlined the ambiguity of the gang as a mappable phenomenon in contrast to an involvement in drug supply which was without equivocation:

> The definition of gangs changes, as I suppose fashions come and go. But the one thing they are all certainly doing is dealing drugs. They'll all drug dealers, every single one of them, and I don't mean getting caught with a little bit of cannabis for personal use; it is Class A supply (OFF8)

The Uphill case study emphasises the benefits and need to work within the local communities, it underlines the decoupled nature of police activity which ultimately cannot be siphoned into neat areas of expertise. Perhaps the legitimacy so sought after should be that of the local community rather than the government's latest schemes to deflect attention from the underlying structural issues.

The tunnel vision of 'the gang gaze' implies that gangs control drug networks, echoing Densley's (2012) Enterprise Stage, but discounting the complex social worlds beyond the gang, and Hobbs (2013: 126) notes:

> …the label of 'gang related drug dealing' valorizes mundane territorial disputes with the mythic glamour of market-led predation (Thornberry et al. 2003) for individuals no longer empowered by the options provided by industrial society, and adds an illusory, somewhat glamorous façade to what was a routine entrepreneurial conflict related to the lower rungs of street drug markets.

One officer, described the difficulties he perceived in labelling individuals as gang members, when associations were so varied, a fact he put down to making connections in the drug trade:

> But we have gang members – Intelligence analysts find them really hard – "well, they were seen with him, how can they now be seen with them"; it's a business, so it's supply and demand and it is profit (OFF1)

Interminable Terminology

The gang's metonymic power means that as long as it remains at the fulcrum of the MPS and partnership approach to the policing of youth and weapon enabled violence the confusions

and conflations described above will remain, and possibly worsen. Indeed, the potential for it to receive a full blown promotion into the realms of organised crime that has been threatened for years (Hobbs 2013), and appears ever greater as practitioners fixate on organised drug supply as the *raison d'être* of the 'gang'. Having been initially adopted as an explanatory tool for violent interaction, the idea of 'the gang' has more recently been used to explain drug related criminality, whilst avoiding the complexities which surround higher level criminality.

This generates a further question – should the police be focusing on the gang at all? The plan outlined by one senior Trident officer is instructive in this regard, underlining the conceptual confusions:

> What we are doing now, we are trying to move away from gang as I have said and we are trying to call them sort of…Criminal networks… [laughter] you might have heard the term [laughter] we're not necessarily saying organised, we're not necessarily saying Matrix, we are trying to keep it as loose as possible because we are comfortable with that but the network is what it is so that is not from saying "you are in [GANG X], therefore you have to go on this chart" - we are starting really small and we are identifying a few key individuals and then building the networks from them. What we are then doing is building the networks vulnerability around them so everyone who is vulnerable, that is linked to that network, what we are then doing through MPS intel is defining the violence through that network (OFF1)

Given the level of embeddedness within organisational processes and wider institutional environment, a wholesale change along these lines remains highly unlikely.

The Gang is Dead, Long Live the Gang: The New Gang Myth?

Over the course of writing this thesis, there been a perceptible shift in both organisational and political focus from gang violence to weapon enabled violence – the non-gang delineated knife crime performance targets imposed on Trident, for example. In policy terms, this shift is counter-balanced by a re-framing of the gang as an organised criminal network, operating at national and international levels and exploiting vulnerable individuals in pursuit of drug

market focused financial gain. However, the focus on violence has meant that harm mechanisms do not reflect drug supply activity. This is addressed through both the OCGM and the multitude of targeted operations seeking to convict those believed to be involved in violence as discussed in Chapter Five.

The refreshed focus of national gang policy in the form of Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation (EGVE) appears to have had some positive impacts on the policing response. Notably, in the realisation that vulnerable individuals might be being exploited into dealing drugs, and hence the possibility that this will generate a shift from a culture of criminalisation through 'easy pickings' to one of intervention and support. However, officers also described an ingrained performance driven 'arrest culture' that would necessitate significant changes in organisational practice across the MPS.

