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IMPRESSIONS OF JUVENILE GANG MEMBERS¹

Malcolm W. Klein

The accepted publication mores within social science seldom provide the opportunity for investigators to loosen the bonds of scientific rigor sufficiently to say "This is what I *think* I saw, even though I can't document it with hard data."

My colleagues and I have reported hard data elsewhere—the partial results of five years of field research with Negro and Mexican-American gangs in Los Angeles. (4, 5, 6, 7, 10). The present report is designed more as a personal catharsis, an opportunity to share observations and speculations which might otherwise remain repressed within personal experience.

The gang members involved in the projects under scrutiny included 576 Negro boys, 202 Negro girls, 118 Mexican-American boys, and 30 Mexican-American girls. These youngsters were all affiliated with *traditional* ("area," "vertical") gang clusters, each consisting of several age-graded subgroups which had existed for from ten to thirty-five years. Members of short-lived or "spontaneous" gangs might well yield different impressions from those reported here. In addition, our gangs were serviced by detached workers; unserviced gangs might also yield different impressions (14).

¹This paper is based upon field research between 1962 and 1967 supported by the Ford Foundation, The National Institute of Mental Health, and the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development (HEW). Collaborating organizations were the Los Angeles County Probation Department and the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, to whom the author acknowledges his sincerest gratitude.

Gang Leadership

Impressions of gang leadership derive from two sources: direct observation (over 400 gang meetings, outings, tutoring sessions, sports activities, and the like), and reports from detached workers assigned to the groups. It may be that our conclusions are in part erroneous; but the notoriety and special attention given to gang leadership, both in the professional literature and in the public media, make it important that we attempt a description of what has been observed. In addition, the importance of dealing with gang leaders is given heavy weight by detached workers. To understand their program, one must listen to the way they see and deal with gang leaders.

1. Leadership in these gangs is not a *position*, a structured set of rights and duties to which a few individuals are assigned. In the gang setting, leadership is best defined as a collection of *functions* that may be undertaken at various times by a number of members. Leadership also varies with particular activities. The "big man" in fighting may be a failure as an athlete or a ladies' man. One cannot come to grips with a gang by dealing with *the* leader but only by dealing with *leadership* as a distributed and often shifting phenomenon. Leadership cannot be considered merely as a personal quality of an individual because it is also a product of group interaction and a response to the context in which the group finds itself. Traditional gangs often have been denuded of their acknowledged leaders, and yet they have continued to survive and thrive. A leadership vacuum does not exist for long.

2. In contrast to Yablonsky's stance (14) we would maintain that most gang leaders are *not* sociopaths or psychopaths. The respected member with lasting ability to influence others is often indistinguishable at first glance; whereas the psychopathic gang member is visible immediately. "He wants what he wants when he wants it," to use one worker's phrase. There are some very sick boys in every large gang. If they are fighters, their exploits are part of the gang's mythology and live in a world of partial fantasy. But seldom can they exert genuine in-

fluence—their reputation does not spill over into leadership.² We report below a brief summary of intervention steps with one such boy.

"Curley"³

The detached worker has known Curley for over four years, and described him as a gang psychopath and a respected member of the "Veteranos." His father is dead, and for ten years his mother has had a common-law husband. There is constant verbal and physical fighting between all family members, and financial resources are inadequate. Curley has a serious hearing loss in both ears and very poor eyesight. As a juvenile, he was known to be a frequent user of drugs and alcohol and had seven arrests. He has also been involved in gang fighting, both as assailant and as victim, and was expelled from school in ninth grade. At the beginning of our project he was legitimately considered an almost impossible case.

1st month: Given job with recreation department at \$1.26 an hour.

4th month: Called police to report a gang fight in which his friends were being attacked.

5th month: (a) Laid off from his job.
(b) Failed to meet court date.
(c) Recruited younger members into "Veteranos."

²Our favorite example occurred during a "hassle" between the Red Raiders and the Victors. In a Red Raider meeting attended by about 80 members, one of these older psychopaths strongly condemned the notion of a truce meeting, and insisted that the gang's reputation was at stake. When he saw that the membership was opposed to his approach, he stalked out of the room declaring, "Ya win the last fight, then ya conversate!" Not a single boy followed him.

³Names, dates, and other identifying information have been changed to preserve confidentiality. Case reports are taken from a project log.

