

Lisa Taylor-Austin, MS Ed., NCC, LPC
Gangologist • Expert Witness • Professional Counselor
Providing Training to Professionals and the Community on Gang Issues

I'm not worried

by Ian Gillespie

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Gangs? Here in London? I'm not worried.

Sure, I read about the handful of punks who battered two men in the Marconi Boulevard neighborhood. But they're just young guys, jazzed with testosterone. It's been a hot summer. Tempers flare. One thing leads to another. That dust-up doesn't worry me.

Sure, I read that London police claim about a dozen gangs are stalking the city, stealing cars, robbing stores and threatening people. But everybody knows the cops exaggerate so they can get more money from city coffers. I'm not worried about what the cops say.

Sure, I see that principals at Thames Valley District secondary schools announced they're banning hats and bandanas because they don't want gang members in their classrooms. But everybody knows schools are designed to stifle individuality and churn out good little robots who'll find a job, spend their money and join the sheep-like masses. I'm not worried about uptight principals.

I talk to an American expert on gangs, and she says some "super gangs" – like the Bloods and Crips – have migrated to Canada, Europe and South Africa. "A high-ranking Crip gang member told me there are a lot of comings and goings over the border and that gangs are going to flourish in Canada," says Lisa Taylor-Austin, a "gangologist" who has counselled parents and authorities about gangs since 1988. "It's like a business plan. They sit down and look at a map and say, 'Where can we go and make money?'"

Okay. But I tell Taylor-Austin I don't believe these hoodlums are really Crips and Bloods – they're just wannabees. And I'm not going to worry about wannabees.

She tells me wannabees are more dangerous. "Well-established gangs operate under certain rules and guidelines," she says, adding some gangs have rules against harming children or the elderly. "They actually have a code – certain things you do, certain things you don't do."

But kids who are just making up their own thing ... they tend to fly more by the seat of their pants. They just do what they want.

"If you have people who all live on the same street, and they wake up one day and say, 'Hey, let's go start a war,' and they don't plan and they don't talk and they're just out there – see how they could be more dangerous?"

Yeah, yeah. But these London punks haven't shot anyone. I'm not worried because it's not as bad as the States.

"What you're describing to me sounds like what we had here in the 1950s," says Taylor-Austin. "I think

the level of violence is going to increase, because now there's so many other messages being sent to kids from different places."

Okay. So maybe today's kids are wired differently than the wild ones from decades past. Maybe those punks didn't have murder-a-minute mayhem beamed into their muddy brains from movies, music videos, TV shows and video games.

But why should I worry? There's nothing anyone can do to help these losers, right?

"There are kids out there thinking, 'Should I or shouldn't I join?'" she says. "And I think if they had somebody to talk to . . . that could make a difference to a lot of kids."

Well, I'm not worried about my kids. They know the rules – I tell them loud and clear.

"That's not like having a discussion," she says. "That's more like dictating. It's good to have rules, but you need to be able to discuss why the rules are there and how it's going to benefit the child."

I don't know. Talk to my kids? It sounds pretty, ah ... "It sounds simplistic," she says. "But either people are too busy [to talk to their kids] because they're working a lot, or they've lost touch with remembering what it's like to be a teenager."

Now she's got me thinking about what it's like to be a teenager, and how, almost every day, teenagers face another glorious chance to mess up their lives forever.

And now I'm worried.



consultant@gangcolors.com

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Lisa Taylor-Austin, MS Ed., NCC, LPC
514 Foxon Blvd - Suite 232
New Haven, CT 06513-2329
Phone: 203.522.6164

Web Consultant: [Ugly Designs](#)