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*Out*law and economics: Biker gangs and club goods

Ennio E Piano
George Mason University, USA

Abstract

Today, outlaw motorcycle gangs are best known for their involvement in an international criminal network dealing in narcotics, human trafficking, and arms smuggling. Law enforcement agencies in three continents have identified groups like the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, the Outlaws Motorcycle Club, and the Bandidos Motorcycle Club as a major threat to public safety. Before their descent into organized crime, outlaw bikers captured the imagination of the American public due to their peculiar look and outrageous behavior. They dressed in dirty sleeveless leather jackets and Nazi paraphernalia, their arms covered in tattoos of Nazi and White-supremacist symbolism. They drove highly customized, loud, and heavy American bikes—almost always Harley-Davidsons—and despised Japanese vehicles. They were notorious for their erratic behavior, in particular, the propensity to use violence in an idiosyncratic way when interacting with non-bikers and the public display of nudity and sexual practices. Unlike standard treatments of outlaw bikers, which draw from criminology, sociology, and psychology, I propose an explanation for these seemingly irrational and certainly odd practices rooted on the economic approach. Following the literature on the economic theory of religious sects, I argue that these odd practices served as effective obstacles to the ability of outlaw bikers to free ride on the club goods provided by these organizations.

Keywords

Club goods, outlaw bikers, sacrifice and stigma

Corresponding author:
Ennio E Piano, F. A. Hayek Program for Advanced Study in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, Department of Economics, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030, USA.
Email: epiano@gmu.edu

> They're all just psychologically unstable. That's all you have to know. Otherwise none of it makes sense.
>
> Anonymous police officer (Wolf, 1991: 12)

Introduction

Outlaw bikers captured the attention of the American public before their rise to power in the criminal landscape in the 1970s and 1980s. By the end of the 1940s, stories about their peculiar behavior had started circulating thanks to the reporting of national magazines and newspapers (Barker, 2010; Veno, 2010). The image of the violent, proud, and existentially free outlaw biker became increasingly popular in American popular culture, as it is evident from the success of movies such as the American classics *The Wild One* and *Easy Riders*.

This success rapidly evolved into a "moral panic" (Katz, 2011) as stories about the odd practices of outlaw biker groups eventually emerged. Ethnographic and journalistic reports of these groups described them as radically out of step with mainstream society. Deviant sexual practices were used for initiation ceremonies. Violent attitudes toward non-bikers were the norm. Even their piratical look communicated adherence to alternative lifestyle and values. "[B]iker-associated values include racism, concern with Nazism, and in-group superiority. 'Righteousness' is achieved through adherence to these values" (Watson, 1980: 35). Outlaw bikers shared common characteristics:

> The typical righteous outlaw belongs to a club, rides an American made motorcycle, is a white male, displays subculture's symbols, hate most if not all nonwhites and Japanese motorcycles, works irregularly at best, dresses at all times in dirty jeans, cut-off denim jacket, and engineer's boots, drinks beer, takes whichever drugs are available, and treats women as objects of contempt. (Watson, 1980: 38)

Scholars and law enforcement agents who study outlaw bikers have proposed different theories to explain the peculiar behaviors and institutions of outlaw bikers. Most of these explanations belong to the realms of sociology and criminology. One popular theory is that outlaw bikers' behavior is the result of a process of alienation begun in the aftermath of the Second World War and that accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. Davis (1982) refers to the "anomic conditions that affected lower middle-class white men" during these decades as the cause of bikers' lifestyle and ideological paradigm. Wolf (1991) blames the urbanization and industrialization of American society, which led to a sense of "[i]solation from meaningful social

participation and the subsequent psychological experience of inadequate identity fulfillment [which] may result in a personal search for self-authenticity" (p. 31). Quinn and Forsyth (2011) argue that these groups "consist of men who cannot or will not fit in mainstream society, they are alienated enough to exalt in their outlaw status and fearless enough to defend that status against all challenges" (p. 216). According to this interpretation, the individuals who founded and later joined these groups brought their behavioral attitudes along with them:

> [O]utlaws' behavior is explained by the fact that they come from a violent and unsafe environment: Most members of outlaw gangs are from lower or lower middle-class levels of American society, and as such, bring with them their class-associated behaviors. (Davis, 1982: 18)

A second interpretation sees the military background of most outlaw bikers as a major determinant of their practices. Back from their deployment in Europe and the Pacific, veterans found themselves addicted to the thrills of violence and conflict, as well as in search of the same camaraderie they experienced while serving in the army (Quinn, 2001). The biker lifestyle was the closest substitute to army life, thus attracting thousands of veterans to their ranks. This purported attachment to such values as brotherhood, patriotism, discipline, masculinity, violence, technical skills, and even the love for bikes is hereby explained (Veno, 2010).

While these claims certainly contain elements of truth, they also suffer from a serious shortcoming. They are mutually inconsistent and provide a contradictory theory of outlaw bikers' behavior. For example, through the lenses of the sociological and criminological approaches, the requirement that a righteous biker owns "American iron" and the ban on foreign bikes, especially Japanese ones, appear as a clear case of veteran psychological distaste for a symbol of the war enemy of the past (Veno, 2010: 20). Through the same lenses, bikers' use of neo-Nazi symbolism and terminology is explained as the psychological response to the alienation of urban, bourgeois, cosmopolitan America of groups of marginalized and alienated whites (Quinn, 2001). The fact that Nazi Germany had too been on the opposite side of World War II is nowhere to be mentioned.

The purpose of this article is to offer an alternative, one rooted in the economic approach to human behavior. More precisely, I draw from the economic theory of clubs as pioneered by Buchanan (1965), developed by Cornes and Sandler (1984), and extended by Iannaccone (1992) and Berman (2000) to the study of religious sects. This approach has two advantages over its contenders. First, it does without unobservable and untestable assumptions about the content of bikers' psyche. Second, it

provides a theory for bikers' behavior that is internally consistent and produces predictions that are strongly supported by the ethnographic and sociological evidence.

This article focuses on the formal and informal institutions, practices, and behavioral requirements of North American outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs), including such organizations as the Hells Angels, the Bandidos, and the Outlaws, between their origins in the 1930s and the 1970s. By then, these groups had already undertaken a process that would result in their descent in the world of organized crime.[1] Today, OMGs are involved in a wide array of criminal enterprises, including (though far from limited to) the production and trafficking of drugs, prostitution, arms smuggling, and human trafficking. They operate in dozens of countries across North America, Europe, and Oceania (Lauchs et al., 2015; Sher and Marsden, 2006), making OMGs the first case of effective export of a criminal organization in the history of the United States (Barker, 2004). The effects of this evolution (and the organizational change required by it) on outlaw bikers' institutions and practices are also consistent with my approach.