The ideas and beliefs which underpin EGVE present the possibility of old gang myths being reinforced and new ones being created. My findings have demonstrated how Trident secured resource and legitimacy by undertaking operational activity that conforms to the vulnerability agenda. The further risk amplification of the gang in its increasing conflation with organised criminal activity has been highlighted previously (Hallsworth & Brotherton 2011; Hobbs 2013), but the current climate – both in terms of the perception of drug supply pervasiveness, vulnerability and exploitation – may provide the conditions for an acceleration of this dynamic. The last decade has eradicated the 'peer group' in policy discourse and seen the amplification of risk from 'peer group to gang' (Hallsworth 2013), so in many ways this is simply the next logical step. This is a homogenising approach that has the potential to cast the net even wider and incorporate even more draconian responses.

The ongoing conflation between street gangs and organised crime can also be understood by the growing concern around the extent of the relationship between licit and illicit business; so-called 'symbiotic relations' (Gounev et al. 2010: 74); In this way, the 'organised gang'

presents a potentially greater threat than pariah forms of organised crime who are 'destined to exhaust their resources and energies within the restricted realms of illicit markets' (Ruggiero 2017: 4). Symbiotic manifestations of organised crime employed by successful indigenous groups who

> …are in a position to control the major operations of conventional criminality (mainly protection rackets and large drug operations) while participating in the official economic and political worlds…

represent a significant barrier to the investigation of organised criminal activities (Gounev et al. 2010: 160).

The following section demonstrates how the new myth of the 'organised gang' might be used to gain or maintain resources in the face of declining interest in the old myth of the gang.

The Future of Trident? Searching for Legitimacy and Survival 'after' the Gang?

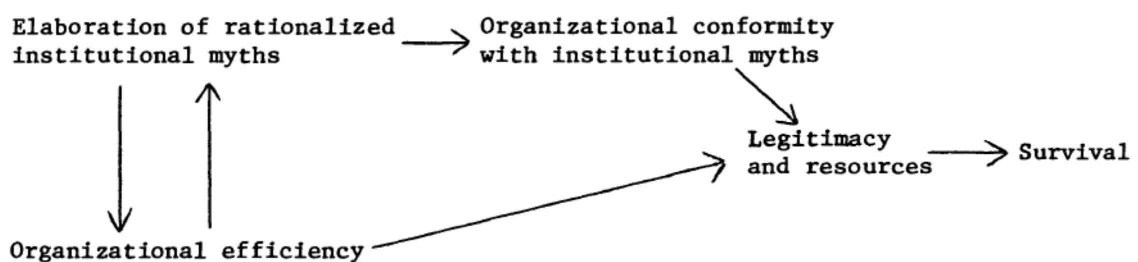

Figure 7: Organisational Survival (Meyer & Rowan 1977: 353)

Towards the end of my fieldwork and data collection, there was a palpable concern amongst Trident officers at all ranks as to what the future held for their unit. As this thesis has described, there was some disillusionment amongst officers who had previously dealt with firearms crime when in 2014 they were told to investigate what they saw as relatively minor

incidents – usually stabbings – between gang members they perceived as 'just kids'. There was a belief amongst some that gang-related investigation might be 'given back' to boroughs and that Trident would return to its original focus as a specialist gun crime unit.

For the proactive teams whose remit was gang suppression, this organisational restructuring had the potential to disband their units. A few months prior to my interviews, the unit had begun work on the 'holistic' operations described in Chapter Five. These were designed to not only 'dismantle' the gang, but the 'County Lines' and criminal networks to which it was linked. Importantly, the holistic approach included identifying and offering support and diversion to individuals identified as being controlled and exploited. Packaged as an 'innovative' approach, and supported by MOPAC funding, it was in line with the Government's Vulnerability and Exploitation agenda, seeking to directly address the issues highlighted in the Government's 'discovery' of 'County Lines'. From an institutional perspective, this purposeful shift in operational practice suggests a bid for organisational survival (see Figure 7). The Trident proactive teams sought to conform to the institutional myths (gang exploitation and clear linkages between street gangs and organised drug dealing) of the Sovereigns (in this case the Government and MOPAC), to gain legitimacy and resource. The effectiveness of such an approach remains to be seen, and in all likelihood, will never be established due to a continued combination of reluctance and limited resource to evaluate operations robustly as discussed above.

Hunting for the 'Golden Egg': Who really understands the Gang Problem?

