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ABSTRACT

A study of inner-city youth in San Francisco (California) shows that behavior and street ideology once associated exclusively with gangs have now become the world view of a large segment of inner-city young people, especially males. Inner-city young people who aspire to material success do not see a realistic connection between public education and the world of work. From 1981 to 1990 the Youth Environment Study addressed the twin issues of drug use and the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco (California) in areas with the heaviest concentration of families and youth living in poverty. This study, updated by 30 additional interviews with city adolescents, has identified 4 essential aspects of growing up in the inner city as crucial to understanding behaviors and planning services: (1) the overriding importance of ethnic or racial identity; (2) the existence of a street system of social guidelines for youth; (3) increased importance of drug use and drug dealing as a means of socialization and income; and (4) the rise in the use of violence with advanced weaponry. In the competition between the criminal justice system and the educational system for young people, the criminal justice system has been winning. New policy directions are needed to reconsider the current prohibitionist drug policy, bringing fewer youths into the criminal justice system, and improve the educational system's use of natural neighborhood street systems. (SLD)

Preparing for Prison: Life in San Francisco's Inner-City Neighborhoods

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PREPARING FOR PRISON: LIFE IN SAN FRANCISCO'S INNER-CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

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Ralph (a 19-year-old African-American): I see people coming in there [jail] cry all the time they're there. Then I'd seen people in there complaining about what they could have done to get away, or "Damn, I shouldn't have done this or that." When I went in there, the first time I was like--I was interested in what's happening in there because I...wondered, I always wanted...

Interviewer: You wanted to know what it was like?

Ralph: Yeah!

Known for its civility, San Francisco, has been called "everyone's favorite city." Away from the shops, the restaurants, the theaters, and tourist attractions, young people growing up in San Francisco's inner-city neighborhoods must come to grips with a street life that has become increasingly more desperate, more violent, and more neglected by the institutions traditionally responsible for the city's children.

In the past, neighborhood street systems, commonly called street life, where children play and become socialized to the values and norms of the community, were usually dominated, even ruled, by what we called "gangs." Gangs, as we knew them, were distinct entities with relatively few members. Because of their achieved reputations for violent action, they could intimidate the more conforming neighborhood youth whose interests might tend toward conventional sports, school achievement, and an acceptance of low-paying, entry-level jobs. Gang members were renowned for their willingness to defy authority and commit delinquent acts other young people living in the same community and under similar economic circumstances tended to avoid. As a small band of "trouble-makers," they usually had reputations for being tough and defiant as contrasted with "good" kids who attended school, stayed out of trouble, and prepared either for college or stable working-class jobs.

The ethnographic history of gang research in urban scenes shows a steady trend of increasing violence accompanied by greater sophistication and technology in weaponry, which places conventional families who reside in the inner-city in a context of ever present danger. Of greater importance, as more young people find themselves removed from the mainstream economy, they have increasingly accepted a world view that was once exclusively associated

with gang and criminal groups. Even a cursory examination of the ethnographic literature of urban gangs reveals that the descriptive picture of them has shifted from the stable corner-boy behavior of the late 1930s. At this time poor youth without aspirations for higher education engaged in local political activity, stable racketeering, or legitimate business opportunities. William Whyte (1943 and 1955) described this clearly in his classic study of what he called an Italian slum in Street Corner Society. The shift was toward teenage gang fighting in the 1940s and 1950s, in which the targets of violence were rival adolescent gangs (New York City Youth Board 1960). In these bygone days of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s--with the exception of hard-core heroin addicts or those few individuals caught and imprisoned for substantial sentences--most youth gang members matured out of the street system into marriage, military service, or adult employment.

Some social scientists like Walter Miller (1970) have proposed that inner-city gangs have always existed and that awareness of them fluctuates with increased or decreased media attention. Almost all authorities, however, agree that gangs have been the hub of the inner-city street system throughout the years; and the measure by which local youth from those neighborhoods have been judged to be "good" or "bad" usually depended on whether they were directly

associated with "gangs." In those days, the phenomenon of gangs was itself a unique subsystem or subculture of the broader working-class communities of all racial and ethnic persuasions.

More recently, the term gang has merged with the concept of "underclass" and a growing tendency to affix the adjective permanent to descriptions of street groups in the inner-city. William J. Wilson (1985), for example, has contended that the underclass is "outside the mainstream of the American occupational system" and is comprised of "individuals who lack training and skills...Individuals who are engaged in street criminal activities and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families who experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency." Joan Moore (1988), a sociologist who has studied Mexican-American gangs extensively in Los Angeles, observed wisely that deindustrialization--the movement of manufacturing plants to countries with cheaper labor sources--and a service economy, which she believes never reached into the poorest ghettos and barrios, left inner-city populations with few means of survival.

This chapter shows that the behavior and street ideology that was once associated exclusively with gangs has now become the common world view of a large segment--perhaps the majority--of inner-city young people, especially males.

While issues of sexuality, families, and peer acceptance are common concerns for young people, the most commanding considerations are economic. Inner-city young people must come to terms with a state of poverty which from their perspective appears to condemn them to permanent exclusio. from the mainstream economy and access to the symbols of success and prestige in America. They have become disenchanted with education as a route to the kind of material acquisition they associate with personal achievement and success which peers and others can appreciate or admire. Even those jobs which previous generations had settled for--laborers, factory workers, post office clerks, etc.--are scarce in an economy that has become increasing technological and which no longer provides upward mobility or even job security for large numbers of the underclass.