- 6th month:* Taken by staff to State Service Center for processing.
Assigned to stockman's job at \$1.35 an hour.
- 8th month:* (a) Quit job because of low pay.
(b) Began heroin use.
- 9th month:* (a) Offered second job by staff, but turned it down because it was too far from the neighborhood.
(b) Stabbed in hand by agitated female member while seeking out members of rival gang.
- 10th month:* (a) Offered third job by staff at \$1.50 an hour. He accepted.
(b) Foreman gives excellent work report on Curley.
- 12th month:* (a) Received raise to \$1.75 an hour.
(b) Staff arranged medical appointments for hearing aid and speech class.
(c) Follow-up appointment kept!
- 16th month:* (a) Returned to using heroin.
(b) Foreman threatened firing for absenteeism.
(c) Ear impression taken for hearing aid through State Service Center.
- 17th month:* (a) Hearing aid obtained, and Curley extremely pleased with the results. Off heroin, and settling into good work habits again.
(b) Assigned as acting foreman during boss's vacation.
(c) Job attendance slipping again; reported back on heroin.
- 18th month:* (a) More absentee reports; continued using heroin.

The up-and-down story of Curley illustrates several points for us. Acknowledged by the boys as a high status member he is nevertheless an addict, physically handicapped, and unstable. What does a gang leader look like? There is no general pattern. He may be large or small, loud or quiet, strong or weak, attractive or homely. In describing one leader the worker said, "He's illiterate, and doesn't play the tough guy." Another is described as "very quiet and level-headed."

We have found that the only way to distinguish leadership is to observe the actions of the other boys. By their behavior, they provide the clues as to who will be followed and who won't and in what context.

"I noticed that where Booker sat, the rest of the boys would sit; where Booker went, the rest of the boys would go."⁴

"A good leader has to make the group look like victims when trouble develops. If they get busted⁵ because of him he can't keep his leadership."

One particularly interesting pattern revolves around verbal abilities. "This is an exceptionally valued ability among Negro teen-agers, especially gang kids. It doesn't matter too much if what he says is correct or incorrect, but mainly *how* he says it." In this case, then, style rather than substance is paramount.

I have witnessed a beautiful example of this pattern. In a meeting of the Red Raiders, their president gave a partly incoherent but truly moving and impassioned speech about getting a job, finishing school ("You gotta go back and get your smarts, man."), and generally following what he called the "righteous way." No more convincing or effective statement could ever be made by an adult than was put forth by this very sincere young man. At the end of his oration, a thoughtful silence fell over the room until a voice from the rear queried, "Yeah, man, that's all right. But what if them Victors come over into our set [territory, neighborhood, turf] again?"

⁴Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes are from detached workers.

⁵Arrested.

The response from the orator was immediate and perfect: "If they come down on us, we gonna go through them like a hot knife through butter!" The room was filled with joyous approval—handclapping, floor thumping, and shouts of glee. The orator had played the roles perfectly; first positive leadership, then fighting leadership, and both expressed with style and vigor. Leadership is not just a personal quality; it is also a response to group needs.

3. Leadership is age-related. Although it is true that younger members often idolize the older "veterans" and bask in the reflected glory of past exploits, it is also true that each age level and each clique has defined leadership within it.

"Nobody speaks for an area. I don't gave a damn who he is. Nobody; or for a gang."

This fact is acknowledged by the boys themselves. One worker quotes an older leader's comments about members of the younger group in the cluster:

"Well, we can tell them, you know, to hold it down to a trot. But the little rooty-poots have got to get experiences; they got to get knocked on their asses so they can understand what we're talking about. We can only tell them, and after that if they don't want to believe what we're saying, it's up to them. I'm not his father."

So although the older gang member may have a great "rep" (high status) in the eyes of the younger boys, he does not automatically have the ability or the desire to wield influence. The younger member or the clique member has his own leadership closer at hand; he has a dual allegiance to the subgroup and to the cluster. What we are saying, then, is that leadership is related directly to the overall structure of the gang cluster; or, on a more abstract level, structure and function are part and parcel of the same phenomenon—a lesson too often overlooked by social scientist and practitioner alike.