My contribution is at the intersection of two literatures. The first is the analytical literature on North American OMGs. This literature is summarized in Barker (2010), Lauchs et al. (2015), and Piano (2017). The second is the literature on the economics of organizations operating at the margin of mainstream society and organized crime (Skaperdas, 2001), along the lines of Leeson's (2007, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) work on 18th-century pirates and Skarbek's (2010, 2011, 2012) work on North American prison gangs.

Outlaw bikers: a brief overview

History and evolution

Little is known about the first days of the outlaw bikers. The phenomenon seems to have started in the years between the two world wars. The Outlaw Motorcycle Club is the oldest existing association of its kind, having been established in the mid-1930s in the suburbs of Chicago (Barker, 2005). The golden era of OMGs started after World War II when millions of Americans were returning to their homes after having served overseas. According to OMGs scholars, it was these veterans who established the first groups of outlaw bikers, usually after having been expelled from (or prevented from joining) mainstream motorcycle groups, such as those belonging to the American Motorcycle Association (AMA) (Barger et al., 2001; Barker, 2010; Lauchs et al., 2015). These new organizations started to be referred to as "outlaw," "deviant," or "one-percent"[2] to distinguish them from the

"conventional" clubs that make up the AMA (Barker, 2005: 101; Quinn, 2001: 380).

Most people joining these "outlaw" clubs were young, white males, often veterans of the second world war, the Korean war, and, later, the Vietnam war. These were individuals with problematic family backgrounds, affected by post-traumatic stress disorder, or that had been alienated by the rapid social, cultural, and economic changes of post-war American society (Quinn, 2001: 395).

McGuire (1986) refers to the years between 1947 and the 1960s as the OMGs' "formative years." In the following decades, outlaw bikers undertook a series of radical changes. First, during this period, outlaw bikers became increasingly involved in various illicit activities. I discuss this involvement in detail below. Second, of the hundreds of outlaw clubs that had been established in North America during the previous decades, only a few emerged as major national actors (Lauchs et al., 2015: 16). This consolidation became especially apparent by the 1980s and 1990s when law enforcement agencies started referring to these OMGs as the "Big Four": The Bandidos, the Hells Angels, the Outlaws, and the Pagans (Davis, 1982; Richardson, 1991). Except for the Bandidos,[3] each of these groups claimed exclusive domain over a specific region. The West coast was Hells Angels' territory, the Midwest the Outlaws', and the Pagans claimed control over the Southeast. Third, these OMGs abandoned their original organizational structure, which was characterized by an informal association of mostly independent chapters sharing a common name, to a highly hierarchical one with clearly identified leadership,[4] usually (but not always) embodied by the oldest existing chapter within the club, or "mother chapter."

Finally, these changes were paralleled by a steady increase in the number of OMG members as in that of local chapters. Unfortunately, we have no specific information about the magnitudes of these figures before the 1980s. We do know that these numbers rapidly increased during the 1970s and 1980s. Quinn (2001: 383) suggests that this growth was due to an increasing sense of alienation among the members of the saloon society or subculture produced by the rapid social and technological change that characterized American society in the 1960s and 1970s.[5] By the 1980s, the Big Four alone counted more than 3000 full-patched[6] members divided into over 100 chapters across the United States (McBride, 2007: 71–73). Richardson (1991) reports similar numbers for the early 1990s, while according to Barker (2005), the five largest OMGs in the United States (the Big Four plus the California-based Mongols MC) counted more than 5000 full-patched members by the mid-2000s. Today, according to American law enforcement

agencies, over 20,000 outlaw bikers live in the United States (National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC), 2009: 8).

Parallel to their expansion in the United States, OMGs have also increased their presence at the international level. As in most fields, the Hells Angels were pioneers in this development, establishing their first international (i.e., non-US) chapter in Auckland, Australia, in 1961 (Barker, 2010: 77). Soon after, all major OMGs followed suit. Today, the Hells Angels and the Outlaws are global organizations with chapters in dozens of countries across three continents (Barker, 2011; Lauchs et al., 2015; Sher and Marsden, 2006).

Originally perceived as "bar room brawlers" (NGIC, 2015: 22) and "a headache for local enforcement agencies" (McGuire, 1987: 11), before long, outlaw bikers started to be seen by law enforcement agencies as *bona fide* criminal organizations (Davis, 1982; Richardson, 1991). This was due to the increasing involvement in an array of illicit enterprises, including (but not limited to) the production and distribution of narcotics, the control of the prostitution market, and the smuggling of stolen goods—weapons, motorcycles, and car parts (Davis, 1982: 13). Although it is not clear when this process started, the evidence points to the fact that it was already underway by the 1960s, with the increasing involvement of the Hells Angels into the market for narcotics in Northern California (Barger et al., 2001: 81). By the 1980s, all major OMGs were engaged in similar activities (Richardson, 1991: 28).

Today, "crime is endemic among 1% bikers" (Quinn and Shane-Koch, 2003: 294). According to NGIC (2013), American outlaws are among the largest threats to public order in the United States, after street gangs and alongside prison gangs (p. 19). OMGs are also at the center of an international criminal network that includes ethnic mobs, prison gangs, and drug cartels (Sher and Marsden, 2006). The Hells Angels and the Outlaws have emerged as two major players in the criminal landscape not just in the United States, but also in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Western Europe (specifically, in the Dutch Republic, Germany, and Scandinavian countries) (Barker, 2010).

One consequence of the deepening involvement in criminal affairs was the adoption of a new national and international governance structure to consolidate a club's control over its territory (and the economic opportunities that come with it) by violent means (Piano, 2017). This has led to a 30-year period of conflict, starting with the violence between the Hells Angels and the Mongols over the control of Southern California in the 1970s, to the "biker wars" of the 1990s between the Hells Angels and the Outlaws in Canada—conflict which led to death of at least 60 people, including two civilians—and between the former and the Bandidos in the Scandinavian countries (Barker, 2010; Quinn and Forsyth, 2009).

A second consequence pertains to the internal dynamics of the club. The involvement in highly remunerative illicit enterprises encouraged criminally minded individuals to join the ranks of outlaw bikers, leading to the formation of two factions within most OMGs. Quinn (2001) refers to these, respectively, as conservative and radical. Conservative outlaws are attached to the ideal of the righteous biker and the values it represents, especially "the freedom of the lifestyle and the camaraderie of their 'brothers'" (Quinn, 2001: 380). Radical bikers are more interested in the profit opportunities provided by the criminal network within which OMGs operate (Quinn and Forsyth, 2011: 271). The evolution of OMGs in the last three decades, with its transformation into international organized crime groups, is a testament to the increased influences of the radical faction.[7] Many local and national Hells Angels officers have been convicted of racketeering and drug trafficking, as is the case with "every past president of the Bandidos MC" (Barker, 2011: 208–209). The same is true for all other major OMGs and affiliated groups (Barker and Human, 2009; Lauchs et al., 2015).