In response, inner-city young people who aspire to material success do not see a realistic connection in either the short-run or long-run between public school education and the legitimate work world. And they reject as unacceptable entry-level, low-status employment which offers little future for career advancement; they gravitate to those activities which are money producing and often illegal but which have immediate monetary visibility. In this sense, gang identity and ideology as we assess it in the

1980s and early 1990s is no longer confined to small collectivities of young people in street corner groups but has become a widely adopted communal orientation which allows large numbers of poor youth who are not necessarily associated with gangs to view their world as hostile to them and to assess their chances for advancing to jail and prison to be better than achievements in formal education, traditional jobs, and married life.

Data Sources

From 1981 to 1990, the Youth Environment Study, Inc. (YES) addressed the twin issues of drug use and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in those communities of San Francisco with the heaviest concentrations of families and youth living in poverty. YES had over the years either studied inner-city street systems through ethnographic research and provided on-the-street HIV/AIDS risk reduction services or street-based early intervention to young African American drug users in the Western Addition and Bayview Hunters Point, to Latinos in the Mission District, and to homeless/runaway youth in the Tenderloin and Polk Gulch neighborhoods.

In order to update our knowledge on how youth manage their lives and cope with the major social institutions which impinge on them, especially the school system, the

co-authors carried out 30 additional selected interviews with adolescent representatives from each of the neighborhoods studied. Because of the specific emphasis that YES gave to drug trends, particularly the most current fad of smoking and selling crack cocaine, we were cognizant of the way the increase of law enforcement activity as part of the war on drugs has shaped a new and more violent adolescent adaptation.

Over the years, YES staff and researchers identified four essential aspects of growing up in inner-city neighborhoods in San Francisco as crucial to understanding their behavior and to offering services they would accept and utilize: (1) the ethnic or racial identity of young people is an overriding factor in understanding their choice of activities and the social organization through which they act; (2) the existence of a street system that provides a set of guidelines or unwritten bylaws for behavior by which youth judge each other and determine their friends' and their own individual worth; (3) the increased importance of drug experimentation, drug use, and drug dealing both as a means of adolescent socialization and as a source of income; and (4) the rise in the use violence with advanced weaponry as a strategy for settling personal, jurisdictional, and/or economic disputes.

Community Life

Despite the legal gains made in integration, residential patterns in San Francisco still tend to follow racial and ethnic patterns. Bayview Hunters Point is considered one of the political strongholds for African Americans in San Francisco; and the Western Addition, even after gentrification by gay, middle-class home owners, nonetheless has large neighborhoods which are predominantly African American and which contain low income housing projects and other pockets of poverty. The Mission District, particularly the Inner Mission, has for the past 30 years been the social and political center for Bay Area Latinos, the preferred designation in San Francisco for the Spanish-speaking populations from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Central and South America. Caucasians tend to be scattered throughout the city; but among the homeless/runaway youth groups who have selected the Tenderloin and Polk Gulch as their primary territory, Caucasians are the majority population but contain significant numbers of Latino and African-American youth.

Our studies of youth groups in each of these ethnic and racial communities have revealed similarities which cut across racial and ethnic lines as well as dramatic differences in their choice of activities, their social

organization, and even their preferences for particular chemical substances.

The youths whom YES studied and served have lived in communities which contained the largest concentrations of poor families. In the decade of the 1980s, the number of youths in San Francisco living in poverty increased dramatically and the negative consequences on family life became more pronounced. Of the approximately 138,000 children--one fifth of the city's populations--the majority lived in those neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of poverty. Over the last 10 years, the trend of increasing numbers of San Francisco youth living in poverty has rapidly accelerated. In 1969, for example, one in seven children--14.3 percent--lived in poverty. In 1990, one in five--20 percent--lived in poverty. And if the trend continues, the Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth in San Francisco (1990) predicts that by the year 2000, one in four children--25 percent--will live in poverty. Probably no other single factor has the total impact on the behavior and outlook of young people as their condition of poverty.

As a result of the poor economic conditions of families, the number of children whose parents have no health insurance tripled in four years between 1982 and 1986. For this and other reasons, Kelly Cullen, director of the Tenderloin Youth Advocates, stated in the July 22, 1991

edition of the San Francisco Examiner that "this city is not economically friendly to children and families." Advancing the notion of San Francisco's unfriendly climate for children, George Wesolik's commentary in the May 1991 edition of the Catholic claimed, "...it is increasingly clear that San Francisco doesn't like children." At times, it appears that the city is not simply unfriendly toward them but through neglect and intent is consistently hostile to its youth in ways that are both subtle and overt. As a result, growing up in San Francisco holds few of the joys tourists find so appealing and romantic. Instead, San Francisco has moved from the old-fashioned belief that children should be seen but not heard toward constructing methods of punishing them for behavior and activities which are essentially adaptive to their life conditions and which have their roots in poverty and illness.