4. An interesting corollary to the foregoing comments is the existence of what might be called "hesitant leadership." When we first noticed this phenomenon, we thought it was peculiar

to the gang context, but continued exposure to the Negro and Mexican-American ghettos has suggested that its roots and existence stem more generally from the culture of poverty as it exists in the disorganized minority ghetto.

Briefly stated, "hesitant leadership" refers to reluctance to assume an identifiable leadership *position*. Sometimes this takes the form of active *denial* of leadership: "We got no leaders, man. Everybody's a leader, and nobody can talk for nobody else."

But, in addition, often there is a strong flavor of ambivalence about the pattern. Many youngsters have started to assert leadership only to pull back at crucial moments. This can be seen in intergang truce meetings during which selected "leaders" verbalize group feeling and assume a spokesman's role, only to pull back when challenged or requested to take some action on behalf of the group: "Y'understand, I can't talk for them other dudes. I'm just saying it for me."

This is an extremely frustrating pattern with which the gang worker has to deal. He cannot physically influence 100 boys at a time and is therefore forced to select a few pivotal members through whom to attempt his interventions. But when the time of crisis comes these selected "leaders" may either deny their own influence, or refuse to stick their necks out for fear of interfering with other and equally ambivalent leaders. None is sure of his following, and each has seen rival leaders "cut down to size" by other peers. Leadership, then, as a *position*, is aspired to but withdrawn from for fear of losing status; and status is extremely important and must be preserved at all costs.⁶

Given these few descriptive notions of gang leadership, what route does the gang worker follow? As might be expected, he

⁶One acknowledged leader of the Senior Operators wrote it this way; "There are no leaders . . . and this is caused by the different groups or cliques inside the subgroups. Those that are popular inside these cliques are usually the leaders, except for the Seniors. If you ask a member of the Seniors why they don't have a leader, he would probably say, 'I don't believe in no one giving me orders.' Or if there is a leader, 'Why shouldn't it be me?'"

treads his way very cautiously, trying out different approaches, alternately depending upon and circumventing the ephemeral leadership structure of his gang. He too becomes ambivalent about leadership and its uses, as can be seen in the different philosophies underlying the following three statements:

"There haven't been any more incidents at the theater since they hired two leaders as ushers."

"Albert Houston, the president of the El Hunters, is home from camp and could solidify the group. However, (I've) encouraged Albert to remain close to home for a while."

"I feel I made a mistake in relegating coaching responsibilities to Frisco, one of the older Operators. He was too excitable, transmitting this to the Baby Operators. He used poor judgment throughout the game. He swore at the Baby Operators and exhorted them to play a rougher type of game."

The result, during many projects, is an inconsistent approach to the use of gang leadership; inconsistent both within a cluster and between workers. Until a conceptual scheme exists (8) to which workers can turn for guidance, loosely supervised gang programs will always be featured by a "seat-of-the-pants" approach to leadership utilization, much to the detriment of the programs and the youths under their wings.

Adolescence

If there is one overall impression of the gang boys that most strikes one at first acquaintance and remains uppermost in the mind, it is of a *caricature of adolescence*. All those behavioral manifestations which allow one to say of a person's behavior that it is adolescent can be seen in the gang members and usually in excess. It is adolescence overplayed. The pattern shows first, perhaps, in their approach to humor, especially in a group setting.

The boy who tells a joke or makes a clever crack looks for

the response even more quickly than the response can be given. He seeks out the reaction—how many are laughing, and how loud; how are the adults reacting; how can he build on the first crack to maintain the reaction? Humor is used less for its own value *per se* than for the approbation and momentary status it might bring to its user. Humor is attention getting and is used consciously for that purpose. The behavioral clue here is neither the joke nor the reaction to it, but the search for the reaction.

In the same way, the boys do a great deal of boasting about their individual exploits. But more often than not the exploits are imaginary, or elaborations of simple events are made to sound dangerous and exciting. Continual observation suggests, as one would expect, that boasting serves the purpose of ego-building where few objective qualities or accomplishments are available for the task. For, in fact, these boys, more than their nongang age peers, feel little confidence in themselves. They tend to be insecure both with respect to their own abilities and with respect to social relationships (12). The pattern is illustrated in these descriptions given by the workers:

“Eddie, in spite of his boasting, appears to be one of the main catalytic agents in the Victors-Vampires conflict and is actively seeking a following to enhance his own need for security and acceptance.”