The righteous biker

Outlaw bikers live at the margin of mainstream society. Uncomfortable with the values and principles of the latter, they found a home in an alternative social milieu, sometimes referred to as "saloon society" (Quinn and Forsyth, 2009). This "bohemian subculture" (Wolf, 1991: 33) is populated by blue collar, White, little-educated individuals, mostly men, some of them war veterans, often with a passion for motorcycling and, occasionally, involved in illegal activities (Quinn, 2001: 395). Late night bars, taverns, strip clubs, and the likes are among the classic hangouts. This milieu is no safe place. Patrons and employees alike are armed at all times, and crime—from the selling of drugs to prostitution, extortion, and even murder—is "endemic" (Quinn and Forsyth, 2009: 12–13).

The underlying values of the outlaw subculture have been the center of attention of much literature on OMGs. Davis (1982) describes it as one based on "a willingness to shock the public … [to] break with the value system of society" and characterized by a sense of "hopelessness" (pp. 17–19). The common denominator is one of rejection of, and inability to adjust to, the "dominant culture" (Watson, 1982: 335) of the new urban society that was emerging in the United States of the post–World War II economic miracle (Wolf, 1991: 31).

The outlaw biker's lifestyle revolves around such values as hyper-masculinity, brotherhood, independence, outrageousness, and mechanical skills (Quinn and Forsyth, 2011):

> 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. (p. 227)

Bikers' ideology is also permeated by a cultural attachment to White-supremacist, anti-foreign, nationalist, and militaristic attitudes (Barker and Human, 2009: 276).[8] Until very recently, all major American OMGs did not accept African-American or otherwise non-White bikers within their ranks. As a response, all-Black and all-Hispanic clubs have emerged, though they represent a small minority in the outlaw landscape and have relatively limited influence.[9] Satanic themes are also common. Many outlaw groups' names reference the devil, death, hell, and other demonic elements: Other than the Hells Angels, there are the Coffin Cheaters, the Demon Knights, the Devils Disciples, the Grim Reapers, and the Satan's Choice.[10]

The combination of these values gives life to the image of the "righteous biker," an image every outlaw motorcyclist aspires to and must strive to achieve if he wants to be accepted in the subculture. Righteousness is a blurry notion. It is often defined in terms of one's attitude over one's "brothers" (e.g. other members of the same club), including his willingness to share one's "booze, spare parts, money, and some types of women" (Watson, 1982: 339). Righteousness also extends to a biker's public image and look. Notwithstanding their nominal adherence to non-conformism, outlaw bikers have a standardized (though informal) dress code. The most important piece is the sleeveless jeans or leather jacket, "personalized with a variety of pins, patched, medals, or badges" on the front. On the back are the "colors" of the club, consisting of three parts or "rockers": the top rocker, containing the name of the club; the bottom rocker, containing the territory claimed by the specific chapter; and the middle rocker with the emblem of the club.

The righteous biker is also a symbol of radical freedom, individualism, and independence. He is "the spiritual descendant of the frontiersman on his horse; they see themselves as North America's last heroes of independence and self-reliance" (Wolf, 1991: 56). Watson (1982) identifies the principles of outlaw righteousness as the ownership of a Harley-Davidson, "[an] appreciation for and skill with the mechanical aspects of bikers," a strict adherence to the bikers' subculture and "the general cultural model of masculine outlook, behavior, and sexual orientation," and an "'outrageous' nonconformity" to the values of mainstream society (p. 344).

Mechanical skills are an integral component of "righteous" behavior. No outlaw biker worth his name would go to a repair shop to get his bike fixed. He spends many hours a week cleaning, fixing, and customizing his "Iron."

The bike—indeed, a very specific brand of bikes: Harley-Davidson—is the totem to the biker's secular religion. Expenses on one's bike take priority over one's own consumption:

> The life of a biker is riding. His bike is his first obligation no matter what else is wrong. If he has ten dollars to his name and his bike needs an oil change, then his bike gets an oil change. If I need a pair of shoes and the bike needs a tire, I'll bum a pair of shoes off one of my brothers and I'll go out and buy a tire for my bike. If my bike needs five dollars' worth of gas and I want a beer, I'll put five dollars' worth of gas in my bike and worry about where I'm going to find the beer later.[11]

Unsurprisingly, biking is a central activity in the life of the outlaw. Clubs have mandatory monthly and yearly runs for their members. During these runs, the bikers ride thousands of miles at a time at high speed—their "ol' ladies" (outlaw jargon for "significant other") on the back seat—challenging each other to showing class through "demonstrations of reckless bravado" and violations of the road rules (Quinn and Shane-Koch, 2003: 283).

Providing club goods at the fringe of society

The notion of club good was first introduced in Buchanan (1965). Here, Buchanan explores the economic theory of members-owned clubs aimed at the provision of an excludable good that experiences congestion in consumption above some threshold size.[12]

The fundamental insight of this analysis refers to the relationship between the individual's utility maximizing values of the three variables of interest: private good consumption, the amount of club good provided, and the size of the club. Buchanan (1965) finds that the optimal size of the club is determined by the tradeoff between the increased utility one derives from the next unit of the club good and the decreased utility determined by the congestion effect of increasing the membership size of the club.

This basic intuition has been successfully applied to a wide variety of subjects.[13] By manipulating such variables as membership size and access-toll, clubs can be (and have been) used to effectively provide goods and services to their members. For the purposes of my discussion, the most relevant subfield of the applied theory of clubs is the literature on the economics of religious sects.

Iannaccone (1992) considers the case of religious behavior in which "religion is modeled as a club good that displays positive returns to 'participatory crowding'" (p. 271). In order to consume a religious good, individuals must coordinate their activities as each individual's enjoyment of the good is a positive function of one's coreligionists' input (prayers, chants,

attitude, and so forth). Per standard analysis, the public nature of these actions and characteristics opens the door to a collective action problem. Each member would free ride on everyone else's contribution while contributing little on his or her own in exchange, leading, in equilibrium, to an under-supply of the club good.

Iannaccone (1992) shows that sects adopt various strategies to encourage their members to contribute to the production of the religious club good. While the standard theory of clubs would suggest this problem be solved by the adoption of toll payments, taxation, and side-payments to incentivize contribution, Iannaccone (1992) points out to the limits of such actions in the context of religious sects. Tolls may fail to select effectively if willingness to pay is not strongly correlated to one's ability to contribute to the joint production of the religious group. Side payments and subsidies suffer from the same weakness as relevant features such as one's spiritual commitment to the sect, private behavior, and so forth are often extremely costly to observe (Berman, 2000). According to this approach, what at first sight might appear as wasteful forms of behavior, such as clothing requirements dietary and other behavioral restrictions, assume now a functional significance consistent with the rational choice postulate: their adoption ultimately increases the utility of the individual members of the sect.

These strategies can take one of two forms: sacrifice and stigma. The function of stigmas is to indirectly increase the price of goods or services that are close substitutes of those provided by the sect itself. Thus, provided one has effectively joined the sect, stigmas reduce his or her ability to access alternative suppliers.