Practitioner's perceptions will always be influenced by their professional roles. Common amongst all, and indicative of the field they work in, is the pervasive threat of the gang. Police analysts present a logical and (in the context of more developed products) tempered assessment but one which is reliant on limited intelligence of variable quality. Some have faith

that their carefully calculated degrees of confidence in gang association will protect those uninvolved in criminal activity from police attentions. The question of whether they are really the 'repository of knowledge' that they believe they should be is moot, although it is interesting that several of the interviewees highlight the two higher gang analysts as having the best understanding of the gang problem across London.

> There are subtle differences that people don't understand and it gets very complex; if someone said to me; "right these are the people that you need to target" I'd be delighted, and that's the sort of golden egg (OFF1)

From a local perspective, the Local Authority analysts I interviewed had the most rounded and nuanced understanding of gang issues in their areas, primarily because they had access to such a wide range of information and intelligence, as one analyst explained; 'I just piece it all together'.

The pervasive practice of drugs supply in gangs was one area where practitioner perceptions were absolutely in unison. Yet understandings of the structure of such activity was mixed, to the extent that some practitioners appeared to be describing drugs networks rather than gangs, and others suggesting that that was exactly what many groups previously described as gangs had evolved into. Many practitioners recounted almost verbatim the age graded hierarchical drug-orientated structure put forward by Pitts (2008) and Densely (2014), although others were far less certain of direct links to organised crime. This recalls Hallsworth's (2013) assertion that the perception of organised drug dealing was as much a result of the *a priori* assumptions of practitioners, who assumed there would be hierarchy and bureaucracy. The fact that many of the practitioners had no access to analytical products untangling and depicting drug supply networks (such a thing rarely exists, as one analyst explained 'too much for us to understand') strengthens the assertion that they are merely imposing their own assumptions to make sense of it all.

A problem with police perception of drug supply as so pervasive in gangs is that net widening is made easier; the complex chaotic and cafeteria style criminality of some (Klein & Maxson 1996) – and the complete absence of criminality of most – can easily be overlooked by imposing a drug/gang label, particularly as much drug dealing activity is assumed rather than evidenced, bringing with it the inevitable increase in police attentions and the a label that is virtually intractable in police eyes.

Many practitioners simply imposed whatever construction of reality best enabled them to do their job, and possibly keep it; the push by some practitioners in proactive units to look at networks rather than 'gangs' presents and interesting change in dynamic. In terms of outward presentation of the problem, the wider view of 'levels' of criminal activity of senior officers who had access to confidential operational knowledge arguably shapes the narrative of a hierarchical super-ordering of the gang. These are the officers who impart their knowledge at conferences, meeting and committees; the wider institutional environment - the decision makers and myth makers. The apparent deconstruction of one myth of the gang, thus appears to be giving way to the construction of new ones; the outcome of this on the policing response remains to be seen.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

Previous UK research in the field has highlighted the uncritical acceptance of the gang label by police and policy (Smithson et al. 2013), and called for greater transparency in the process and mechanisms on through which individuals are labelled (Bridges 2015; Smithson & Ralphs 2016; Williams 2014, 2015). The overarching aim of this thesis was to contribute to this knowledge gap by providing a unique practitioner perspective insight into the opaque and complex processes which shape police understanding and response to gangs. My primary research question was:

> **How do the various labelling processes and recordkeeping practices of the MPS shape organisational understanding and response to gangs in London?**

A framework of analysis drawing on elements of interactionist (labelling) and organisational theoretical approaches allowed for exploration of the processes and mechanisms by which individuals and groups are labelled gang members by the police and a consideration of the organisational and environmental factors which have influenced the police response.

Key Findings and Contribution

Governing Through Gangs

Since the 'perfect storm' of political pressures, media induced social outrage and economic precariousness which gathered in the aftermath of the 2011 riots and gave birth to the current policing approach to gangs, there is little doubt that the MPS has been 'governing through gangs' (Fraser & Atkinson 2014: 167). This thesis has demonstrated the extent to which the gang is deeply embedded in organisational process; the MPS fully embraced the gang as the 'suitable enemy' suggested by its sovereigns (Hallsworth 2013), creating not only array of

specialist gang units, but a set of gang databases to map gangs, gang members and their associated risks. Yet whilst a definition was adopted, and the mechanisms which map the gang suitably homogenising in their static representation of the problem, this thesis demonstrates that the gang has retained its fluid meaning amongst practitioners in the field.