“He is a nice looking boy, but he has the problem of not believing in people.”

“Those who have not broken away hang around in the park with the Junior Operators. They are not strong leaders. They are guys who have not grown up, and who cannot cope with problems of everyday life. They seem to be in limbo.”

“This is one guy that I know I’ll spend more time with, jacking him up and building confidence within him. He’s somewhat introverted. I think . . . he . . . would drop pills or sit in a corner and shoot junk.”

“The day of the trip they all found excuses not to go. Later they admitted that they were scared to go out of their

environment. They might have confidence in me, but not in themselves."

This lack of confidence and inadequacy in skills and social abilities results in a level of dependence upon the peer group which in turn often results in arrest-provoking behavior:

"This boy is a follower, whether for good or bad. He is easily led into doing things."

"Here's a guy who I think will get into trouble because . . . he sort of moves in a circle that will get him in trouble."

"They say he was a real nice boy when he came here from Georgia. Then the guys sure messed him up. He was drinking, smoking dope, and dropping pills. Currently he is going to night school. He hopes to get his high school diploma, then go on to college; 'I want to be somebody. I don't want to live in a housing project all my life.'"

How can this be? How is it that the associating together of these youngsters can lead so directly to involvement in delinquency? This is a question the worker *must* deal with if he is to intervene positively. He must understand the dynamics by which association leads to guilt: guilt *through* association rather than *by* it.

At first blush it might appear (as some people believe) that gang boys come together in order to commit delinquent acts, much in the fashion of the Capone mob or the Cosa Nostra. But this is a naïve view of adolescent relations. Juvenile gang members tend to float toward each other as they reject and are rejected by the other opportunities in a lower-class community.

"They find strength in numbers. There are, for example, very few of these kids in organized sports. To play by the rules, to take the frustration of not winning is too much for many of them. In my opinion, they are deficient in all aspects of what we value, but I don't think their relationships among themselves are deficient: I mean, I think . . . that they are wholesome."

Perhaps, as Caplan (1) has suggested with regard to Chicago's inner-city youth, gang development is in part the result of many "floaters" coming together in their search for non-institutionalized activity that will fill the empty hours.

"This youth can often be seen . . . wandering up and down the streets. He appears to be the kind of person that is psychologically dependent on the Victors, and does not admit that there has been any diminishing of the Victors' cohesiveness."

From this point of view, the gang is seen as an aggregate of individuals held together more by their own shared incapacities than by mutual goals. Primarily, group identification is important as it serves individual need satisfaction, and leads to delinquent group activity only secondarily and only in the absence of prosocial alternatives:

"Now, all winter long, you take a guy like Perry. He's just done nothing because there was nothing for him to do. But now he carries the wine; he comes to the park with the wine . . . and so he gets five of these guys coming behind him with the wine and so (they) go out and hustle some dimes, get some wine . . . So he becomes a big deal, which is everybody laying around in the park and drinking wine."

Thus a gang boy is, first and foremost, an adolescent with all of the problems and advantages accruing to that age group in our society. But he tends to be a *caricature* of the adolescent—more shy, more dependent on his peers, more ambivalent about appropriate role behaviors—exhibiting the features of a well-catalogued age group, and yet showing significant departures from the norm.

A boy named Manny is a good example, though a tragic one. The son of a convict, he was a boy at loose ends described by a staff member as a "happy follower." He returned from a juvenile institution with little notion of what he wanted to do,

and immediately melted back into the group. We observed him on the street forty-five times in the month following his return, and he was alone in only three of those situations. The group was his life and, as it happened, his death.

Manny

- 9/8: Returned from probation camp. Seen immediately in the company of various core members.
- 9/22: Enrolled in high school with staff help.
- 9/23: With three others, attacked member of a rival gang.
- 10/4: Recommended to Boys' Club as youth aid under Neighborhood Youth Corps program.
- 10/10: Though considered a bad risk, Manny was accepted for the job at the Boys' Club.
- 10/13: Job held up because of N.Y.C. regulations.
- 10/15: During raid by rival gang, Manny ran up the back stairs of a house only to find the door locked. Trapped there, and with his pals scattering in all directions, he was shot and killed.

Manny was not the particular target of this raid. But his heavy dependence on the group, and staff inability to come up with alternate activities soon enough, placed him at that place at that time. His death, in this sense, was purely accidental—an accident brought about by the personal inadequacies which led him to be with the group whenever he could, including the time of the attack.