Sacrifice serve a similarly important function in sects' governance. Imagine world of heterogeneous agents. Each agent belongs to either of two types: a low contribution type and a high contribution type, respectively, g_l and g_h.[14] An agent's type is private information while types' distribution is public information. Once a member, the latter type's average contribution to the production of the religious club good is higher than the former's. This difference is due to the fact that g_l's inputs in the production of religious goods have a higher opportunity cost (Iannaccone, 1992: 282). Given that monitoring and enforcing behavior through stigma, sanctions, and ostracism is costly for the sect, its members would prefer the marginal member to be a g_h rather than a g_l. The sect can ensure this by making acceptance contingent on the aspirant member's undertaking of a sacrifice. The effective sacrifice imposes a cost to the individual that is at least as large as g_l's present value of his or her expected benefits from sect membership, but not so large to discourage g_h from incurring it, resulting in perfect sorting (Carvalho, 2016).

Biker gangs as clubs

The discussion in section "Providing club goods at the fringe of society" lends itself to the derivation of a set of testable implications. A provider of club goods must adopt strategies aimed at encouraging its members to supply the necessary inputs to the club. To the extent that OMGs fit this description, they too must adopt these strategies. As per the discussion of the work on the economics of religious sects, in the presence of informational asymmetry, willingness to pay will not serve the purpose, forcing the group to rely on alternative membership requirements.[15] First, the organization will require prospective members to incur into highly costly activities, including investments in highly specific human capital and similarly specific assets with little value outside the organization. Second, the club will impose on its member behavioral requirements and practices that effectively increase the cost of producing and consuming those commodities that are close substitutes to the goods and services provided internally. Thus, the club will first force members to identify as such when interacting with non-members and then use behavioral requirements and other norms to discourage the latter from interacting with the former. Finally, if the approach presented here is correct, the intensity of a club's adherence to these requirements will vary with its involvement in the provision of club goods. Thus, we should observe a decrease in intensity with OMGs' reorientation from club goods provider to criminal enterprises. The historical and ethnographic evidence strongly corroborates these hypotheses.

Club goods

Membership to an OMG guarantees access to a diverse array of excludable goods and services. First and foremost, clubs are mutual aid societies. Most members are limited in their ability to be productive members of society. Because of their lower class background, they have accumulated little human capital and therefore command relatively low wages (Barger et al., 2001; Watson, 1982: 346). Mutual support and brotherhood are foundational principles of an outlaw's lifestyle. An outlaw biker has an obligation to help a brother who is going through a rough time:

> Members assist each other in matters such as the repair and maintenance of their motorcycles, the loaning of money, the sharing of living accommodations, finding employment, and the solving of personal problems. (Wolf, 1991: 97)

For example, former Hells Angels President Sonny Barger recalls how, in the early years, members of the Oakland chapter would contribute to paying the rent for the chapter's clubhouse, the "Snake Pit," which was open to

everyone to "crash in" (Barger et al., 2001: 33).[16] In some OMGs, patched members who "find themselves out of cash" often borrow from each other unless they need large amounts of money, in which case they have access to the club's "reserve fund" (Wolf, 1991: 249).[17]

Among outlaw bikers, mutual support also takes the form of camaraderie and companionship. In the club, a socially marginalized individual finds friends (brothers) akin to himself in tastes, attitudes, and lifestyle. He need not fear rejection nor ridicule (Quinn, 2001; Veno, 2010; Wolf, 1991).

Another benefit of club membership is protection from violent confrontation in the saloon society. This is an extremely violent social setting, populated by drunks, thugs, and professional criminals (Quinn and Forsyth, 2009). The risk of getting in a fight, and that this fight will quickly escalate, is quite high. In this context, the outlaw biker has an advantage over anyone else: his brothers. "[The member] knows that he can always count on support from his brothers in threatening situations" (Wolf, 1991: 99). Other patrons of this milieu are well aware of this norm and are therefore discouraged to bother or pick up a fight with someone wearing OMG colors. In the words of an outlaw biker, "Man, if you're not a member (of a club), you're nobody […]. When you're a clubber, nobody f**ks with you."[18] Bikers refer to this as the "power of the patch" (Barker, 2011: 208). This norm could potentially open the door to opportunistic behavior on the part of outlaw bikers, as their expected cost for them of taking advantage of other patrons is now reduced and could therefore result in even more violent confrontations than otherwise. While there is evidence that bikers do tend to take advantage of their privileged status when interacting with non-bikers (Quinn and Forsyth, 2011), OMGs counteract this effect by making the individual member liable for dragging his brothers in unnecessary confrontations:

> [The member] learns that the club will not tolerate him abusing that support. Any member who unnecessarily draws the club into a conflict situation, such as a barroom brawl, would be held fully accountable—and face possible retribution—for his actions. (Wolf, 1991: 99)

Operating an OMG is not a costless enterprise. A chapter must pay rent for its clubhouse and related expenses as well as for group activities like motorcycle trips (or "runs") and parties at the clubhouse. Most of the funds necessary to cover these expenses come from the monthly contributions of the members (Barker, 2009; Wolf, 1991). A majority of outlaw bikers are employed in seasonal jobs, which allow them to take the summer off and ride cross-country with the club (Watson, 1980: 38). This restricts the biker's ability to secure for himself a stable employment at a mainstream job. While the OMG does not require that its members be employed in a specific

industry, some occupations—such as store clerk, bus driver, and college student—are strongly discouraged,[19] while others—such as mechanic, truck driver, and construction worker—are encouraged (Wolf, 1991: 261). Bikers find these occupations through the club's extended social network. If one biker finds out of a job opportunity, he will share this information with his brothers. If he has the opportunity, he will often involve them in his own line of work.

Even before OMGs' descent into organized crime in the 1970s and 1980s, not all of bikers' occupations of choice were licit ones. Since very early in their history, outlaws have been involved in a variety of criminal activities, from drug dealing to the stealing and retailing of cars and motorcycles (Barger et al., 2001; Quinn, 2001). A biker's operation in the criminal industry was facilitated by the "power of the patch." On the one hand, a biker's membership to an OMG provides potential partners with a means to retaliate against the former's opportunistic behavior. If the outlaw fails to honor his part of the agreement, the damaged party can take recourse against the chapter as a whole.[20] On the other hand, OMG membership increases the potential partner's expected cost of cheating, as he knows the biker can rely on the help of his brothers to get retribution.

Finally, clubs organize different activities for their entertainment value, including periodic runs and parties at the chapter's clubhouse. Participation in these events is restricted to members, their ol' ladies (their wives and girlfriends), and a small number of guests (Barger et al., 2001; Veno, 2010; Wolf, 1991).[21]

Sacrifice

As predicted by the economic theory of clubs, in order to gain access to the goods and services just described, wannabe outlaw bikers must pay a toll. As in the case of religious sects, this toll does not take the form of a direct payment to the club, but rather that of a sacrifice.[22] Indeed, they must incur two types of sacrifice. First, he must undertake a long recruitment process, known in outlaw jargon as the "road to the patch." Second, he must invest a relatively large amount of resources, monetary and not, into the purchase and maintenance of a piece of "American Iron."

