

The Tools, Tactics, and Mentality of Outlaw Biker Wars

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Abstract Warfare among rival outlaw motorcycle clubs has been and remains a critical dynamic in the subculture. This paper examines the role of war mentality in the biker subculture and how it has changed overtime. Specific exemplary and noteworthy events are discussed to illustrate critical ideas. Also examined are the changing tactics, defenses, and tools used in these conflict and how the mentality of the outlaw biker club has contributed to the evolution of warfare from impulsive, self-gratifying mayhem to more calculating symbolic and instrumental acts.

Keywords Motorcycle clubs · One Percenter · Criminal behavior · Deviant behavior · Violence · Outlaw · Gangs · War · Crime/criminology · Violence · Social Organization · Organizational change · Subculture/counterculture

Introduction

This paper examines the historical warfare, which continues to evolve, among rival outlaw biker clubs and the role of war mentality in this one percenter subculture. These clubs consist of men who cannot or will not fit in to mainstream society, are alienated enough to exalt in their outlaw status and fearless enough to defend that status against all challenges (Quinn, 1987; Quinn & Forsyth, 2007, 2009). The subculture consists of a plethora of clubs with local, regional, national and international status but is dominated by the so-called “Big Four” clubs—the Hells’ Angels, Outlaws, Bandidos and Pagans. The “Big Four” term dates to the early 1970s when these clubs were the most powerful groups in the subculture. The term has lost its substantive meaning: The Pagans have declined in power and territory

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and are in many ways comparable to the Sons of Silence while the Mongols have emerged as a major power in the subculture. Thus, the designation is historical-traditional but remains important to the status of some clubs.

Since the mid-1990s, the Hells Angels have become overtly antagonistic to virtually all clubs over whom they do not have direct influence. This has reduced the intensity and frequency of conflicts among the other large clubs and led to a subcultural war pitting the Angels and their affiliates against the other large clubs on a number of fronts across North America, Australia and Europe. The Hells Angels are sufficiently elitist to seek the complete and unmitigated control of the entire subculture as their long term goal. They may also have the structural sophistication and overall ferocity to achieve that goal although the forces arrayed against them are daunting and their arch-rivals, the Mongols, are ascendant in many areas.

Conservative or purist bikers want to preserve the original values of the 1960–1975 era and value the tough, mechanically-oriented, homo-social world of the biker bar and clubhouse (Wolf, 1991; Barger, Zimmerman, & Zimmerman, 2000:35–36, 103; Quinn, 2001). While they value sophisticated weaponry, they settle most of their disputes with fists, knives or chains and prefer riding and carousing to jetting around the continent in pursuit of profits. The opposite, “radical” (Wolf, 1991) or entrepreneurial (Quinn, 2001) pole is typified by rational behavior that supports a preoccupation with organized criminal enterprises. The subculture’s roots and imagery are largely grounded in purist values, but an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurial thinking led the emergence of the “Big Four,” and is shaping the subculture’s future (Quinn & Koch, 2003; Barker & Human, 2009).

The two ideologies are thus compatible and most one percenters endorse aspects of each view. Purists are not necessarily anti-entrepreneurial; nor are entrepreneurs seeking a different way of life for themselves or their brothers. The difference is one of priorities. Purists put biker values (as manifested in their club) first, and are willing to limit club and enterprise growth to protect these values. Entrepreneurs see the financial power attained through enterprises and growth as essential to the preservation of the club and subculture. They reason that if the club falls, its version of the subcultural values will fall with it and then even the purist goal is lost. Therefore minor and hopefully temporary sacrifices of values are acceptable to them if they serve the greater purpose of advancing the club and its values.

The violence and xenophobia of the one percenters’ world presents serious obstacles to direct objective study of the subculture. Most of the literature on one percenters is based on retrospective participant accounts, and/or interviews with or police sources. Triangulation of themes from written accounts of club life is challenging because that literature is written largely by bikers themselves (Reynolds, 1967; Barger et al., 2000; Winterhalder, 2005), police investigators (Davis, 1982a, b; McGuire, 1986a, b; Trethewey and Katz, 1998; RCMP, 1999, 2002; Smith, 2002; Grascia, 2004; McDermott, 2006) or journalists using sources similar to those of police and prosecutors (Lavigne, 1995, 1997, 2000; Sher & Marsden, 2003).