Individual Deficiencies

There is no need to dwell on the family background of gang members. Although there is much variance, the situation of the average member is not good; poverty, broken homes, inadequate educational and vocational role models, family members with criminal histories, and similar features are common enough in the world of the gang member to ring a familiar bell.

On the other hand *physical* handicaps are exceptional. The

gang is not a very tolerant group. Exclusion of the malformed is common. Those who *are* accepted must overcome the stigma of physical defects. For example, two boys with severe skin problems were known as "Cornflakes" and "Potato Face;" a boy with glasses was called "Goggles;" and a Mexican boy given a mascot role in a Negro gang was called "Taco." The desire for membership must be strong to overcome these verbal insults.

But if these youngsters are not physically handicapped, are they intellectually deficient? Restricting ourselves to performance on intelligence tests, the data are discouraging. Out of 243 available records containing test scores, 8 per cent show scores below 70, and only 8 per cent show scores of 100 or better. The median score is 84. Fully one third of the boys have scores that would dictate their placement in special education classes according to the overall guidelines employed by the Los Angeles city schools.

Does this mean that the boys are stupid? No, it clearly does not. What it does mean is that they are not well prepared to take advantage of the educational system as it exists, or to prepare themselves for remunerative employment beyond school. It means, in the words of a physician familiar with the situation, that "in the absence of adequate *capability*, they develop *cope-ability*." They become "street wise," learn to handle many problems with a style of their own, and they also learn to avoid those which present difficulty or a threat to the self-image.

Perhaps the only major exception to this pattern is the handling of impulse control. *Lack* of impulse control is certainly a most common characteristic of many of these boys and, of course, those who habitually act on impulse stand out to the observer. The lack of restraint in the expression of hostility, greed, and status needs—restraint ordinarily present in the form of guilt, or anticipation of negative consequences—makes one wary of pushing these boys too far.

Although violence is not their way of life it is a predominant "myth system" among them, and the line between myth and reality is often thin indeed. Aggression, verbal or physical, is a

coping mechanism that receives constant reinforcement within the gang. It is this reinforcement in the presence of low impulse control that often stands as the public hallmark of gang behavior:

"... a guy like Frisco, that likes to get high and raise a lot of hell and fight and argue . . ."

"Carlos does not seem too rational. He likes to agitate and fight . . . the others use him to start fights."

"He reported later than they became abusive and tried to fight him. Corky broke a bottle and tried to attack him with it. Both boys have been in Juvenile Hall repeatedly, but were released. Both are considered gang psychopaths, and are only fourteen years old."

But we may become lost in a morass of speculation if we attempt to explain these behavior patterns in terms of "types" of boys; there are as many types as there are boys. To understand better the situation of the worker it is perhaps more valuable to think in terms of types of *behavior*, any one of which may be exhibited by any number of gang members. In fact the seeming behavioral inconsistency *within each boy*, and the fact that he seems to exhibit the full range of behaviors in cafeteria style (11) prevent the worker from developing consistent intervention approaches for individuals: he must have a repertoire fully as broad as that of the boys.

One of these patterns, if it can be called that, is the potential for truly dangerous behavior to which the worker must *always* be alert. The danger is well described by the workers:

"JoJo was observed walking . . . with a .22 caliber rifle in his hands, chamber loaded and cocked, and bullet between his teeth. He was looking for Robert Simmons in order to kill him because, according to JoJo, Robert had beaten him unfairly in a fight. This boy seems to be in need of psychiatric help. These are the comments made by his peers, who are uneasy in his presence. He does not seem to have a conscience."

"Big Mambo is somewhat unbalanced. He can be dangerous since he is large."

"Randy's status about his part as originator of these chains of violence was not said with too much modesty One of his problems is apparently an attempt to find a suitable platform in which to give vent to his aggressiveness Randy can be extremely dangerous when provoked. He's positive in meetings, but he's a gang psychopath."

Attempts to intervene in the lives of such youngsters are highly frustrating. In the following case one can sense the dedication of the workers in their dogged pursuit of rehabilitative resources, and, in the final analysis, the waste of professional time with a boy who invariably retreats or acts out in the face of progress.