The road to the patch. Becoming a full-patched member of an OMG is no easy task. One must be highly committed to being able to successfully complete it, as the investment in time and other resources is a demanding one. OMGs have established a highly formalized process to screen potential members. This consists of four consecutive stages: friend of the club, striker, initiate, and patch holder (Barker, 2010; Davis, 1982; Veno, 2010; Wolf, 1991).

A friend of the club is only loosely associated with an OMG. Often a young person with a fascination for motorcycles, he has had the first exposure to the world of outlaw bikers through magazines or by seeing them hang out at some bar. The friend of the club has somewhat gained the respect of a full-patched member, perhaps through his knowledge of bikes and mechanical skills or by behaving "righteously" during a bar fight. The full-patch member invites his new friend to "hang around" with his brothers: Sitting alongside them at bars and clubs, attending some of their runs, and even to visit the chapter's clubhouse to party with the full-patched members (Barker, 2010: 68). During this stage, the friend is directly exposed to the public and private life of an outlaw biker; familiarizes himself with his language, customs, and norms; and "gets a good a good idea as to whether or not he is compatible with members in terms of their personal values and social strategies, such as the risk involved in committing an illegal act in public" (Wolf, 1991: 68). This stage does not have a predetermined duration. Some will stay friends of the club indefinitely, for they realize that the commitment required to become a full-patched member is too demanding. Others might spend several months and even years before moving to the next stage.

To serve as a striker for the club, the friend of the club must convince a full-patch member to sponsor him in front of his brothers. This can prove tricky, as the sponsor must take "full responsibility for the striker's future actions" (Wolf, 1991: 80). This requirement effectively forces the sponsor to internalize the effect of his decision, thus providing an incentive to carefully evaluate the candidate. If the latter's search of a sponsor is successful and there is a widespread consensus among chapter members that the candidate has what it takes to be a righteous biker, he officially becomes a striker for the club.[23] This stage is characterized by "an intense process requiring close personal interaction between the striker and other club members" (Barker, 2010: 68). This stage is highly demanding. The striker is required to make the needs and prerogatives of the chapter his own. He has little time left to socialize with non-patch holders, including friends and family. The striker must willingly obey all orders coming from his brothers and is responsible for a wide array of tasks:

> He is responsible for cleaning the clubhouse and making sure the refrigerator is fully stocked with beer. In addition, the striker stands guard at the clubhouse and makes periodic security checks during meetings. During club runs, the prospect sets up tents, gather firewood, and keeps the fire going. […] Strikers are the designated gofers at all club functions and the club bar. (Barker, 2010: 70)

Furthermore, he must undertake one public humiliation after another. According to an outlaw biker quoted in Wolf (1991), "[w]hen you become

a striker you are classified as nothing but dirt. You have no saying concerning club activities; and you are always wrong no matter what you are talking about, even if you are 100 per cent right" (p. 91).

The striking stage is also aimed at the examination of the prospect's mechanical skills, personality, attitude, and adherence to the values of an outlaw's lifestyle.[24] This process can take anywhere from 3 months to 2 years, depending on such variables as the prospect's abilities and the prestige of the club (larger OMGs require a longer screening process than smaller ones (Barker, 2010: 68; Wolf, 1991: 89). At the end of this period, all patched members of the chapter take a vote on whether the candidate is to be admitted to the club or not. The result of the vote is positive if the prospect obtains no more than one vote against. Two votes against are enough to reject the candidacy, though the members can also decide to extend the prospecting stage and retake the vote in the future (Barger et al., 2001; Wolf, 1991).[25]

If he does obtain the necessary number of positive votes, the striker is made a full-patched member of the club. The newly minted outlaw receives the OMG's emblem, which he then sews onto the back of his jacket. Next, he must undertake an initiation rite, which often consists of a test of the biker's courage and/or his humiliation by his new brothers during the next mandatory run, followed by a big party (Wolf, 1991: 111–112). Once he has been initiated, the biker enjoys the same privileges and must conform to the same standards as his brothers. He gains full access to the goods and services reserved to full-patched members, including, most importantly, the right to wear the club's colors, and can freely participate in club politics by proposing policies, casting votes, and running for office.

The discussion above clearly establishes the high degree of commitment necessary to be admitted to the ranks of the outlaw bikers. The cost associated with this process is staggering. One must spend years of one's life learning the ways of the outlaw: its peculiar language, values, and norms. In doing so, he compromises his relationship with mainstream society including his family and loved ones. His is a highly specific investment in human capital, one that would only repay itself with years of membership and the consumption of those club goods that come with it. From the point of view of the members, these are very costly sacrifices, and low commitment individuals and free riders will generally not find them worth the cost.

American iron. As I discuss above, motorcycles play a central life in outlaws' lifestyle. However, from their point of view, not all bikes are created equal. A popular saying among outlaw bikers reads, "Harley is the best, f**k the rest."[26] Harley-Davidson is the vehicle of choice of the righteous biker and, thus, of any outlaw biker. Indeed, most OMGs would not accept anyone riding

anything else. Some groups do not even allow individuals to prospect for them if they don't own "American iron," although others (usually smaller ones) tolerate the use of British vehicles, at least temporarily (Wolf, 1991). What is definitely not permitted is the ownership of what bikers refer to as a "rice-burner," that is, any bike that was produced (or even contained pieces made) by Japanese companies (Barker, 2010; Veno, 2010; Watson, 1982; Wolf, 1991).

From an economic perspective, this requirement takes the form of another highly specific investment aimed at the manipulation of the incentives of the individual biker. To be effective, this investment must be initially costly, hard to recover *ex-post*, and must align the incentives of the biker with that of the club. This explains why Harley-Davidson (more precisely, pre-1969 Harley-Davidson models)[27] is the vehicle of choice and Japanese ones are so strongly disliked and prohibited. Harleys and Japanese bikes differ on many different margins—from look to size—but the two most relevant ones are price and reliability.

In the 1960s, Japanese makers rapidly established themselves as the main players in the US market for motorcycles. This success was due to low prices and an effective marketing campaign that targeted the American middle class (Wolf, 1991). Not only were Japanese bikes cheaper than the American competition, but they also made the riding experience more palatable for the average middle-class American by including such features as

> Computerized cruise control, push-button adjustment of the suspension system, AM/FM stereo, auto-reverse cassette player and intercom, four-speaker surround system, an electronic travel computer for elapsed time and average speed, and automatic transmission. Wolf (1991: 40)

Due to Japanese manufacturers, biking became an activity for individuals with little to no mechanical skills and relatively small budgets. The improvements in safety also meant that a biker did not need to travel in group to reduce the risks associated with this activity. The Japanese bike became "the motorcycle of the Establishment" (Wolf, 1991: 40).