Although an undercover agent with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), William Queen’s book (2005) is the least biased description of the inner dynamics of a 1% club (the Mongols), but it does not really attempt any sort of analysis. Academic efforts (Montgomery, 1976, 1977; Watson, 1980, 1982; Quinn, 1987, 2001; Hopper & Moore, 1983, 1990; Wolf, 1991; Smith, 2002) strive for

objectivity but are biased by the authors' role, era, club and location as is all ethnography. Only a few very limited quantitative papers on one percenters have been published (Danner & Silverman, 1986; Alain, 1995; Tremblay, Sylvi, Cordeau, MacLean, & Shewshuck, 1989) and their focus is limited by topic and region. Media reports provide useful details, but like police sources, tend to focus on a single local conflict (e.g., Clark & O'Neill, 1981a, b, c, d) and/or the particular facts of specific crimes (e.g., Clawson, 1983) or events (e.g., Jamison, 2000a, b). The most recent use of the media to analyze these clubs (Barker & Human, 2009) is based on media coverage and that reflects mainly of police activities.

Methodology

We have distilled many insights into club values from conversations with club members, associates and law enforcement personnel in North America, Europe and Australia over the last 30 years. The synthesis of these confidential contacts relies on evaluating their consistency and context as well as the bias of the source. Insights from our informants are illustrated with press reports selected for either their typicality or their focus on subcultural milestones. In many cases these contacts emphasize the more mundane aspects of club life that tend to be neglected by most writers and investigators. The insights of other writers are cited, those acquired from club members, their immediate associates and law enforcement officials are not.

The One Percenter War Mentality

Constant internecine warfare is one of the most dominant themes in biker life: It has been a pervasive influence on both the subculture and its participants since the 1960s. Interclub wars guided the subculture's evolution (Quinn, 2001; Quinn & Forsyth, 2007) but are also a crucial force in shaping the psychology of club members and their collective behavior. It is one vital key to any effort to understand and predict the future behavior of these bikers. The chronic internecine conflicts that absorb much club attention and resources underlie a shifting complex of alliances and tensions between clubs of various sizes with varying interests. For example, the Warlocks' M.C. origins in the mid-Atlantic region often placed them in competition with the Pagans but the clubs united briefly in some of their Florida adventures due to mutual antagonism against the Outlaws. Pagans and Warlocks in Pennsylvania remained intense rivals, however, which led the Warlocks into the Angels sphere of influence as hostilities between the Angels and Pagans escalated. This is fairly typical of biker alliances: mutual enemies lead to uneasy and generally transient alliances. In the expansionist era (c. 1965–1980) these shifting alliances and partial truces made interclub relations so complex that they could rarely be neatly defined except momentarily at the local level. The subculture was a dangerously unpredictable social setting (and still can be to a lesser extent) because one's drinking companions were often members of other clubs who could be valued allies one moment and homicidal enemies then next. The subculture is relatively small and isolated so most 1%ers know most of the bikers in their region as well as those in

their club. Keeping up with the personal and group alliances in one's home area is a major task unto itself.

In combination with local personalities, regional opportunities and issues often encourage temporary, unstable relationships between small groups from different clubs that are limited to a particular enterprise, recreational situation or common foe. Throughout the 1970s, the Outlaws and Pagans alternated between feuding over territory and aligning against other clubs. Members of the two groups even united occasionally for drug and prostitution deals. This was especially true at the fringes of their corporate territory where chapters tended to be small and somewhat removed from the national hierarchy. This tenuous relationship continued until the Orlando Outlaws tried to coerce three Pagans into exchanging their colors for Outlaw membership. The resulting double murder (one Pagan escaped by leaping from a moving van on the Florida Turnpike) (Lynch, 1978) led to life sentences for six Outlaws and open hostility between the clubs.

While the desire to expand is a constant in most clubs, it is an increasingly costly effort that requires some coordination with the club's national and regional hierarchies: Expansion in one area can create tensions that lead to an imbalance in club relationships in other areas; thus, the granting of charters that permit use of the club name and symbols is strictly controlled at the national level. Nonetheless, each chapter is relatively autonomous in its routines and most are left to independently decide how to deal with nearby chapters of other clubs. The club hierarchy acts mainly to support these local units and often acts informally to influence their behavior in one direction or another. This can occur at officers meetings or through direct contacts. Chapters often negotiate with one another over either the details of how revenge should be handled or to obtain resources (equipment, weapons, manpower) for use in hostilities.