Richard

One of five siblings, Richard lived alternately with his grandmother and with his mother and stepfather. His father's family lived in Arizona, and Richard went there occasionally. His mother is a prostitute; his stepfather is of a different racial stock. Family dissension rules the home, and no one is willing to put up with Richard for very long.

Richard is a core member of the gang but not ordinarily an initiator of activities. He uses money and marijuana to "buy in" to the group, being personally insecure and visibly torn by a negative and destructive self-image. He admits that fighting is the one activity that makes him feel good. Prior to the project he was lucky in having been arrested only three times on minor charges. He was expelled from tenth grade for drug use.

1st month:

- (a) Working in hardware store out of the area.
- (b) Plans to join Marines after release from probation.
- (c) Going steady with Ginger.

2nd month:

- (a) Lost job because of transportation problems.
- (b) Given N.Y.C. job by staff. Job #2.
- (c) Pressured by Ginger to return to school.
- (d) Finds a second girl friend, Anna, in rival gang area.
- (e) Fight at work over racial epithets.
- (f) In possession of a gun; alternately carries it or loans it out.
- (g) Escape from police, avoiding arrest for possession of marijuana with three companions.
- (h) Staff confirms Richard is pushing marijuana.

3rd month:

- (a) Registered for school by staff.
- (b) Dropped course after attending drunk.
- (c) Quit N.Y.C. job.
- (d) Has finished off his marijuana supply.
- (e) Arrested for attempt to rifle public phone.
- (f) Drops Ginger in favor of Anna.
- (g) Job at Boys' Club arranged by staff. Job #3.
- (h) Job offer rescinded when Richard announces plans to enter Marines soon.
- (i) Fight with gang friend over use of car.

4th month:

- (a) With two companions, attacked by rival gang.
- (b) Flunked Marine exam, but will be given second chance.
- (c) Failed to appear for second Marine exam.
- (d) Arrested for interfering with police in aftermath of intragang fight.
- (e) Secured job in plant opened to members by staff: Job #4.

- (f) Arrested for possession of marijuana.
- (g) Received Job Corps notice.
- (h) Departed for Job Corps through staff help.

6th month:

- (a) Letters from Job Corps report depression, fighting, and town jail.
- (b) Quit Job Corps.
- (c) Hit on head by tire iron in attack by rival gang results in chronic dizziness.
- (d) Started job, via stepfather, out of the area at \$1.87. Job #5.
- (e) Reported by other boys to be experimenting with heroin.

7th month:

Arrested for joy-riding.

8th month:

- (a) Admits recent gas station robbery to staff; gave money to newsboy who had no shoes.
- (b) Admits heroin use to staff.
- (c) Taken by staff to narcotics rehabilitation center.
- (d) Refused to return to rehabilitation center.

9th month:

- (a) Laid off work through stepfather's influence.
- (b) Given job in clothing plant by staff. Job #6.
- (c) Laid off by foreman.
- (d) Family strife reported increasing.
- (e) Got away with pursesnatch and house-break.

10 month:

Rehired at clothing plant. Job #7.

11th month:

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- (b) Reported involved in raid on rival gang area.
- (c) Complaints of severe headaches.

12 month:

- (a) Attacked at party.
- (b) Unable to make psychiatric appointment arranged by staff.
- (c) Arrested for possession of marijuana.
- (d) Family evicted from home.
- (e) While blind drunk, beat up unknown boy, attacked fellow member, and collapsed.
- (f) Having impregnated Stella (another girl from rival area), announces marriage plans.
- (g) Given Job #8 by staff.

13th month:

- (a) Failed to appear for job.
- (b) Runaway, with Stella. Sleeping in garage.
- (c) Beaten up by rivals at hot dog stand.
- (d) Detained for failure to appear in court.

14th month:

- (a) In solitary confinement twice for fighting with fellow prisoners.

15th month:

- (a) Given suspended sentence and probation.
- (b) Beat up Stella, who has had miscarriage.
- (c) In fight with fellow member.

16th month:

- (a) Given job training spot by staff. Job #9.
- (b) Fired for absenteeism.
- (c) Arrested for riot and disturbing the peace. Five days in jail.

17th month:

- (a) Family moves again.
- (b) Admits more heroin use to staff.

- (c) Taken to psychiatric ward of County Hospital by staff; refuses self-commitment to Narcotics Center.
- (d) Receives knife wound in fight.
- (e) Refuses visit to Narcotics Center.