Labelling and Recordkeeping Practices: The Questionable Validity of Gang Data

The multifarious internal and external influences on the construction of police gang data highlighted by this thesis suggest that its value as a tool to understand the nature and prevalence of gangs and gang members in London is limited. Such a conclusion is neither novel nor surprising; the deficiencies of police gang data have been previously noted both in America (Chesney-Lind et al. 1994; McCorkle & Miethe 1998; Meehan 2000; Spergel 1995) and to a lesser extent the UK (Smithson & Ralphs 2016; Williams 2015), all of which my findings lend support to.

Rather than objectively applied, the gang label is interpreted and subjectively assigned by an array of practitioners with varying priorities, and crucially varying conceptions of what constitutes a gang and to what extent gang motivation can be identified. In congruence with previous interactionist critiques of police data (Katz 2003; Kitsuse & Cicourel 1963; Meehan 2000), my findings have demonstrated the factors influencing construction at all levels; serving to distort the aggregated picture of gang harm and prevalence both upwards, and downwards. From political prevarications over reputational damage to force-level drives to populate the Matrix; the construction of gang data is, my research suggests, more instructive of policing practices and priorities than it is of the phenomenon it seeks to map.

Intelligent Policing?

Gang labelling is further inhibited by the complex organisational configurations of gang policing. My findings suggest that previously identified organisational pathologies in

intelligence systems are likely to be exacerbated by the both the decoupling of local gang units, and the decoupling of analysis (Sheptycki 2004). Institutional theory facilitated an analysis of the levels of connectivity between specialist gang units, gang monitoring mechanisms and the wider organisational environment. Although limited in the extent that the myriad of configurations could be analysed, this thesis has questioned the normative perception of specialisation equalling efficiency. The intelligence and information silos created inhibited development of a joined-up understanding of localised issues; thus, my research suggests that specialising in the gang and the decoupling this necessitates can negatively impact on operational efficiency, whilst simultaneously protecting those units from wider evaluation and accountability. This is in congruence with previous research suggesting that specialisation disrupts normal patterns of communication and leads to 'redundancy in operations' (Katz 2001; Rostami et al. 2015).

The thesis offers suggestive evidence questioning the normative assumptions of the efficiency and effectiveness of centrally driven intelligence-led approaches. Officers questioned whether much of the policing work in the gang field that is portrayed as intelligence-led could accurately be described as such, and analysis of the processes and intelligence mechanisms designed to direct the police response lends weight to these doubts. My research indicated the imposition of process over analysis in the policing of gangs. Central to this is the paucity of available intelligence in the first place, influenced not only by the standard intelligence pathologies, but also a continuing mistrust and lack of engagement between the communities most affected by serious street orientated violence and those policing it.

Linked to this, is the questionable efficay of the intelligence-led policing approach. Here, contradictions abound. The discourse of intelligence-led, risk management orientated policing appeared to generate an ambivilance amongst most practioners regarding the

mechanisms they were tasked to populate or be directed by. There was a tacit acceptance that the processes imposed on them by the approach were both necessary and realtively efficent; they 'got the job done'. This is likley to highlight the degree to which resourcing issues have taken primacy in policing; whilst analysts highlighted the lack of bottom-up intelligence, officers bemoned the loss of embeded analytical functions. My research has shown the problematic ways in which resourcing pressures can incentivise the escalation of risk.

Further, this thesis has demonstrated that in additional local variance, gang data is affected by wider organisational priorities, themselves driven by a combination of institutional concerns and environmental contingencies. These shifts in focus add to the complexities of the organisational environment and generate uncertainty and confusion over what problems are actually being addressed, whilst ensuring that any evaluation of the efficacy of operational approaches is impossible.

Questioning the Gang-centric approach

Whilst findings concerning the reliability of police gang data are both practically and theoretically beneficial in their own right, this thesis has also raised questions as to the efficacy of such sharp focus on the gang. According to practitioners deeply involved in the process of policing gangs, the gang of 2017 is very different from the gang of 2011. From their perspective, the evolution of the gang has been extraordinary in its rapidity, and the mechanisms to monitor it haven't caught up.