When a club formally declares war, however, all such internecine fraternization is expected to end; all chapters are mandated to cooperate in any effort to target the enemy club. Without such a declaration, one chapter may seek revenge but find itself limited due to objections from other chapters. These are usually attempts to keep the club's profile low so as to avoid increased police scrutiny but may also protect local arrangements that assure peace to neighboring chapters of the two clubs. New York Pagans, for example, might seek a war with the HA while chapters in West Virginia may seek to preserve an unspoken truce with nearby Ohio HA chapters. However, as tensions rise and the number and severity of affronts to club honor and power mount, solidarity builds within the club and inter-club truces dissolve.

The Angels have twice declared war publicly, against the Outlaws in 1974 and against the Pagans in early 2005. The HA declaration of war against the Outlaws formalized antagonisms that were decades old and resulted from the execution of three Angels by an Outlaw national and several members of the South Florida chapter. The HA's east coast leadership's 2005 declaration of war against the Pagans was almost immediately rescinded under pressure from both the West Coast leadership (which controls the corporate aspects of the club, and thus its power to charter new groups and distribute resources) and regional ethnic mobsters (Barker, 2004, 2005, 2007; Caparella, 2005).

While decision-making is largely at the chapter level, larger dynamics influence club warfare by restricting the availability of resources (weapons, manpower) that

embattled chapters can draw upon. When a club is at war in one area, chapters in the contested area draw resources from other chapters. The national level of the club often assists with loans, contacts or influence. National officers can also encourage pivotal members of one chapter to transfer to other areas to assist the embattled group. No club's resources are infinite, especially if purist sentiments keep membership standards high. Men can and do move into contested areas at the urging of the club but this disrupts their economic activity. Only a few such moves can be made without great cost to the club. At the height of the HA-Outlaw war (1971–1986) the Pagans and HA established an informal truce which allowed the later group to flourish all along the east coast as the Angels focused on the Midwest where the Outlaws were dominant. Later, when the HA came to focus more upon threats from the Bandidos in Canada, Europe and the south, their northeastern and mid-Atlantic chapters were freed to reinitiate hostilities against the Pagans that culminated in the Pagans attempt to confiscate surrendered colors at the Hellraiser ball on Long Island in 2002 (Gootman, 2002). Like the HA attack on the Mongols in a Laughlin NV casino, this incident was unusual for the public setting in which it occurred. Most interclub violence occurs in remote or private settings, or in bars, tattoo shops, etc. that are clearly part of saloon society and thus rarely endangers non-bikers. Unlike Laughlin, the pagan attack on the Hellraisers' ball was ordered specifically by club officials to recover "colors" from former Pagans who had patched over to the HA.

The Social Psychology of War

The social psychological changes in individual thought and action that accompany involvement in a war explain much of warfare's attractiveness to bikers via their effects on group dynamics and the suspension of concern with competing norms and goals. Being at war simplifies the world by eliminating concern with, and even recognition of, the shades of gray that color ordinary moral perceptions. A mere society of sociopaths could not survive and prosper as have 1%ers, but a cult of warriors whose only ethic is victory would almost certainly succeed under such conditions. Modern motorcycle clubs are a bit of each with entrepreneurial sentiments roughly correlating with sociopathy and purist ones with impulsivity and tribal loyalty. The perpetual state of war that pervades club life underlies the bestial actions of these men as it coexists with the depth of their camaraderie and even tenderness for one another and their families. Hence the ability to kill old friends thought to have turned traitor against the club. The psychology of war also clarifies how these men can be neglectful husbands and fathers by mainstream standards while adhering to the highest standards of their wives and club brothers.

Threats of prison, injury or death are overwhelmed by the need for immediate action to protect the group. The consequences of losing are defined as equal to or worse than such threats. Hardship and sacrifice are more easily endured when the alternative is conceived as wholesale destruction and enemy dominance. Force is imperative and virtually any means are justified by the quest for survival: The greater evil represented by the enemy is the embodiment of evil itself. The enemy becomes merely a symbol of evil and danger, a target for anger and a scapegoat for

all that is wrong in a man's life. This makes it easy for otherwise ordinary people to commit atrocities ranging from a barroom stomping to torture and genocide.