Classic Harley-Davidsons[28] are bigger, heavier, louder, and more expensive than their Japanese counterparts. Not only is the initial investment required larger, but it also continued over time. Old Harley models were especially unreliable,[29] thus necessitating continuous and expensive efforts to keep the bike functional: "Harleys require constant maintenance, frequently including an annual strip-down" (Watson, 1982: 342). The strong social norm in favor of older models makes the maintenance requirements, as well as the related expenses, even larger (Watson, 1982). Furthermore, the biker must rely exclusively on his own knowledge and skills and the help of his fellow club members to fix and improve upon his vehicle.

Harleys are also much less reliable when it comes to riding it. This is one reason why outlaw bikers always ride in group and according to a very specific formation (McGuire, 1986; Wolf, 1991). A fundamental rule of OMGs' mandatory runs is that no member should ever be left riding alone (Veno, 2010: 38). This rule is paired by a strictly enforced requirement that a biker takes very good care of its bike since one motorcycle breaking down during a run requires the entire group to stop until the problem has been fixed.[30]

From the point of view of the biker, buying a Harley-Davidson is a very costly investment. This investment takes the forms of both the initial price of the bike (which, as I discuss above, was relatively expensive) and the expected maintenance costs. The latter include the cost of the required parts, the opportunity cost of the individual's time and labor, as well as the investment in human capital of acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary, which often takes years of practice (Veno, 2010; Wolf, 1991). OMGs adopt a variety of norms to ensure that this investment cannot be easily recovered. First, the bike of choice is one that does not have widespread marketability. As I discuss above, the models of choice were unreliable and unpractical, limiting the number of potential buyers and, thus, imposing downward pressure over the exchange value of the asset. Second, outlaw bikers are constantly encouraged to customize and personalize their vehicles. Bikers refer to this process as "chopping": "the ultimate stage and the ultimate challenge in personalizing a motorcycle" (Wolf, 1991: 45). The goal of chopping is to make one's bike truly his own, the result is an extremely personalized bike, immediately identifiable with its owner and maker. Oftentimes, chopping requires taking one's bike apart and building it back from scratch and, in the process, modifying every aspect of it, from the engine to the body to the paint job (Wolf, 1991: 47). Like all forms of customization, chopping further reduces the exchange value of the bike. A mainstream biker would generally find impractical to acquire a bike that has been stripped of all its comforts and customized beyond his understanding to fit the preferences and needs of another person. This is also true for an outlaw biker, who would get no recognition from his peers for the chopping job done by someone else (Wolf, 1991: 48).

By requiring the prospecting member to purposefully acquire an unreliable and expensive vehicle with little exchange value, the club improves its ability to effectively screen out those prospective members who are less likely to contribute to the production of club goods.

Stigma

The economic theory of clubs predicts that small groups will often adopt strategies that reduce members' ability to produce and consume commodities outside of the club. This is achieved through an indirect form of

taxation of goods and services that are close substitutes of the ones provided by the club. A popular form of these strategies is to reduce members' ability to interact and socialize with non-members via a stigma. OMGs are no exception. Alongside the many privileges that are associated with the patch also comes the stigma and countercultural image of the outlaw biker. Mainstream society's perception of outlaw bikers is that of violent and deviant madmen (Quinn, 2001: 384). This perception is partly the result of historical accidents (Barger et al., 2001; Lauchs et al., 2015), but mostly of bikers' desire and deliberate attempt to shock the public with their outrageous behavior:

> Physical dirtiness, outlandish dress, and forms of behavior repulsive or frightening to outsiders are to an extent affected in order to repel outsiders. Such behaviors might include public sexual activity or nudity, public urination and defecation, obscene gestures, and various acts of violence whenever it is felt that outsiders do not respect the boundaries between the two groups. (Watson, 1982: 338)

This desire is immediately apparent from the outlaw's piratical look. Bikers wore long hair long before it became a fashion statement in the late 1960s, often matched by a similarly long beard (Barger et al., 2001). But the biker's distinctive characteristic is his attire: a jeans or leather jacket over a white T-shirt, his back covered by the colors of the club (its name, emblem, and territory). This combination makes failing to recognize an outlaw biker almost impossible. The fear of provoking an unpredictable, violent reaction keeps the average citizen away from him.[31]

Look is not the only thing keeping mainstream society at a distance. Another important element is the biker's association with two of the most offensive themes one could come up with in post–World War II American society: Nazism and Satanism. For the first few decades since their emergence, all OMGs adopted openly racist and White-supremacist stances. They also expressed their fascination with Nazi ideology. For example, the Outlaws MC named its elite unit after Hitler's paramilitary force, the SS (short for the German Schutzstaffel, or "protection unit"). Bikers would also have swastikas and other references to Nazism and White-supremacist themes tattooed on their skin, sewn on their jackets, and painted on their bikes. Nazi memorabilia were also popular items for outlaw bikers to wear and collect (Barger et al., 2001):

> At the time it was fairly easy to find authentic captured Nazi war gear at flea markets and gun shops. Plus, it did piss people off big-time, which is what we were all about anyway, so we figured, why not? Soon we were wearing helmets, medals, tattoos, and armbands, and one famous photograph printed in a national

> magazine was a close-up face shot of Skip from Richmond wearing a chromed Nazi helmet. (p. 29)

Repulsed by his image and action, the average citizen sees the outlaw biker as a dangerous outcast. At the other end, the biker embraces this image and reinforces it even further. As a result, the cost for the latter of socializing with the former is increased. The biker ends up "encapsulated in a social network" that consists almost entirely of other outlaws (Wolf, 1991: 99).[32] Furthermore, the club discourages members' attachment to any non-member, including women and children, as they constitute a potential distraction of the member's time and effort away from the club (Watson, 1980: 41). This strategy successfully reduces the biker's ability to free-ride and, furthermore, encourages him to contribute to the joint production of club goods. Rather than being a product of alienation and social marginalization, bikers' attachment to these symbols was aimed at separating them from mainstream society.

Decline of the righteous biker

The individually costly practices I describe in the preceding sections derive their functional significance from their effectiveness in selecting individuals who are more likely to contribute to the club good and, at the same time, encouraging them to contribute once they have become members. Counterintuitively, their costliness is what makes these practices effective, leading to a higher level of utility for their members than they would enjoy otherwise (Iannaccone, 1992). But this does not change the fact that individuals would be better off if they did not have to subject themselves to these practices in order to get the club good. Thus, the framework predicts that these should be abandoned under two circumstances. First, when the group has access to a less costly scheme that could be employed to perform the same task. Second, costly screening devices should be dispensed off if the function of the group changes. This would be the case of an organization whose purpose was to evolve from supplying club goods to its members to producing goods or services to be supplied on the market.