This thesis has demonstrated the variation in perception and understanding of what constitutes a gang and 'gang related' criminality amongst practitioners heavily involved in policing gangs. In common with the 'merry-go-round' (Densley 2013) of the academic gang definition debate, practitioners see things differently; within and between roles, ranks and locations. The variation in perceptions is itself is suggestive of the heterogenic nature of

gangs, something the 'gang industry' conveniently downplays in the pursuit of a common 'suitable enemy' (Hallsworth & Young 2006). However, commonalities also existed; a prevalent view of a move towards instrumentality via increased involvement in drug markets was evident, striking a chord with Densley's (2013) gang 'evolution' thesis, but only when the centrality of the gang to these dynamics is *presupposed*. My findings indicate that the labelling and recordkeeping practices described above create a rigid framework which serves to cement this presupposition, both internally, and within the wider institutional environment.

The confusions and conflations evident in the labelling of gangs and gang crime, coupled with practitioner perceptions of an increasingly fluid and ambiguous criminal landscape suggest that the gang mapping mechanisms impose a false order, and one that is perhaps becoming further removed from reality on the ground. Although caution should be exercised when interpreting the perceptions of practitioners whose professional focus is primarily the gang, the drug connection is striking, as is – given that caveat – the suggestion by some that focus should come off the gang. It may be that the practitioners are more accurately describing the rhizomatic world put forward by Hallsworth (2013) and Hobbs (1997: 832):

> The adaptability and capacity to mutate that are inherent in contemporary crime call into question convenient academic categories such as gang, professional, organized and white collar [and] questions the spotlight being continuously trained on the lower order.

Impact on Individuals

Supporting the findings of UK academics influenced by labelling theory (Medina et al. 2013), my findings suggests that policing through the gang lens makes net-widening through association straightforward, likely and often actively encouraged. This means that young people can get pulled into the policing gaze through little more than the area they live and the friends they keep, and is likely to cement the inherent bias which ensures the Matrix consists overwhelmingly of individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Since the

creation of Trident there have been several 'intensive drives' to increase the number of Matrix nominals in custody and the number with Judicial Restrictions. As well as directed enforcement activity based on intelligence of varying quality, those labelled gang members are subject to increased police attentions at all levels, with markers placed on their police national computer records to encourage regular stops and encourage intelligence feedback to the gang units who own them. The faith some analysts had in police officers being mindful of the degrees of confidence placed on gang affiliation and criminal connections, previous evidence suggests, may be naïve.

My research also provided strong evidence that once the gang label is conferred, it is there to stay; this can be seen in both practitioner reluctance to believe desistance is possible, and in the length of time that individuals spend on the static systems seemingly at odds with the seemingly increasingly 'rhizomatic' environment (Hallsworth 2013). Of course, the attention is not always necessarily negative; the Matrix is designed to prioritise intervention and diversionary activities for those that engage. However, the application and outcome of such activities is generally unknown to the police – they are reliant on the Local Authority and third sector to implement and evaluate.

Most importantly, in terms of impact this thesis has highlighted the possibilities of continued risk amplification that may occur through the imposition of an organisational dynamic which can catapult bit part players into the realms of organised criminals. Here, the overarching drug supply discourse presents significant dangers to this effect as can be seen in the widely held associations between County Lines drug dealing activity and the gang.

The Institutional Environment

The creation of Trident Gang Crime Command appeared to in part designed to present a powerful signal to stakeholders that decisive action was being taken to confront the gang

‘problem’. My findings suggest that the legitimacy that this signalling sought to achieve may have actually had a detrimental impact of community engagement. This can be seen in part due to gang suppression tactics. The combination of pre-emptive targeting based on questionable intelligence, sweeping ‘perhaps overused’ drugs enforcement tactics gave communities the impression that Trident were targeting ‘easy pickings’; something officers suggested was indeed sometimes the case. The view of some officers that reorientation as a gang unit diminished Trident’s legitimacy both within the police and amongst the community suggests that the pejorative connotations of the label may be transferring to those doing the labelling.

From Violence to Exploitation?

The role of external stakeholders in influencing gang policing policy is significant. *Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation,* the policy replacement to the maligned *Ending Gang and Youth Violence*, marked an austerity driven shift to focus on vulnerability and exploitation which appears to be having some positive impacts on gang policing. Notably, the cultural shift towards seeing children and teenagers involved in drug supply as victims of exploitation rather than easy arrests to bump up performance. Should this nascent policing approach take hold it would mark a significant change in the way proactive policing is conducted and hopefully lead to a decrease in the needless criminalisation of primarily non-violent young men.