In wartime, everything that helps one's cause is good and all that threatens it is evil. Participants feel special because they play a role in a cause much larger than themselves that is experienced as having almost cosmic importance. Inter-club warfare easily takes on an epic quality when one's social world is restricted to the 1% subculture, saloon society and the local underworld. A subculture whose honor code drawn from the Wild West imagery of U.S. media (Thompson, 1966) and espouses the virtues of personal combat (Barger et al., 2000:87) can thus readily condone bombings and similar acts of stealth. Collateral damage to citizens is as secondary in importance to bikers as it is to the military. A sense of impending doom looms large in the group's psyche as the perception that everything is about to radically change takes hold during a war.

The intense emotions of war build internal solidarity among the victims of attack who are far more likely to close ranks in self-righteous outrage than to ask what their group has done to provoke the enemy. Personal goals are suspended along with the search for petty comforts as the threat posed by the enemy dominates the warriors' thoughts. Values like class, courage and group loyalty nourish this dynamic as their meaning is warped in the drive for victory. (Class originally meant demonstrating reckless bravado and malicious violence but its connotation has expanded to refer to conspicuous consumption of wealth.)

War is exhausting and expensive in every sense. However, it is also strangely attractive, particularly to those who crave excitement and/or are chronically angry. Aggression can act as an excitatory drug that focuses combatants on the current struggle (Chen et al., 2005). Warfare allows leaders to become tyrants as rank-and-filers redefine the group's needs to cope with the emergent threat. The most savage men take control of the club apparatus much more easily in war than in peace. Disparate sub-groups and feuding egos are united into an efficient social structure with a single overriding goal—victory. Dissent becomes synonymous with cowardice or worse. Chapter and personal autonomy are diminished to assure group power.

Once surrendered, these freedoms are rarely regained. Savagery and profit seeking increasingly dominates the evolution of the subculture through this process making bikers more ruthless than the older ethnic mobs because they are chronically at war. War facilitates this process because it clouds judgment and mobilizes all members and supporters of the club. The men's attention is focused on the minutiae of the mission (i.e., club business) and they come to believe that their lives and self-worth dependent on victory. Many biker women expect assurances of safety from the men and relish the opportunity to contribute to the cause. The drug-like effects of excitatory neurochemicals keep members focused on the present threat while anticipating the pleasures attendant to victory. It can take years and a long series of severe losses to produce fatigue under these conditions.

Warfare and Club Structure

Biker wars were fought almost entirely at the local chapter level until about 1970. Clubs were near groups so chapter and personal loyalties outstripped those of the

larger group as one percenters fought among themselves for internal dominance. Among the Hells ‘Angels, for example, the Oakland-San Francisco rivalry repeatedly exploded into violence during the 1960s as the Oakland chapter repeatedly attacked the rival Gypsy Jokers and San Francisco chapter parted with them. Friction between the northern and southern California branches of the club, which dates to its founding, ostensibly in 1947, remain to some extent even today. Likewise, the Pagans had regional divisions throughout the 1970s, primarily between Mid-Atlantic and the more southern chapters and the Bandidos are still notorious for their internal divisions.

As group cohesion grew during the 1970s, warfare became more regional in scope. Intra-group conflicts were handled more diplomatically as clubs developed internal command and conflict resolution structures, allowing greater attention to rivals. The intensity of these conflicts is best explained by group value theory. Intergroup conflicts between groups vying for the same or similar members produce very intense internecine conflicts (Vold & Bernard, 1986). These conflicts were also driven by particularly dominant personalities within the various clubs who used intergroup antagonisms to build solidarity and assure their own leadership roles. Ralph “Sonny” Barger of the Hells Angels is the only survivor of these 1% empire builders, but Staircase Harry Henderson of the Outlaws deserves mention, as does, Donald Chambers of the Bandidos. Their efforts fed club and subcultural expansion as they carved out enough turf for their groups to thrive while provoking the ire of rivals. These achievements were partly deliberate and partly the by-product of self- and group-aggrandize-ment. These early biker leaders used a war mentality to enact their own blend of purism and entrepreneurship as they met their emotional needs for status and power. Their egotism irked many within and beyond their clubs and thus assured continued rivalries as well as the gradual development of controls that partially rationalized club decision-making (Quinn, 2001; Quinn & Koch, 2003).