These are not the counterculture children of the 1960s who were disenchanted with a materialistic society. They are, for the most part, young people who have come to view their world realistically, and an increasing number of them have come to realize that their chances to acquire material goods are best achieved outside the economic mainstream. Their essential struggle, then, is with those social institutions with the primary mandate to socialize and contain them, most notably the school system and the

criminal justice system. The strategies for managing their collective behavior are formed through participation in face-to-face, informal friendship groups--sometimes involving family members--composed of similar youths and adults who share an identity with their neighborhood of residence. In the past, we called them gangs. As young members of the underclass, they are an important part of a large and growing army of unemployed who inhabit the inner-city. And it is in the street context where their identities come to fruition and their career destinies are determined.

Street Life

In each of the inner-city communities that YES has studied or served, an active street life exists. Street life tends to be dominated by males but females are greatly influential in almost all of the their activities. The world of drug dealing, prostitution, gambling, and confidence games among inner-city residents has traditionally been called "the Life" or "the Sportin' Life" where the foundation of the economy is the "game" or the "hustle" (French 1991).

In most inner-city neighborhoods, street life begins early. It may be identified for each individual as that point in life where the values of the street corner group

become more important as a guide to behavior than the teachings of parents. In earlier writing, Feldman (1973) described male street life in the fictional community of East Highland in the following way:

> The East Highland street system offered its participants a paradoxical sense of fear and protection. The young men (and not-so-young men) who comprised and perpetuated the street system became socialized to its unwritten bylaws early in life through an informal arrangement of implicit directives. Unlike the middle-class world where changes of college or bureaucratic position created a shifting pattern of friendships that permitted failure in one period of life to be informationally buried in a series of recurring fragmented relationships, the street relationships of East Highland had a fixed, anchored quality where adult relationships contained memories of younger years. The task, then, of every young man in the street was to project through actions and words the kind of self he believed would be locally tolerated, welcomed or admired by persons who would know him throughout his life and would, in the final analysis, be the measure of his worth.
>
> ...In elementary school years, boys began seeking status positions among street friends and

> participated in activities that had embryonic features of toughness, daring, and a willingness to show bravery in the face of pain. As boys grew into early adolescence, the excitement escalated to minor law-breaking activities such as joining friends in stealing cigarettes or vandalizing a school. The shared forbidden activities became the bonds that tied youth together in a sense of solidarity. Commitment to street life became a search for trust among one another both in carrying out exciting activities as well as sharing intimate knowledge about them.

Although Feldman's analysis is specific to an east coast community of a previous generation, his general description is applicable to other street systems with variations arising from racial and ethnic predominance.

While the existence of street life is a reality in all inner-city poor neighborhoods, each racial and ethnic group provides its own design and cultural rationale for the social organization, selection of activities, and even the choice of preferred chemical substances and other delinquent acts.

African American Street Life. Perhaps the most salient feature of African American street life among adolescents in San Francisco is its basic unit of relationship: the small,

intimate friendship group. Comprised of two to five individuals, these groups usually form on the basis of neighborhood proximity where youth select from their own age levels individuals whom they can trust and confide in. Key activities such as school, athletics, dances and adventurous, often delinquent episodes intended to solidify friendships based on mutually shared--typically forbidden--escapades create group formation. Although these small friendship groups may mix with others in activities where similar small groups participate--often giving the impression of a large gang-like structure--to the inside observer, the subgrouping pattern is discernable.

In most cases, the friendship groups are age-related, and age is a key factor in the composition of subgroupings. Usually five general subgroups that are identifiable: (1) young adults ages 21-30; (2) older adolescents ages 18-20; (3) adolescents between ages 16-18; (4) young adolescents 13-15; and (5) preadolescents ages 8-12. These age categories are not, of course, strictly adhered to; and some mature individuals from a younger age may strive to become part of or be selected by older groups who take respectful notice of young aspirants because of special or gifted abilities street participants admire--fighting, athletic ability, or some criminal endeavor that displays ingenuity or daring.

Underpinning this street social organization is a belief system that implies:

- Only close friends--family members and those whose loyalty has been tested and proven--can be trusted;
- The world is unsafe and inhabited mostly by other persons who cannot be trusted and will attempt to "use" or exploit you;
- Physical and emotional strength and dominance are attributes to be admired and respected; independence and self-control are inner qualities necessary for success in street life;
- Street survival and slickness--outsmarting adversaries--become important measures of success and street ranking.

In keeping with the belief that only close friends can be trusted, the number of intimates is kept small so that friendship can over time be reinforced with new, binding experiences.

The descriptive term for the overall street style and the desired approach to projecting an individual's personal image can be summed up in the word "cool." Ideally, "being cool" implies an individual's mastery of a potential conflict situation through intelligent and/or daring use of logic or weapons. In the competitive world of the streets--whether in the pursuits of sexual partners or in the world of drug sales--"being cool" provides the style and content

for controlling one's destiny and skillfully maneuvering others in a favored direction.

Given a "cool" orientation, it follows that individuals in the African American street life would select licit and illicit substances that are consistent with this valued style. Substances which are perceived to enhance a "cool" demeanor are preferred; and those which undermine it are rejected.