The latter instance is consistent with the recent changes in the outlaw landscape identified by different scholars starting in the 1970s and 1980s. Around this time, bikes started playing a more peripheral role in the life of the club. Quinn and Forsyth (2009) note how "an increasing portion [of outlaw bikers] seem to prefer SUVs and luxury cars" to old school American Iron (p. 15). They also point out that clubs have stopped enforcing those rules mandating members to participate in weekly and monthly runs and that these violations are not taken "very seriously."

Most clubs have also informally altered their membership requirements. A candidate's adherence to the outlaw subculture and his passion for motorcycling have been replaced by other considerations. Most importantly, OMGs screen their members based on "their reputations for violence and/or criminal behavior" (Barker, 2011: 208). For example, in the early 2000s, an undercover U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) agent was able to by-pass the selection process of the Arizona chapter of Hells Angels by offering to share his connections in the criminal world (Droban, 2009).

Some clubs, including the Hells Angels (Sher and Marsden, 2006), have even adopted the performance of a crime (often the killing of an enemy of the chapter) as one of the requirements to be considered for membership (Barker, 2005, 2010). Finally, OMGs have slowly abandoned some of the most extreme themes of their subculture in an attempt to affect public opinion and reduce the perceived social distance between them and the citizenry. This is in sharp contrast with the previous history of these organizations and their uncompromising desire to shock the public and signal their distance from the latter (Wolf, 1991). According to Barker (2009), "[i]n the 1970s the already established biker began to clean up their images (the Hell's Angels banned rape because it was bad for public relations)" (p. 279). In the 1990s, the Angels went so far as to ban references to Nazi ideology from their jackets (Barger et al., 2001: 23). Outlaw bikers organize and promote charitable events and other activities open to the public at large (Barker, 2010: 167; Veno, 2010). Recently, OMGs have also expanded the number of full-patched OMG members with white-collar jobs (NGIC, 2015: 26).

These are all radical changes from the early decades of outlaw bikers' history. They also coincided with OMGs' increasing involvement in illicit activities and their transformation into highly structured criminal organizations. As the driving purpose of these groups evolved from the provision of goods and services at the margin of mainstream society to the pursuit of profits in the criminal landscape, sacrifice and stigma also lost their functional significance. OMGs faced new, different obstacles to effective governance and reacted to these new challenges by changing their rules and governance structure (Piano, 2017).

Given the limits of the empirical evidence at our disposal, it is hard to ascertain whether the relationship between the evolution of OMGs' function since the 1970s and the coincidental abandonment of the practices described above is causal.[33] It is in fact entirely plausible that the sacrifice and stigma institutions adopted by OMGs in their early days are partly responsible for the later transformation of these groups into criminal organizations. For example, they might have affected the composition of these groups' membership if the unobservable characteristics for which individuals were being

selected, such as a lower productivity in mainstream society and higher sense of loyalty to one's "brothers," are highly correlated with other unobservables, such as a comparative advantage in criminal activities or a certain familiarity with the underground economy. Under these circumstances, there would be plenty of opportunities for its members to coordinate their efforts and attempt to redirect the resources of the club toward the support of these activities.

The recent history of American outlaw bikers is strikingly consistent with the process just outlined. Lauchs et al. (2015) write that this evolution was possibly "[the] natural progression from being a violent club to recruitment of that violence for profit" (p. 2). Quinn (2001) describes the emergence, during the 1970s and 1980s, of two rival factions within most OMGs. One faction, the conservatives, were anchored to the "righteous" ideology and more interested in the traditional outlaw activities (e.g., riding in group, partying at the clubhouse, or picking a fight at a bar), while the other, the radicals, were "deeply involved in criminal enterprises" (Quinn, 2001: 380). He also advances the hypothesis that those groups with the deepest involvement in criminal activities had a comparative advantage over other ones, as the former would tend to attract more prospects than the latter, given they could use the revenues from illicit enterprises to offer better opportunities to their members (Quinn, 2001: 383). The historical evidence points toward an increasing influence of the radical faction, as in the last few decades, radicals have taken control of the leadership positions at the local and the national levels at most major OMGs (Barker, 2011; Lauchs et al., 2015).

While the above discussion suggests that we might not be able to clearly identify exogenous determinants of the abandonment of the peculiar practices of the early day of outlaw bikers, it is not inconsistent with the analytical framework of this article. This framework predicts that, in equilibrium, sacrifice and stigma institutions are likely to be abandoned when the cost they impose on group members is not more than compensated by the ability of the group to produce goods and services valued by these members. This is consistent with the experience of OMGs. For more than three decades, these practices served OMGs well, as is demonstrated by their rapid adoption by virtually all such groups as well as by the growth of these groups (both in terms of their numbers and their membership) during the same time-span.[34]

Conclusion

In this article, I provide an explanation for an array of different practices associated with the outlaw biker, an image that has been highly influential

in American popular culture. My explanation is rooted in the economic approach to human behavior. The function of OMGs, between their emergence in the interwar period and until the 1970s, was to provide their members with a diverse set of excludable goods and services. Like most economic clubs, outlaw bikers had to overcome the free-rider problem: They had to encourage members to contribute first-hand to the funding and, in some cases, the production of these goods and services.

Sacrifices and stigmas are two ways in which clubs can do so effectively by, respectively, screening out those individuals who are less likely to contribute and increasing the cost of goods and services produced outside of the club. The historical and ethnographic evidence on outlaw bikers is consistent with this model. To join the club, a biker must go through a process that is highly costly in terms of time, resources, and investment in highly specific human capital. This process takes the form of a long prospecting period—during which the biker forgoes a large share of his labor income, his pre-existing social network, and his spare time—the learning of mechanical skills and of alien language, lifestyle, and values, and the purchasing of an old and unreliable motorcycle with little exchange value and highly demanding of his time and efforts.

Once a member, he must also embrace a lifestyle that separates him from—and stigmatizes him in the face of—society. He must dress, talk, act like an outlaw: wear easily identifiable clothes with the insignia of the club, cover his body with tattoos representing Nazi and White-supremacist symbolism, and behave outrageously, violently, and unpredictably in the presence of members of mainstream society.