The desire to dominate the club, and through it the milieu, was never lost, nor was the tendency to rely on personal contacts, informal networks and charisma rather than formal structure. The potential for violence remains ever-present but is increasingly delegated to low status bikers, club associates or members of prospect clubs (Smith, 2002). These qualities and patterns of activity are now deeply ingrained in the subculture’s modal form of operation (Barker, 2007; Barker & Human, 2009). Big four clubs have clear hierarchies but often ignore them in favor of more informal means of fulfilling goals.

While their organizational hierarchies are increasingly rational, charismatic factors still drive much of club life. Both the rational structures and their charismatic alternatives grew out of the interaction of rebellious and raucous personalities of club bikers in the context of prolonged warfare. Warfare, for example, made it tolerable for clubs to take control of their member’s violent impulses (Quinn & Forsyth, 2007). Control, however, meant guidance and forethought designed to maximize effectiveness, not the amelioration of mayhem. Warfare also guided the evolution of standards for membership that first permitted the admission of marginal members at the height of inter-club conflicts but later removed them for reasons based on either purism or entrepreneurialism. This shift from near-group to rational organization also eliminated some veterans who could not tolerate the growth of entrepreneurialism of formal control by club leadership.

The larger 1% clubs struggle with one another to maintain and expand dominance within the local subculture and milieu. A dual structure of formal and informal power hierarchies allows the locus of power in 1% clubs to shift with the demands posed by this goal while assuring sufficient stability over time and space to protect ongoing enterprises. This mirrors capitalism's need for formal rational law to be predictable enough to permit long term investment while tolerating some level of corruption and lobbying. Dual hierarchies permit great latitude at the chapter and regional level in both assigning member's tasks and regulating illegal operations. The details of strikes against rivals are left largely to regional and local leaders, but limits (e.g., bans on explosives) and priorities are set at the national level of most clubs. Enterprises crosscut those structures, and are directly controlled by cliques.

Chronic concern with warfare requires chapters and clubs to generate large amounts of cash to purchase weapons and protective gear, as well as to pay members' legal expenses while their time is devoted to club business. Clubs relegate most fund raising to their members. The group sets the amount of dues and fees that must be paid by members based on its needs; members are left to their own ingenuity to obtain these funds. Informally, the clubs are umbrella organizations in which specialized crime rings proliferate; the group's reputation, social networks and resources (e.g., loans, clubhouses) are integral to this proliferation. Clubs often loan members cash with few questions asked so long as it is repaid. Initially this helped them keep their bikes in working order but was transformed into seed money for illegal operations in the 1970s when interclub warfare grew especially intense. Virtually no questions are asked about member's activities both because members often trust one another and due to the need to compartmentalize information about illegal actions. Most of the member's criminal enterprises are not directly sanctioned by the club, but are seen as beneficial because they strengthen the financial and logistical powers of individual members and enrich club coffers.

Tactics and Defenses

Increasingly sophisticated criminality was necessitated by the ever greater amounts of time and money required of members by various club affairs. Intelligence gathering became a major focus of activity and investment in the late 1960s when some chapters of major clubs began to spend months at a time surveiling various rivals. It remains one of the most time-consuming aspects of club business and is pursued with great vigor by all large clubs and smaller ones. As they became more sophisticated and rationally motivated, bikers came to enjoy access to the most modern technology and often modify it for their own purposes (Ayoob, 1987; Clark & O'Neill, 1981a, b, c, d; Davis, 1982a, b). Night vision devices and long distance lenses are very popular but tracking devices and eavesdropping equipment are also used at times. Keeping up with gossip in saloon society and its fringes is also of great import to clubs. Female associates often play a role in these endeavors as they commonly work in bars and/or the sex industry but rarely advertise their affiliation to customers. Biker links to the sex industry provide a cash flow and safe meeting places as well as extortion and money laundering opportunities. These links also provides a window on the greater saloon society and the activities of its denizens. For example, women employed in the sex trade may make contacts with military

personnel who become instrumental in obtaining weapons for the club. Contacts in other agencies and private businesses may similarly facilitate enterprises through collaboration, blackmail and coercion (RCMP, 1999:8, 53).