Prior to the crack fad of the 1980s, among African American youth, powdered cocaine was the most esteemed drug because of its association with highly successful entertainers and well-paid athletes. When cocaine, a drug which had previously been used only infrequently because of its high cost, became regularly available in small, inexpensive units of crack, much of its popularity was connected to the high status reputation cocaine had already achieved as an elite and "cool" drug. In addition, cocaine tended to energize the user and provide him/her with a heightened sense of clarity. Both cocaine's effects and its elite reputation paved the way for its enthusiastic reception when it became available in the cheaper form of crack.

Similarly, quality and expensive marijuana was another preferred substance, and youth continue to smoke it in almost every social setting in which they gather. It serves

the function of strengthening the friendship group by sharing a forbidden activity; and even if it interferes with memory, a necessary aspect of education, it is used to reduce the boredom associated with school.

In contrast, African American youth generally reject those drugs which cloud their thinking or make them "sloppy" and unable to maintain a "cool" deportment. Drugs like PCP or angel dust which cause slurred speech and stumbling are rejected and strongly renounced; and it is the rare African American youth in San Francisco who smokes PCP and chances damaging his "cool" image.

Latino Street Life. For most youths growing up in the Mission District, the neighborhood is the center of their social and recreational world. Each neighborhood contains within it at least one large, primarily male street group that takes its name from a local park or street. The term "homeboys" refers to this large collectivity--usually 15-30 individuals per group--although the term homeboy itself has recently moved out of fashion because of police activity and its negative association with gang violence. Latino teenage females form separate cliques, which are often formally connected by ties of affection or family to the male groups and are sometimes called homegirls. They often take on the name of the male group. Since hanging out on the street is considered an exclusive male pastime, females usually

socialize by gathering at each others' houses but almost never spend large amounts of time on the streets. Doing so would seriously damage their reputations and mar a respected image of femininity.

There are no formal rites to becoming a member other than sharing the group's ethnicity and neighborhood loyalty. The groups generally select a particular hangout--usually a park or a distinctive landmark--and declare it their informal headquarters. Graffiti frequently proclaims the "ownership" of the location, and it is often defended against what are perceived as hostile invasions by other homeboy groups who threaten its sovereignty. Homeboys street groups form spontaneously, and youths become members by appearing repeatedly and participating in the group's activities.

Daily routines consist of informal contacts at the local hangout where any single member may match up with any of the 15-30 individuals who comprise the group. Although special, close best-friend relationships develop, individual loyalties--unlike African American street groups--are to the larger entity; and splintering subgroups are almost never heard of.

Members have constant interaction that goes on for years; and an enormous trust builds among group members. As a member, any homeboy--whether his behavior is justified or

not--can anticipate help and protection from his peers who without question or hesitation will protect and defend him. Among homeboys, there is great tolerance for diversity once a member has passed and accepted all informal group norms. Members might include college graduates and eighth-grade dropouts, trouble makers and conventional youth, individuals who use drugs heavily, and those who experiment only infrequently. Of particular value are artists, especially muralists, and musicians. And those former homeboys who successfully avoid criminal careers and earn their livelihood as artists or musicians achieve a special place in the neighborhood history.

The initial commitment to homeboy or homegirl groups begins prior to puberty when youngsters observe the importance and street influence of the group. By the onset of adolescence, they have through their neighborhood association become an auxiliary or younger adjunct. Once the youth has achieved acceptance as a part of the group, a homeboy can depend on his group to come to his defense in times of trouble, to help him attain financial gain through legitimate or illegitimate means, and to share in risky and/or law-breaking adventures. In the tug of loyalties between school attendance and hanging out with buddies, the homeboy gravitates naturally toward his friends.

Similar to the African American social organization of street groups, the homeboys configuration is age-graded and sexually segregated. Within the overall Latino street culture, the role of the young adult--called "veteranos"--holds high status. "Veteranos" are predominantly males in their twenties or early thirties who are often unemployed or marginally employed former homeboys with extensive careers in crime and penal institutions. Because they have experienced the gamut of criminal justice encounters in which their manliness has been tested and proved, they are respected and listened to. As role models, they set the tone and content of conversation whenever they participate. Having endured or even prevailed in the harsh conditions of prison life, "veteranos" act as mentors; and younger aspiring homeboys seek to emulate their deeds as a means to achieve similar high street status and respect.

Prison life is a frequent and recurring topic of conversation between young homeboys and "veteranos." Long before homeboys become candidates for incarceration, they have received instruction on how to manage prison life and how to turn a bad situation to one's own advantage. It is common for the "veteranos" to advise young homeboys on the presentation of their manliness and how to avoid "getting punked"--becoming the submissive partner in prison sex--and otherwise establishing for themselves a tough, respected

prison identity. In preparation, young Latinos acquire homemade tattoos, which act as insignia for homeboy identity and signify that the carriers are committed to a rebellious, "kick-ass" way of life.

In the Latino street world, the role of the "veteranos" cannot be minimized. They are prestigious street figures whose criminal records have blocked them from conventional employment commensurate with their street achievements. Young homeboys and others associated with these cliques listen to them carefully and, when appropriate, shape their behavior in accordance with the "veterano's" advice.