While at first sight irrational and wasteful, this article argues that these peculiar features served as an institutional hindrance to the possibility of opportunistic behavior, thus enabling these groups to effectively provide a wide array of club goods and improve the well-being of their members. Analogue arguments could be used to illuminate similar practices as they are adopted in such organizations as American fraternities and sororities[35] and even in the world of academia.[36]

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Notes

1. The consensus among scholars of outlaw bikers is that criminal endeavors were of only secondary importance before the 1970s (Barker, 2010; Quinn, 2001; Veno, 2010; Wolf, 1991).
2. The phrase "one-percent" was first coined by a former president of the American Motorcycle Association to indicate the small minority of American bikers that belonged to Outlaw motorcycle clubs (Lauchs et al., 2015: 13).
3. Historically, the Bandidos have been somewhat of a wild card in the world of outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs). They seem to have preserved the typical organizational structure of early outlaw bikers and associate themselves with the dominant club of the territory within which they operate.
4. See Piano (2017) for a discussion of the organizational transformation of all major OMGs during this period.
5. According to Quinn (2001: 388–389), urbanization, the civil rights movements, and the Vietnam war are the main forces behind this process.
6. In the jargon of outlaw bikers, a full-patched biker is someone who has successfully completed the selection and initiation process and is to all effects a member of an OMG.
7. But see Veno (2010) for an alternative viewpoint.
8. In 1965, the Oakland chapter of the Hells Angels unexpectedly attended an anti-Vietnam war rally in Berkeley to show their "support to the troops" by picking up a fight against the protestors. These events are proudly described by the former leader of the club in his autobiography (Barger et al., 2001).
9. The Mongols MC are an important exception. Established in California in the early 1970s as prison gang (Barker, 2005: 110), the Mongols are a Latino motorcycle gang that has rapidly emerged as a challenger to the Hells Angels for the control of the East coast (Quinn and Forsyth, 2009: 20–23).
10. Readers can find a list of the names of major North American OMGs at http://www.onepercenterbikers.com/list-of-one-percenters-motorcycle-clubs/
11. Caveman, member of the Rebels MC, quoted in Wolf (1991: 41).
12. See Sandler (2013) for a comprehensive discussion of Buchanan's theory of clubs.
13. For a review of the applied club theory literature, see (Sandler and Tschirhart, 1980; 1997).
14. Perhaps counterintuitively, from the point of view of the club, individuals with high levels of human capital are more likely to contribute less, given the higher opportunity cost of their time compared to individuals with low levels of human capital. This would explain why sects and similar groups adopt strategies that tend to screen out very productive individuals (Berman, 2000).
15. From the point of view of the club, the optimal member is one who is less likely to free ride on the provision of club goods. Thus, the club would like to select individuals who are authentically loyal to it and its principles. Unfortunately, as for many similar extremist groups, willingness to pay for the services of the club poorly correlates with these unobservable characteristics. Indeed, one's

ability to pay might be inversely correlated with one's commitment to the club in the presence of significant monitoring costs (Iannaccone, 1992).

16. See also Watson (1980): "A clubhouse … is generally a rented house which serves as a headquarters, party location, and place for members to 'crash' when they lack more personal accomodations" (p. 43).
17. This reserve is financed by members' required periodical contributions as well as revenues from merchandise sales and charitable donations (Barker, 2010; Veno, 2010; Wolf, 1991).
18. Quoted in Watson (1982: 346).
19. OMGs discourage most strongly those occupations requiring one to socialize with non-bikers and long-term commitment.
20. He could, for example, restrain himself from doing business with all club members and/or spread the word that bikers from that chapter are untrustworthy. One of the first rules adopted by the Hells Angels was meant to directly address this issue by imposing heavy penalties on any member found committing a "drug burn" (Barger et al., 2001: 47).
21. According to different sources, another benefit of the colors is the ability to entertain oneself with the club's "mamas": "Mamas were the lowest female status in the [outlaw] subculture. Basically, they were viewed as the property of the chapter as a unit and available to any member of the club who desired their sexual services. In return, the club provided her mama with shelter, transportation, and protection" (Barker, 2010: 47). See also Wolf (1991: 148–149) and Veno (2010: 130).
22. As for the case of religious sects, toll payments are impractical for outlaw bikers. Because Motorcycle gangs want to select for low opportunity cost individuals, high willingness to pay for membership is a noisy indicator of a member's expected level of commitment.
23. Most OMGs allow a maximum of two strikers per chapter at a time (Barker, 2010: 68).
24. According to Wolf (1991), the King's Crew MC "deliberately set up a test situation to see if the striker has the "jam" to put himself on the line for a brother. A King's Crew patch holder will invite the prospect to go out drinking. The member then picks a fight with a bar patron and lets the citizen lay a beating on him … Then it is observed whether or not the striker will fight for the member. Failure on the part of a striker to live up to the outlaw code of mutual support simply cannot be tolerated" (p. 99).
25. Reliable evidence about the rate of strikers' success is non-existent. During the 3 years he spent with the Rebels MC, a Canadian OMG, Wolf witnessed eight attempts to join the club. Of these, five were successful (Wolf, 1991: 89).
26. Quoted in Wolf (1991: 37).
27. After 1969, Harley-Davidson started employing Japanese-made pieces in the production of their own bikes (Watson, 1982: 347).
28. By "classic," I mean models produced between the 1920s and the early 1970s. Thus, the contemporary fascination with vintage Harley-Davidson models is not inconsistent with my argument as these are usually modern reproductions

(i.e. they incorporate modern materials and components) of older models. On this, see the discussion by Wolf (1991: 35–47).

29. Long-time president of the Hells Angels Sonny Barger recalls that classic bikes "were built on rigid frames …, which meant they would vibrate when you rode them. […] The constant vibration caused a lot of parts and pieces to come loose and fall off, sometimes when you were riding. You had to constantly wrench up your bike just to keep it shipshape" (Barger et al., 2001: 53). He also claims that "Harley-Davidsons were famous for leaking oil. Even when they were brand-new, they leaked … Sometimes the motors weren't machined properly. If you didn't start your bike for a week, the oil accumulated through the oil pump and into the crankcase. Once you started it, it spits oil all over the ground" (Barger et al., 2001: 55).
30. The collective nature of these runs has one more rationale. For decades, bike-riding was a relatively dangerous activity. According to Wolf (1991), "[a] lone biker on the highway is vulnerable" (p. 16). Bikers were almost five times more likely to lose their life as the result of an accident than car drivers. The latter are thus much less likely to "extend the same courtesy to a motorcyclist as they grant a car" (Wolf, 1991: 53). Riding in group vastly reduces this risk, first, by making motorcyclists more visible to car drivers and, second, by making much costlier for the latter to drive recklessly: If an outlaw biker is the victim of such recklessness, he and his brothers will make sure that he does not run away with impunity (Veno, 2010).
31. Leeson (2010a) analyzes similar practices among 18th-century pirates.
32. This is a common practice among groups living at the margin of mainstream society. See, for example, Berman (2000) on orthodox Jews and Leeson (2013) on Gypsies.
33. I owe this point to an anonymous referee.
34. One could also argue that the subsequent success of OMGs in the criminal underworld is itself further evidence of the effectiveness of outlaws' practices and that the latter were only abandoned because they themselves initiated a process that led to elimination of the very need they were meant to address.
35. I thank David Lucas and Paola Suarez for pointing to my attention the similarities between outlaw bikers' practices and those of American fraternities.
36. See, for example, the treatment of Italian academia in Gambetta and Origgi (2013).

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