Many bikers have tried, with varying degrees of success to monitor police activities (Ayoob, 1987; Clawson, 1983; Smith, 2002). Initially this often consisted of visiting key law enforcement officials on the pretext of improving communication while surreptitiously scanning any visible documents to glean a sense of police concerns and priorities. In the 1970s, several Outlaw officers were known for the “upside down speed reading.” Modern 1%ers occasionally tail key police officers to discern their professional and off-duty activities and discover their home addresses for later use in intimidation efforts. However, computer hacking and improvised tracking devices, are increasingly popular as methods of monitoring authorities. The general social trend toward ever greater reliance on high tech methods is also characteristic of 1%ers weaponry, defenses and enterprises. The sophistication of their criminality is reciprocally related to that of their weaponry. Wars and weapons added to club expenses which are financed in part with criminal operations that provide motivation to suppress enemies and protect assets. The escalation of weapons and defenses began with expansionist pressures in the late 1960s. Crash wagons (specially equipped vans) were originally used for club runs but were put into use in drive-by raids on rival homes and clubhouses which earned them the appellation of “war wagons.” As the severity of these attacks grew, clubs increased their defensive armaments and many clubhouses now resemble fortresses. Clubhouse fortifications now often include all manner of electronic devices (e.g., motion detectors, floodlights, guard dogs), heavy brick or bullet-proof walls, specially reinforced window screening, and entry-resistant doors. Secret compartments within clubhouses have also been noted. Over time, resisting authorities, or at least slowing their entry, became as common a concern as blocking attacks by rivals. Some Canadian municipalities have turned this to their advantage with ordinances permitting local authorities to regulate, inspect and dismantle fortified buildings such as clubhouses (Haut, 1999; RCMP, 2002: 5,31).

These defenses encouraged the use of explosives against the cars, homes and club houses of club enemies which was initiated in the American northeast and Midwest where bikers were heavily influenced by traditional ethnic mobsters (Linder, 1981) and grew in popularity during the 1990’s and early 2000’s (RCMP, 1999; Ayoob, 1987; Barry, 2001; CISC, 1999, 2002; Clawson, 1983; Culbert, Hall, & Lavoie, 2005; Davis, 1982a, b; Frisman, 1981; McGuire, 1986a, b; Scaramella, Brenzinger, & Miller, 1997; Smith, 2002; Trethewy & Katz, 1998). The relative paucity of guns in Canada and Europe may contribute to this tendency as well. Excesses in Canada and Chicago attracted unprecedented police attention (e.g., *US v. Bowman*, 2002) which, in turn led to a decrease in the frequency, power and sophistication of explosive use.

War and Motivation among 1%ers

The loyalty bikers show their brothers and clubs, as well as, the depth of their emotions, makes questionable the assumption that their clubs are mere conglomerations of psychopaths. Take, for example, the rigid lines one percenters draw between club members and outsiders: True psychopaths are not so discriminating

and would not willingly sacrifice their own interests for those of their group. More than one police recording of biker conversations has shown that the bikers continue to serve the club despite their belief that they are under surveillance and will soon face long terms of imprisonment. While it is certain that more than a few bikers are indeed anti-social personalities, this sort of personal pathology is wholly inadequate as an explanation of the subculture.

A better explanation lies in the effects of a siege or bunker mentality on the hyper-masculine values of the 1% motorcycle club that intensifies social learning while cultivating a narrow world view. Constant war and chronic immersion in major criminal operations assures a mental set in which bikers (often rightly) believe that major forces, such as rivals and legal authorities, are focused on their destruction. This perception can assure the vigor of hostilities against rival groups for decades or inspire new ones against any who would challenge club hegemony. The pressing need to respond quickly, unequivocally and often preemptively to perceived threats justifies the extremity of many club actions

Their hedonism is similarly guided by male camaraderie and the chronic sense of threat that permeates 1%ers lives. In their minds, they are soldiers and the club is their nation-tribe. Even the trend in colors is towards a cleaner, almost uniform-like appearance, in many large clubs. Examination of the psychology of war reveals the underlying implications of the idea of a bunker mentality.