If the overall orientation of African American street life in San Francisco is "cool," then in terms of temperature, the Latino orientation, if not hot, is decidedly warm and expressive. Establishing a manly image that is both gentlemanly and menacing becomes the primary street task for these youngsters. As a result, fighting is an expected outcome when someone either challenges the image or shows disrespect in front of significant others.

Collectively, the groups carve out a segment of their community as their territory; and they often act as protectors of it although in recent years the kind of "gang banging"--inter-gang violence--that was prevalent among Latino homeboys units has declined significantly. Violence, however, is an accepted way of resolving conflicts; and

fights often provide an alternative to the boredom and restlessness that is indigenous to hanging out.

Similarly, drug use is a routine part of group membership and individuals must eventually come to terms with its legal consequences. Tony, a young man from the Mission, who was born in Nicaragua, attempted to explain how loyalty to his homeboy group and to the neighborhood provided a mixed blessing that pitted the satisfactions of group identity against the eventuality of arrest:

> So, right now it's just like I'm doing a lot of thinking about myself because I got to get my act together. And it's hard because when you're a juvenile delinquent, you just like to go party, and do other kinds of stuff and everything. So, it's really hard, man, to stay away from drugs and away from your homeboys, away from your 'hood. I wasn't born in San Francisco, but I feel like I was born down here. I only been here four, five years, and I know people and it's just like I was born down here. I know people that they've been here for years and everything. And it just like, like if I was born down here. I feel good.

Loyalty to the total group rather than a specific subset or clique allows any individual member to expect mutual help from any of the 15-30 friends of his group. As

a result, an individual can, if he is so inclined, participate in extremely dangerous behavior and anticipate that his friends will come to his rescue. This aspect of the homeboy's social organization and group loyalty provides the setting for risky drug use patterns and underpins the choice of licit and illicit substances.

Alcohol and marijuana use is pervasive. Consequently, young Latinos usually do not consider consuming them as drug-taking. In contrast, PCP, commonly called angel dust, a drug known on the street for its powerful effects, continues to be a persistent favorite among a large minority of Latino youth in San Francisco. Despite its recognized potency or perhaps because of its street reputation as a "kick-ass" drug, smoking it is a challenge for young risk-takers. Once used as an anesthesia and later as an animal tranquillizer, the drug often produces a stuporous condition. Smoking "dust" and becoming "wasted" is generally accepted by other homeboys unless use becomes habitual. Others in the group are obliged to look after a "stoned" member and do so in most cases with an understanding amusement. Most Latino youth who smoke angel dust, however, do so in carefully controlled and supportive settings with few adverse effects.

Throughout YES's study and service to Latinos in the Mission District, drug use was a core activity in the

socialization of young people, particularly the males who were active in the street system. In comparison to other communities, they used a wider variety of drugs--ranging from opiates (rarely) to psychedelics (LSD and mescaline)--and usually with more intensity. Despite the scope and intensity of drug use, the major consequences were not necessarily medical or physical but economic and criminal. More than any other single activity, drug use and drug dealing brought youths into contact with the criminal justice system through arrest or led to deeper involvement when drugs became the basis for violations of probation or parole.

Even before the sweeping fad of crack cocaine, Mission District youth sold drugs as a primary means of income. Most sellers dealt in marijuana or PCP, while fewer entrepreneurs sold heroin, which was considered a dangerous and potentially life-threatening enterprise. In all cases, the profits from street drug dealing were scanty and decidedly low when compared with legitimate adult income. For youth, however, the profits were considerably higher than the hourly wage employers in the legitimate work world paid adolescent employees.

Homeless/Runaway/Throwaway Youth. San Francisco is one of several west coast cities that provides a stopping-off place for the estimated 12,000 to 128,000 homeless/runaway

youth who move up and down the Pacific coast from San Diego to Seattle (Little Hoover Commission 1990). Their dominant motif is survival on a day-to-day basis. Each day requires a specific plan to obtain food and shelter. With few skills, their most common means of income are prostitution and drug dealing. In San Francisco, two contiguous neighborhoods provide the setting for these business enterprises--the Tenderloin and Polk Gulch, both recognized for containing sex trade areas for heterosexual and homosexual contacts.

The social organization of homeless/runaway/throwaway youth can best be described as shifting. Because of the transient nature of these youths, there is little permanence to their friendship patterns. Mostly but not exclusively Caucasian, individuals seek out buddies or lovers who can be depended on for mutual support. Teamed up in often intense relationships, they help each other devise short-term strategies to acquire food and shelter or to negotiate one or more of the social agencies designed to provide temporary respite from the hassles of street life. It is common for a young heterosexual couple to seek separate, paying sexual "customers," and then to combine their incomes and their destinies in a recurring pursuit of basic necessities.

On occasion, a larger unit or group may emerge which sometimes centers around a particular street-wise or

charismatic individual with highly developed street survival skills. These loose constellations of youth are usually short-lived and fragment easily as individuals members drift to another city or link up with other partners in a changing kaleidoscope of friendships.