The influence and pressures of external stakeholders contributed to the development of the current approach to policing gangs and appears to have continuing influence on the evolution of gang policing. The apparently whole-sale buy in to the Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation policy turn is demonstrated by Trident’s proactive response to focus on networks

rather than gangs and emphasise the importance of protecting vulnerable and exploited individuals, a move that appears to have garnered both the resource and legitimacy it sought.

However, my findings also suggest dangers inherent in the approach, not least in the potential to conceive gangs as an organised crime network; 'the new gang myth' and a perceived 'natural' progression up Hallsworth & Youngs (2006: 63) misinterpreted pyramid of risk, particularly in light of the fact that we have already seen the peer group consumed by the gang (it is interesting to note that peer groups were not mentioned by any interviewees or survey respondents).

Those targeted whether gangs, networks or individuals are not passive entities they evolve and mutate in congruence not only with the environment in which they operate but with the attentions of the police. It remains to be seen whether changes in police tactics in the drug network domain will generate evolution or adaptation.

The Future: New Myths or New Methodologies?

A key theme emerging from my research was the different levels of emphasis and resource placed on *understanding* problems of violence and criminality in local contexts, as opposed to managing risk against gangs and gang members through enforcement. Of course, this is a fundamentally an issue of resource and expectation, and the role of the police, as one officer observed in the context of prevention:

> If you had 100 million pounds it should all go into prevention, [but] you have to deal with the here and now because we're expected to as an agency, but actually the sensible money is investing in the future isn't it? (OFF1)

However, it is also possible that a small shift in balance between the two could reap significant benefits for all involved. In light of the conceptual confusions in defining gangs and gang crime, and the increasing belief amongst some that much criminality labelled under the gang

banner is nothing of the sort, my findings have emphasised the need for a more nuanced understanding of problems at the local level. Although easy to apply, the gang as an explanatory tool for violence and criminality appears weak and may create more problems than solutions. Many practitioners emphasised the benefits of supplementing police data with that of partners, and findings within the thesis have demonstrates the value of more joined up working and the benefits that localised understanding can convey.

In partial mitigation of the problems in problem understanding, the symbiotic nature of illegal economies, violence and everyday life within many deprived neighbourhoods generates ambiguity. It is an immense task to attempt – to any degree – to order the chaos of social reality, and a particular challenge to quantitative mechanisms in this setting. A good example of the difficulty in 'unpacking' this visual ambiguity is offered by Hobbs (2013: 127), noting in his ethnographic research the hooded kids on bikes 'roaming' an estate may be drugs runners, kids 'playing out', gang members, school children - or perhaps all of the above; one that was echoed within my findings. Acknowledging and analysing the plurality of identities and social relationships that make up 'social context' (Sen 2007) is key to understanding the multi-faceted and often overlapping drivers for violent confrontation; it is not however a priority of the police.

Both violence and the illegal economy are entrenched in many deprived inner city communities (Stanko & Hales 2009). In the late modern metropolitan bazaar (Ruggiero & South 1997), young professionals will stop and chat to their drug dealing friends as they walk home through their estate (Stanko & Hales 2009), shops selling household goods also offer a bit of weed or some cheap cigarettes on the side, and nail parlours not only manicure, but might manage illegal cash flows. Illegal economies are social as well as economic systems, and a level of embeddedness and interconnectivity exists which means that it is impossible to neatly extract market orientated concerns from the social and cultural; retail end drugs

violence is most often committed by and against young men who live within the communities in which they do violence. Understanding how violence is bound up in the personal and occupational identities of those involved is paramount.

In the conclusion to Densley's (2013: 173) gang ethnography he claims that 'isolating gangs and their members from the social contexts in which they act are destined to repeat the failures of previous, US attempts at gang suppression'; although my findings support the notion that social context is important in understanding criminality, my research suggests that isolating gangs *at all* may have a detrimental outcome given the inherent difficulties, dangers and distortions in labelling them.

Ultimately, my findings cast doubt on whether the gang should be given the priority it currently is in the policing of youth and weapons enabled violence in London. Practitioner perceptions of the gang present a complex and multi-faceted world; an apparent mixture of order and chaos, play and professionalism; coercion and free will. The mixed perceptions reflect the competing academic perspectives of the phenomenon, giving the impression of a term so malleable and all-encompassing as to be rendered redundant of any explanatory power in its own right.