LeShan (2002) explains that war creates sense of uniqueness in the individuals caught in its emotional fervor. Participants feel that they, their comrades and the times in which they live are unique. This justifies the suspension of many “normal” social rules governing morality and even common decency. The urgency of war readily justifies a host of entitlements that could not otherwise be rationalized by anyone with a conscience. Anger at the outrages attributed to the enemy justifies these entitlements and focuses adrenalized attention on the conflict. An entitlement declares that one deserves special consideration that permits all variety of legal and normative violations.

Entitlements open up a new vocabulary of motives (or rationalizations) for behaviors that are self-centered and very immediate in focus. In conventional thought, the presence of habitual criminality requires some special sort of warped logic. The alternative argument is that all behavior varies in its source from largely emotional to largely rational. Emotionally driven acts are often regretted after their commission regardless of their legality unless they are successful and thus rewarding to their perpetrator(s). The difference between habitual offenders and ordinary people seems to lie in 1) the proportion of time spent in emotional rather than rational modes of thought and 2) the depth of the emotional response evoked by a situation, 3) the nature of the learned responses evoked in critical situations and 4) the social system to which they are oriented and the manner in which it organizes the distribution of rewards. Bikers are extreme offenders because their social situation and personal inclinations place them at an emotional edge. These tendencies are a consequence of a siege mentality which keeps emotions high much of the time, very deep loyalties and animosities, their earlier lives which lead them to respond with extreme violence, and their membership in a subculture which relies on crime to generate both practical and emotional rewards.

Bikers are distinct from other street criminals by their ability to remain emotionally motivated for very long periods of time while behaving rationally as they focus on specific “missions” to finance wars and destroy enemies. One percenters excel at winning according to the norms of saloon society. Focus on the specifics of a mission allows them to put aside the emotionally-laden context that compels their action and concentrate only on the performance of the act itself. Success is the only criteria by which warriors’ actions are measured and club members clearly conceive themselves as warriors in a death struggle with rivals.

Club membership assures an isolation that reinforces the values and rewards of the milieu to the exclusion of competitors, such as the blue collar world in which most club members were raised. Further, clubs are virtually the only reference group for their members and social support is a powerful antidote to misgivings, regrets and guilt. This raises the emotional intensity of virtually all events because each man amplifies the emotions of those around him as he responds on the basis of the competitive norms of the hyper-masculine subculture. Each biker’s identity is invested in both the practical issues of warfare and the competitive atmosphere in which potential strategies and methods of attaining victory are discussed. Thus anger and hate build rapidly against real and potential foes; this fuels both the continuation of warfare and the savagery of the tactics employed. Each biker invests in conversations about violent strategies to solve problems. Those with the most intense attitudes tend to set the tone of decision (i.e., policy) making. Others must reflect that intensity or risk having either their courage or their loyalty to the group questioned. Thus, each comment tends to up the ante for violence while linking superlatives of retaliation to personal and collective identity. Identity is critical in saloon society because it confers power.

While some seek the elusive sense of safety offered by personal and group reputation in saloon society, others have wholly internalized the imagery of evil with which bikers are associated in the public mind. In the latter case, a synthesis of the “evil warrior” and biker archetypes merge to form an individual identity that is truly ferocious yet wholly rational from the subculture’s standpoint. Because of their intense interaction and relative isolation, all these processes are stronger in major motorcycle clubs than among most other kinds of offenders. Emotionally intense interaction among socially isolated men can be temporarily dominated by sociopaths who manipulate these dynamics for their own gain. In the long run, however, the manipulation, if not the sociopath, will be rejected because it fails to serve the group and its values.