18th month:

- (a) Wrecked car.
- (b) Beaten up in fight with fellow member.
- (c) Given Job #10 at \$2.00 an hour by staff.
- (d) Dislocated wrist in job accident.
- (e) Kicked out of the house by grandmother.
- (f) On anniversary of Manny's killing, went with companion to rival area and stabbed a 14-year-old boy (in critical condition), and shot two other people, one of whom died. Arrested, expected to be put away for a long time. Age, eighteen.

A more self-destructive pattern would be hard to find. Here is a boy—an extreme example, but an example nevertheless—whose every behavior was a call for help, and yet sufficient help was not forthcoming. So often it is true that the helpers are helpless for lack of resources, lack of knowledge, lack of ability to crack the bureaucratic structures of the welfare and criminal justice systems.

So far, we have described the negative patterns; but there are others, equally important, which allow a worker to maintain a modicum of optimism. The first of these—the “righteous defender” pattern—is in fact one in which the workers almost take pride, for it combines manliness with coolness: two highly valued characteristics of the ghetto boy. Every gang we have seen reacted to the accusation of being a fighting gang with the same phrase, “No, man, we a defensive club.” This was the group version of the individual pattern:

“For some reason, he is the epitome of the gang aggressor, don’t take no stuff type. . . .”

“These were the cool heads—they would fight. But according

to them they didn't look for trouble, but they took care of trouble."

"Benny expresses some fear for his personal safety by saying, 'I think I ought to move from this area. But if anybody comes up on the porch, I'm ready for them.'"

And finally, the pattern to which everything points—the "reformation." When a worker speaks of his success, almost invariably he turns to the description of individuals who have "seen the light"; the more individuals and the brighter the light, the greater the success. In essence, then, the workers—and gang programs generally—rely on testimonials as evidence of success. The difficulty in assessing this pattern lies in several directions. First, does the *statement* of progress equal progress itself? Second, what level of progress and over what period of time can be taken as success? Third, how do we separate those elements of progress or reformation attributable to the worker's intervention from those which would have occurred anyway? And finally, how many cases of reform constitute overall success? There is, of course, the understandable tendency to remember the successes but not the failures. One success experience can wipe out a score of failures in the mind, if not in the street. When a worker really "glows," it is while reporting individual cases like these:

"He finally found out that all he was doing was drinking wine out at the park, so . . . when a kid arrives at this point, I think it's pretty good."

"He has insight into his problems, and likes to counsel at length. 'I know I'm bad. I want to change . . . but I've been bad for so long that changing is hard. I wish I didn't have a reputation, then I wouldn't have to worry.'"

"Reno is beginning to show real positive attitudes toward himself, the club, and myself . . . at one point he confided in me that he had had a fight . . . and had not appreciated the blows he had received. . . . He is beginning to articulate a little bit more about himself and race problems."

"He told me that . . . he was tired of foolish gang life, and was expecting to do the right thing."

"I know people who knew him in forestry camp, and other people, and they say they just can't get over the change that's come over him. It's wonderful, his ability to behave."

Core vs. Fringe

The preceding patterns are by no means inclusive of all the possibilities, but are cited here to illustrate something about the nature of the gang population and the variety of ways one can look at it. More important to our overall purposes has been the need to demonstrate some of the complexities with which the individual gang worker is faced. For these purposes we could just as well have written about the importance of status, or youth-adult relations, or the influence of the girls associated with each gang.

However, one other pattern (really a set of patterns) deserves special mention—the differences between core and fringe membership. In an analysis reported elsewhere (4) we demonstrated that the workers' judgment of a boy's status as a core or fringe member was clearly related to two, or possibly three factors. The two significant factors had to do with (a) individual deficiencies and aggressiveness, and (b) relationship with other group members. Core members evidence more individual problems and aggressiveness, and are more involved in group qua group matters.

The third but less clear factor involves the youth-worker relationship. The suggestion here is that the boy in greater need of help, but more resistant to it or more of a puzzle to the worker, is likely to be seen as a core member. At the very least, he takes up more of the worker's time.

In the article previously cited, data were reported showing that core members are more involved in various gang activities and commit 37 per cent more recorded offenses than fringe members. In fact *all* the behavioral indices on which we

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gathered data showed significant differences between core and fringe members.