Young, gay males make up a large portion of the homeless/runaway/throwaway youth population in San Francisco. In most cases, their parents, upset over the discovery of their child's sexual orientation, reject them; and rather than runaways, these youth constitute a large proportion of what has come to be called the "throwaways." While San Francisco has been viewed as a Mecca for gay men, some of them blatantly exploit and induce homeless adolescent homosexuals into high-risk sexual activities--notably anal sex without condoms--for increased prostitute fees. Other youth search for the sometimes real, more often mythical "sugar daddy" who offers escape from the everyday hassles of street life. Some youth do indeed find "sugar daddies" who provide long-term, but seldom permanent arrangements. In the final analysis, these youths are adrift and depend on their own or one another's resources in a city that tends to value youthfulness more than the youths themselves.

Added to the multitude of survival difficulties, homeless/runaway/throwaway youth face is the ever present

danger of violence from prospective customers. While the ideal "date" may be the wealthy and generous "sugar daddy" who might house and feed them as a member of the family, the more typical situation is one of transitory and impersonal sex in which their lives are not materially improved. In some cases, youths become the object of assaults; and, in a few cases, young prostitutes have been murdered.

Drug patterns among homeless/runaway youth tend to be functional. Because their primary means of securing income is connected to selling their youth in sexual encounters, the selection of chemical substances for both males and females are those which enhance or extend sexual performance. And since most of the prostitution takes place late at night or in the early hours of the morning, young prostitutes select drugs that induce alertness and wakefulness. In today's drug marketplace, both "speed"--the street term for methamphetamines--and crack cocaine are preferred to those drugs or narcotics such as heroin or tranquilizers which cause drowsiness or inhibit sexual performance.

Speed and crack cocaine, as we might expect, provide a lively trade among homeless/runaway/throwaway youth. Second to prostitution, traffic in these drugs is an important source of income. In response, law enforcement efforts to interrupt the traffic make the police a natural enemy.

Their encounters with police are numerous and constant. Involved in prostitution and drug dealing, the more street-wise young people develop expertise in identifying plainclothesmen and undercover narcotics agents. Among their other difficult adjustments to San Francisco, these youths must learn how to adjust to and be managed by the criminal justice system. Less experienced youth--especially recent arrivals to the street--are often arrested, sent through the machinery of the court and probation system, and then released to return to the street. After awhile, homeless/runaway/throwaway youth who determine that they are unable to return to their families face the cold reality that encounters with the police and being managed by the criminal justice system are endemic to the state of homelessness in San Francisco. In time, they acquire from personal experience or street wisdom from peers how to identify "narcs" and "vice." Failing that, they learn with sad resignation to maneuver through the criminal justice system and find their way back to the streets.

Drugs, Violence, and the Underclass

In the past, the greater number of residents of inner-city neighborhoods were conventional blue collar workers who led more or less orthodox lives. Even in poor neighborhoods which contained the kind of active

"underground economy" described as catering to individuals seeking prohibited and illegal pleasures, there appeared to be a kind of stability in which violence may have been present, but it was restricted to the cast of characters involved in illegal businesses (French 1991). Even among the teenage gang fighting of the 1950s, violence was almost never directed toward adults or toward individuals unconnected to gang membership. And in those neighborhoods where gang fighting was prevalent, conventional adults could act either in outrage or concern and arrange for peaceful outcomes and a return to temporary calm.

As a point of historical fact, the Kennedy/Johnson anti-poverty programs of the 1960s began as a concerned response inner-city youth who were popularly associated with gangs and other delinquencies. Following the theory of Cloward and Ohlin (1960), the goal shifted from delinquency prevention to the broader category of people who live in poverty. The principle aim of the anti-poverty programs, then, was to create an economic revolution in which the lower economic classes could enter the work world. While the programs developed during that period of history may not have achieved the maximum positive outcomes they promised, these institutions penetrated poor neighborhoods in the inner-city and were viewed in a friendly, if suspicious, fashion. Programs like the Urban Youth Corps, Neighborhood

Service Centers, Upward Bound, and others constructed a hospitable interaction with the economically disadvantaged. In the past decade, most of these programs were disbanded, and those that remain have sharply reduced budgets and serve significantly fewer young people. Deindustrialization, lack of access to the service economy, and the disappearance of government programs to train and bring young people into human service professions has left the inner-city poor to fend for themselves as best they can.

In the absence of other legitimate occupational opportunities, drug dealing has become an integral, perhaps commanding, component of the inner-city underground economy despite the heavily financed war on drugs to curtail it. Individuals who have been socialized in street systems, which acknowledge and reward risk-taking behavior, largely staff the inner-city street-level drug-dealing networks. Two of the more serious consequences of the illegality of drug trafficking and the war to stop it are: (1) an increase in violence associated with unregulated drug trafficking; and (2) the growing importance of the criminal justice system in the lives of young people who are participants in drug use as customers or providers. Unable to take business disagreements and disputes to civil courts, fair or unfair competition often gets settled through violence and terror.

In many inner-city neighborhoods, even for the conventional individuals and families uninvolved in drug dealing or other illegal activities, there is no escape from what Bourgois (1991) has termed "the culture of terror." Although inner-city neighborhoods are not the continuous battle zone some news accounts might imply, there is nonetheless a state of readiness for violence, an expectation that any given spat can erupt in armed and deadly conflict. Drive-by shootings do not have to be frequent to alert all residents in an inner-city neighborhood that the possibility of being shot with a stray bullet is an uninvited risk of simply living in proximity to drug deals that have gone awry. Almost all youth--in or out of gang or homeboy units--can provide lurid first-hand testimony of their nearness to violence that is often connected to drug trafficking. One young man we interviewed explained how his cousin was murdered in an attempt to employ heavy-handed street methods to collect a drug debt:

> She owed him some money...Selling dope...and he kicked down this lady's door and pistol whipped her. She closed the door and locked it. And he kicked the door down...And she shot him.