The nodes of distortion, internal and external influences affecting data and understanding create a situation where it is impossible to accurately evaluate the efficacy of the police response; very different people and very different problems become subsumed in a messy and uncoordinated agglomeration which is publicly presented with a veneer of order and control (Hobbs 2013: 53). Some officers acknowledged these difficulties:

> So, I think clarity of what we are trying to do [is needed]. So, if we talk about violence and vulnerability [as opposed to gangs] that makes sense because that's where the community is totally on board because too many people are getting stabbed and shot (OFF1)

Focus on firearms, in the view of many Trident officers, makes sense as a specialist area of policing. It's hard to disagree with this perspective. Whilst previous research has been quick to highlight the absence of a media promulgated 'gun culture' (Hales 2005) this is exactly why it is beneficial – different individuals will use firearms for different purposes reflecting the chaotic and mutating environments in which they act, unlike the gang, the only thing that unites it is the harm it causes.

The internal and external consequences of combining gun and gang approaches appear to be an amplification of the perceived risk and threat of those at the lower end of the offending scale, that may not be in any way connected to focused criminality of those at the top; the 'fat boy' running red lights on his bike, as one officer described, is far removed from the professional criminal protecting himself with firearms. That they might be connected by geographical proximity, the colour of their skin, and the amorphous label of the gang.

A Continuing Concern

The malleability of gang statistics makes them ripe for manipulation to suit political ends. Although this thesis has demonstrated the ebb and flow of police policy and practice concerning gangs, with the recent focus on knife crime lessening the gang-centric focus to some extent, the embeddedness of the gang in policy and practice suggests it is unlikely that any dramatic re-focus will occur anytime soon. One only needs to consider the 'hot-off-the-press' associations with gang violence, organised crime and the latest panic around a very small number of violent incidents:

> **'Emerging link' between acid attacks and gang violence in London:** Metropolitan police say connections have been made between acid attack suspects and those involved in organised crime (Marsh 2017)

The various weapons, violence and youth crime orientated moral panics described above inevitably sparked a flurry of academic interest, which has both contributed to and railed

against the confluence of so many different transgressions into the apparently all-encompassing threat of the gang.

Given the likely continuance of the gang myth at the heart of organisational responses to street orientated violence, albeit perhaps under a different label, it is perhaps fitting to end with a Trident officer's observation:

> I just see gangs everywhere. When I'm off duty and I'm in the park and I'm like "oh look at them", I wish I didn't know about it because it's a horrible, horrible world; but you can't unsee it once you've seen it (OFF9)

The gang genie may be very hard to return from whence it came.

Limitations

Whilst this thesis has provided both practical and theoretical contributions across gang and policing research fields, it is of course not without limitations. The limited sample size of interview participants means that my findings cannot be generalised, ether across the Metropolitan Police or between other forces. Findings cannot claim to be representative of the views of all officers involved in the policing of gangs in London, nor other policing approaches to gangs in other forces which vary considerably in size, organisational structure and priorities. Although the survey responses can claim a higher degree of representativeness within the field of 'Matrix administrators', findings are nonetheless limited to this role. A further draw back of the methodological approach is that survey data is particularly limiting in its capacity to draw out the diverse views and perceptions of the practitioners involved, although the open questions provided intriguing teasers to this end.

Although interviewees were carefully selected to include a range of roles and ranks within the field, it was not possible to cover all perspectives; the voices of both intelligence researchers and those working in covert and confidential roles, for example. Likewise, one of the key

findings of this thesis has been the influence of external stakeholders on gang policing; apart from a small sample of Local Authority analysts these perspectives are missing. Analysis has indicated the likelihood of the replication of received wisdom by some respondents with almost verbatim accounts of previous policy status quos; however, the research is not primarily focused on understanding gangs but rather perceptions of them. Whilst elements of this thesis were concerned with the perceptions of key practitioners relating to the characteristics of gangs in London, it is important to note that these are the views of the people employed to control them; in this way perceptions are always likely to provide an exaggerated picture of the problem. This makes the views offered by some questioning whether the groups and individuals they were policing could accurately be described as gangs particularly interesting. Finally, whilst the study has presented a sense of how policing practices have changed over time, the interviewee and survey data are cross sectional and therefore reliant on retrospective accounts of evolution and change. A longitudinal methodology was impractical.