We therefore analyzed the background data gathered from probation files to verify the core-fringe differences to be expected there. This would confirm the notion that the behavioral differences clearly observed were partly rooted in demographic differences. The analysis revealed *no significant differences* between core and fringe members with regard to place of origin, parental makeup, number of siblings, parental education and income, or intelligence scores.

Although a few differences favor the fringe members they are slight differences at best, and certainly of no predictive value. As a sample of presumably relevant background characteristics, the items analyzed explain nothing. On this basis it would seem that an understanding of causal factors relating to the observed core-fringe differences will have to come from other kinds of data—of a sort not collected during the project. We can describe core-fringe differences, but we cannot explain them.

Offenses

With respect to official charges against gang members, we have data on our Negro boys but have not as yet analyzed those on the Mexican-Americans (our general impression is that they will not differ drastically). Among the Negro boys, the most common offenses were thefts of various kinds (26 per cent), mostly petty. Next most common (17 per cent) were "juvenile status" offenses, those which are not chargeable against adults (truancy, incorrigibility, curfew violations, and the like). Next in order came auto thefts (14 per cent), assaults (13 per cent), and use of drugs and alcohol (10 per cent). The rest were a miscellaneous lot of offenses, including only two per cent sex offenses.

The general pattern is similar to that found by Miller in Boston (9), and is *not* one to strike terror in the hearts of men. Even the assault charges involve more intra- and intergang

incidents than serious assaults on "innocent bystanders." The gang boy is far more a threat to himself and his peers than to the community at large. This is a point we lose when we limit ourselves to the reports of the mass media or the observations of many peace officers.

It also seems clear to us that, with some exceptions, gang members are not "junior criminals." Much of their illegal behavior is spontaneous or impulsive reaction to situational circumstances rather than planned exploits. Most of the boys' records indicate a cafeteria-style approach, with offenses varying widely across the available spectrum to be found in the penal code (2). A clear "pattern" of offenses is not the usual finding for any individual boy; neither do we find the expected progression into more serious offenses as the boys grow older; the tenth and eleventh offenses are no more serious than the first and second.

By the above statement we do not mean that gang delinquency is not a problem for concern. But we have found that the great bulk of it has minor consequences for society and does not presage the development of dedicated criminal careers. The greatest damage done by delinquents is to themselves, for their involvement in illegal behavior and its judicial consequences can lead only to the reinforcement of incipient negative self-images and further alienation from the mainstream of society. This is the greatest danger, and the greatest waste.

Summary

The foregoing represents a sampling of salient observations of juvenile gang members in the 1960's. The general tenor of our observations is in many ways similar to that of other recent writers (2, 11, 12), but considerably different from that of investigators writing in an earlier period (3, 13). It has become standard in the gang literature of the 1960's to note that the historical differences have to do with gang structure, offense behavior, and the "style" of a gang member's life.

Formerly, gang structure was conceived of as tight and cohesive, with well defined leadership and other role structures. Current analyses emphasize low cohesiveness and shifting role structures. Earlier studies found strong relationships, sometimes of a master-apprentice nature, between adult criminal systems and gang members; but the gang of the 1960's seems to be more divorced from the adult criminal system. Finally, the gangs of earlier years were described as happy-go-lucky collections of healthy youngsters who enjoyed their experiences together as adventurers in the great game of cops and robbers. Today gang members are seen as "driven" toward the group; dissatisfied, deprived, and making the best of an essentially unhappy situation.

Whether the gangs have changed, or whether the researchers have changed is difficult to assess. Today's data are more reliable because of improved methodology; but this does not necessarily invalidate the findings of yesterday.

We must conclude that our own observations place us squarely in the tradition of today. Our gang member is thrown into his group. He is frustrated, insecure, and trapped in his environment. He is not having much fun, although he makes much of the enjoyments he finds. He is a rationalizer, a self-deceiver in his attempt to get through his adolescence with as few psychological scars as possible. He is not the man he would like to be, and his search for peer status is seldom adequately rewarded. Sad to say, society's most effective mechanism for transforming him—sheer maturity—is not under its control. Getting older is still the gang member's best hope and will be until social theorists and practitioners are able to translate their observations into theory, and their theory into action *more* powerful than the natural variables of urban society.

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