Charlie, an African American adult who ran a local crack house, described how a drug war erupted between competing

youth groups from the projects he lived in and those from a neighboring community:

> These kids came here and undersold the Garden crowd. What they did was sell twofers. Buy one rock [of crack cocaine] for $10 and they give you one free. So, the guys around here started to lose business. When one of them came around, they just grabbed him, took his dope, beat him up and sent him home buck naked. Well, him and his friends came back, a whole bunch of them. I seen this one kid, couldn't been no more than 13, 14. Had an Uzi, some automatic weapon. And he wasn't big enough or strong enough to handle it and he started spraying bullets all over the place. Shit, everyone was running for cover.

While the quality and level of violence may be far less in San Francisco than on the mean streets of New York City, Bourgois's (1991) analysis accurately presents how the underground economy of the present day is not simply a minor element of neighborhood life but a dominant force which affects the lives of all residents:

> Terror...seeps into the fabric of the inner city, impinging upon its residents--including the majority of the population who work 9 to 5 plus overtime in mainstream jobs just above

> poverty-level wages. A powerful ideology dynamic poisons interpersonal relations throughout much of the community by legitimizing violence and mandating distrust. On a more obvious level, the "culture of terror" is experienced physically by anyone who spends time on the street. Obligatorily a street frequenter will be exposed to the violence of the underground economy even if he or she does not participate in it (p. III-22).

Unlike past conflicts between fighting teenage gangs in which the most deadly weapons used were zip guns constructed from automobile antennas, inner-city residents have access to the full range of handguns and automatic weapons usually found only in the military. These advancements in weapon technology and their use in settling inter-group economic disputes may be infrequent occurrences. But the fact of their possibility and the knowledge that many residents of the community may be heavily armed adds to the emotional strain of living in the context of the "culture of terror."

Drugs, School, and Arrests

In 1969, Preble, a noted anthropologist who studied heroin addicts in New York City, departed from the traditional medical view of heroin users as seeking relief from psychological problems and proposed that it was not the

effects of the drugs which kept users in the life but the action and adventure that structured their everyday pursuit of heroin. In keeping with Preble's theme, Feldman (1977) noted how the policy of prohibition and the way it was enforced at the street and neighborhood level served to attract rather than discourage young action-seekers from drug use. Given the extensive and dramatic media attention to the fad of crack cocaine, it was not surprising that crack became a major focal point for street action in almost all inner-cities neighborhood in the United States. Coming as it did during a time of economic slack, one could have anticipated that trafficking and street dealing would be an important aspect of street life. Jamie, a Latino adolescent in our recent study, acknowledged the ubiquity of drug use among all segments of his community in San Francisco:

> It's like everywhere...Like every project you can think of has drugs. Not only projects, but like parks.

Unlike past eras when youth were rarely involved in drug trafficking, young people today find that drug dealing at the street level provides economic opportunity for them that are from their perspective attractive alternatives to both school and the legitimate work world. The sense of economic achievement that selling drugs provides young people was expressed with excitement by Annette, a Latina who explained

why she dropped out of school to pursue a career in drug dealing:

> Interviewer: And then you stopped going to school at Mission High School. Why was that?
>
> Annette: I got into selling dope. I wanted money. Money! (laughter) I mean, it was like, you can make like $100 in 20 minutes. And like to a kid, that like, "Hey!"..Money! That's why I did it. When you're a kid, it's like I was 16 and I was busting like a hundred bucks in 20 minutes. That's big stuff.

When comparing school to street drug dealing, young people are attracted to the immediate economic payoff, and contrast it negatively with the rituals associated with school attendance. Lonnie, an African American male from the Western Addition, dismissed school as irrelevant:

> Lonnie: Forget about school. I'd rather have a life of selling drugs...When you go to school, you do nothing. You sit around, have books in your backpack, take 'em home, do your homework, come back to school, get some grade. When you sell drugs, see I had satisfaction

> of seeing my work, getting some money for it. Money in my hand, money in my pocket. You know, that was a better life for me.
>
> Interviewer: What was better about it?
>
> Lonnie: I was having money...Money would get you around, not books.

In choosing the streets over school, many youths come to see the economic benefits of illegitimate pursuits simply by comparing the two systems and determining that life with an out-of-school peer group is, in fact, less harmful than being ignored or demeaned in school. Stanley, a shy adolescent in the school setting, found that dropping out of school to be with his friends was preferable to remaining in a setting he sensed was hostile and condescending:

> The real reason why I think I dropped out was because I seen my buddies dropped out. Plus, I was a quiet student...And I could never talk to my teachers...I never got the guidance I needed. I felt left out..I always felt left out...Another thing is the way like people acted...the way they talked to me. Some of the teachers out there, I could just feel like they looked <u>down</u> on me instead of looking at what I could be...I can't

> really accuse no teacher of ever doing that but you could feel like someone looking down on you.