Policy Implications

Matrix Oversight, Administration and Accountability

At a practical administrative level, the need for adequate oversight and administration of the Matrix and other mechanisms which have the potential for misuse and present civil liberties concerns. Local flexibility should not mean a free reign on administrating databases which have such considerable impact on those placed on them.

A Reconsideration of Gang-Centric Approaches

As discussed above, my research has demonstrated that a gang-centric approach to issues of youth violence and wider criminality activity is highly questionable. This can be extended to wider policing approaches in the suppression vein; there is scant evidence as to their

effectiveness and plenty of evidence to the detrimental impact they have on community relations and those caught under the net. ignores the devastating impact of the violence that is occurring. Thus, it is not the absence of a problem per se, but how that problem is framed and how the response impacts the individuals and communities who through no fault of their own fall under it.

'Policy Based Evidence' is still the Status Quo

Despite some improvements in the use of robust evaluation methodologies within the field (e.g. MOPAC Evidence and Insight[84]), policy is still overwhelmingly driven by political rather than evidence-based approaches. The police are particularly immune to robust evaluation of their operational activities, as the previous chapter outlined in detail. This is especially true of work in the intelligence domain.

Drugs Legislation

The perceptions of the pervasiveness of drug supply suggests that rather than using this activity as a mechanism to proactively target gang members, consideration should be given to alternative approaches to drug legislation. Rather than looking to America for tips on how to suppress and imprison those believed to be responsible for gang related violence, perhaps we could look to their gradual awakening to the benefits of a more liberal approach to drug laws. A sentence I never thought I would write.

Recommendations for Future Research

The numerous crosscutting themes within the field of gang policing present a multitude of further research opportunities, I highlight those closest to the central themes of my thesis below. Developing an understanding of gang and violence dynamics from those involved first

[84] A dedicated research function based within the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (Dawson & Stanko 2016).

hand is fundamental to broadening knowledge, however, there is plenty still to be learnt from the practices and process of the police. Police data, regardless of its limitations, offers a rich and relatively (comparative to the quantity of data available) untapped source. The police have embraced the digital age for long enough to make retrospective analysis viable; the police do not have the time, resource or often inclination to look backwards, but sometimes learning from the past is the best way of understanding the future. Significant advances in data storage, manipulation and extraction technologies implemented since I started this thesis present a wealth of opportunities to conduct complex research across systems. This does not necessarily have to be the sole domain of those within the policing field; during my research I noted several officers looking for researchers to assist with projects.

Motivations for Violence

As this thesis has shown, understanding the motivations for violent interaction is often beyond the scope of police investigations, encouraging instead the application of relatively meaningless contextualisers such as 'gang related'. Several interviewees described the proximal and distal motivations as too complex to understand, yet at a local level when pooling on the knowledge of a range of practitioners there appeared to be a far more detailed understanding of what was driving violence; tapping into these sources offers the researcher the possibility a far more nuanced understanding that may produce unexpected results.

Gang Data and Statistics

Whilst my research has provided initial insight to a range of mechanisms, each invites further research of a more quantitative orientation, specifically assessing the impact of being included on the Matrix in terms of offending behaviours, as well as comparative analysis between those not labelled. The grey area of localised gang interventions of all kinds offers further avenues, with the potential to conduct cost-benefit analyses.

Police intelligence, due to data access issues, is a relatively unexplored area of policing practice. Institutional theory lends itself to the analysis of ILP, as well as a range of other organisational processes and innovations. The problems with defining and identifying gang affiliation do not preclude the analysis of police data concerning the offending dynamics of gangs. A vast pool of information has now been built up which presents the opportunity for a range of longitudinally orientated research.

Gang Policy and the Institutional Environment

If the gang is here to stay, the policy area itself is ripe for analysis. There remains a lacuna of research on the processes within both policing and the wider institutional environment. For example, messaging and communication between stakeholders. Further, talking to those involved in gang related violence and their perspectives of the policy approach outside of self-serving evaluations offers potential.

Police Operational Activity – Tactics

As indicated in the policy section policing tactics in the field of serious and organised crime is an area where research could present many benefits; the impact of operational activity on local communities in terms of legitimacy and engagement come to mind, in addition to evaluations of efficacy.

Police – Gang Member Interactions

Finally, new police technologies such as Body Worn Video offer massive potential for innovative research. In the gang domain, interactions between officers would be a particularly interesting area of research, as would analysis of the micro-dynamics of violent events (Collins 2009).

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