Each significant event in a biker war changes the mood and shifts the motivational dynamics of the affected chapters. Winning creates a heady sense of victory that bolsters confidence and reinforces the group’s belief in the righteousness of its cause. In its most extreme form it leads to potentially fatal errors as a result of what might be called a power drunk state of mind. On the other hand, losses create a sense of desperation that motivates extreme actions. While it is decidedly unpleasant to lose even a small battle, the sense of uniqueness that accompanies attempts to surmount defeat is heady in itself. This aspect of biker warfare resembles the more mundane notion of living from one crisis to the next that many average citizens endure. Many bikers came from the sort of disorganized blue collar homes in which such a lifestyle is normative so this crisis mentality goes unquestioned despite its

intensity. The bikers' situation is distinctive in the level of threat and excitement it produces; an "adrenaline high" as some have called it. Despite the fact that past and current club efforts to attain dominance created the threats they currently face, one percenters feel their club (i.e., nation-tribe) can be safe only if it thoroughly dominates the regional or global subculture and the cycle of warfare is perpetuated through constant reciprocal strikes amounting to transgenerational vendettas.

Discussion

Large 1% motorcycle clubs combine key features of nations, religious sects, tribes and warrior societies in the highly criminal context created by the members' backgrounds and problem-solving orientation. The violent, even savage, crimes of bikers tempt many experts to label them sociopaths and attribute club behavior to the personal pathology of the members. However, this ignores some critical features of anti-social personality disorder, especially shallowness of emotion and lack of enduring loyalties. Psychopathy and related disorders certainly occur among 1%ers but the dynamics that fuel criminal behavior lie largely in the interactions of small, socially isolated groups of dedicated offenders intoxicated by the intense emotions of war in the context of sect-like loyalty to their tribe-club.

Each club has a unique interpretation of the subculture's values—hyper-masculine camaraderie, loyalty, courage, independence, raucous outrageousness, mechanical-technical skills, honor, and hedonism—that rationalizes the constant tensions between clubs and between clubs and other underworld actors. Power is the supreme biker value, pervading everything from their sexual liaisons to choice of motorcycle. Success and money are indicators of power and therefore vital to bikers as well. The universality of a violent criminal orientation among these men breeds savagery in the isolated, competitive atmosphere a chronic state of warfare.

Chemically induced euphoria, the excitement of combat and the thrill of riding are goals unto themselves, as well as lifestyle markers, among bikers. Biker camaraderie may at times be egalitarian but it is also chauvinistic and homosocial. Biker life is not segmented into work, home and other distinct roles. Being a 1%er is a single, full time role into which recreation, relationships, business and other pursuits are integrated. Most 1% bikers were experienced felons prior to joining the club; many brought specific legitimate or criminal skills to their chapter. Their criminality is deepened by the immersion in the saloon society milieu where violence plays a key social control function. Their adeptness at all aspects of violence, from fisticuffs to firearms and military ordinance, earned them first the interest, then the respect and now even the fear of more traditional organized crime groups.

Clubs have moved away from spontaneous, expressive violence towards more rational, premeditated and lethal forms. They are also increasingly able to hire out some of the dirtier killings to probationary members, satellite clubs or other associates. Simultaneously, they have progressed from small time thefts, drug sales and living off prostitution earnings to highly sophisticated drug, weapons and even gambling rings as well as various fraud and extortion rackets.

Clubs occasionally operate criminal enterprises that are crucial to their financial survival but for the most part insulate their officers from direct involvement in organized

crime. Instead, club officers play a regulatory role that ameliorate conflicts within the group. The great majority of the instrumental crimes committed by 1%ers are the work of cliques who use the club's reputation, resources and networks to facilitate their efforts. Much of their recent expansion beyond the United States and western Canada is due to the ascendancy of an entrepreneurial orientation that may put profits and local loyalties ahead of allegiance to the club per se and the original, expressive values of the subculture. It is their internecine warfare that the club itself becomes the main actor and directly supervises the organized criminality of its members.

The unique mental state induced by being in a state of war is perhaps the most critical, and least recognized, dynamic of biker life. The sense of uniqueness and purpose it bestows upon combatants fits bikers' self images quite well as it feeds their stimulation seeking natures. It also provides powerful motives to suspend the norms of common decency and even those of subcultural honor. War fuels the escalation of weaponry and defenses as well as a variety of intelligence gathering methods that range from high tech to mundane. Most critically, however, war keeps bikers isolated and focused on their criminal activities with an urgency that motivates extremes of both sacrifice and savagery. Each big four club is in a chronic state of war with at least two major entities; at least one other large club and the legal establishment. Despite periodic rumors of truces and alliances among the big four, this situation is unlikely to change substantially in the foreseeable future.

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