The sense of being ignored or excluded is compounded by the condition of poverty and the embarrassment of not being able to participate in normal school routines that require student or family financial contributions. Jimmy, a poor African American youth from the Western Addition, explained how being poor led directly to a pattern of skipping classes prior to his dropping out:

> Interviewer: So, how come you stopped going to school?
>
> Jimmy: The gym teacher. Because when I first went to gym, he used to say that we had to get our [gym] clothes and stuff. You know, I didn't have enough money to get the clothes and he used to say, "Well, just don't come. Cause all you're going to do is just sit around." So, that was the first thing that made me leave...So, I just said, "Well, okay."

Finally, the emphasis on criminalizing drug possession as a means of discouraging young people from using them has evolved into an odd irony. Institutional and political pressures place school officials in the position of adopting

the societal view that repressing drug use through criminal sanctions is a customary and desirable approach, and a strong, hard-line anti-drug position has become acceptable. More and more, youth recognize that school officials turn to law enforcement and law enforcement methods in their attempts to grapple with drug possession or use in the school setting. The consequence for many inner-city youth is the perception and often the reality that schools are an extension of the criminal justice system and that association with them result more often in punishment than help. In describing an arrest, Carl, a recent school dropout, explained how his arrest on the school grounds was a direct result of a teacher turning to law enforcement to enforce drug possession laws:

> They called me from class. The officer said that one of the teachers suspected I had drugs. And police said they're going to have to check me...After that, they said for me to empty my all pockets...I emptied all my pockets and then I had to take off my shoes. They checked up and down my legs, in my underwear. They found a bag of weed [marijuana] on me. Then they handcuffed me and took me out in front of the school. They put me in a police car and took me to YGC [Youth Guidance Center].

The essential point we want to underscore is not that the decision to call the police was necessarily a wrong one only, that it illustrates the increasing tendency of school personnel to adopt anti-drug policies which employ criminal sanctions. When school personnel join forces with law enforcement and adopt this "informer" role, which excludes them from any helping or advocate function they might consider on behalf of the student, they impose a heavy burden on both the youth and his family. Perhaps like the school, they are usually overwhelmed by the complexity of the social and economic difficulties they confront. Far worse, school personnel close off future communication with not only the individual in question but that portion of the student body whose lives are connected to a street system which respects them for the very reasons the school rejects them.

Simultaneous with the disappearance of social programs designed to lift people out of poverty, young people have become prime targets for the war on drugs. From the perspective of the street, the war on drugs has replaced friendly social institutions with hostile ones. Young men and women in the street systems no longer have available to them the kinds of resources and advocates to mediate the punishments of the criminal justice system. Even more

important, this shift of emphasis from helping to punishing has evolved into a state of chronic hostility which contaminates almost all contact between youth in the inner-city and what are perceived as forces of oppression. In the absence of information, police often respond to the symbols and insignia of gang affiliation and drug dealing and view whatever the current dress styles of youth may be as evidence of involvement. Yvonne, a street-smart African American young woman from Bayview Hunters Point, provided some insight into how police in their pursuit of drug traffickers develop stereotypes which frequently encompass all street youth:

> Yvonne: They [the police] have a thing. They hate the gang coats and hats that everybody's wearing...They're like starter jackets. You know, the NFL [National Football League] jackets with no letters on them. They [young people] put their names on them and their turf right here. (Points to her sleeve) H.P., S.D. for Sunnydale, and Fillmore. They hate those coats. When I was watching the news...they had so many coats and hats hung up on the police walls. They take their hats, they take

> their coats when they arrest them. They don't give them back to them. They say that they're drug dealers...

Interviewer: Who wears those jackets?

Yvonne: You have these 11 and 10-year old kids that just want to be seen. They just hanging out in the neighborhood. They're from Hunters Point and they just want to put Hunters Point on their sleeve. It's like they're taking part of people. They spend a lot of money on those coats.

As youth become more socialized into the local street systems and adopt both the symbols and the necessary beliefs and attitudes, they recognize that their common experiences bring them in regular contact with the criminal justice system. Being arrested and persevering in confrontations with police, appearing in courts and facing the sternness of a judge, and reporting to a probation officer all become life experiences which provide a universal content that a growing number of inner-city youth can share. Involvement with the criminal justice system has become almost customary and expected so that when one of the co-authors asked a young African American male who had been sent to juvenile detention whether other friends were there, he readily

answered, "A whole lot of friends. They were there for selling dope...Almost all my friends smoke weed."

In breaking the drug laws, young people anticipate arrest as a expected outcome; and one of the more serious consequences of employing criminal sanctions as a way to deter youth from proscribed behavior, particularly drug use, is the lessening fear of future punishment as youth become more expert in dealing with the criminal justice system. Youth come to realize that the actual punishment--being in detention or serving time in a reformatory--is not as horrendous as authorities or popular belief have portrayed. In fact, they find on entering a facility that in linking up with other members from their home neighborhood, they can form powerful subgroups which allow them to avoid exploitation and to prevail in a situation designed to "scare them straight." Instead of acting as a corrective, the institutional experience allows young men to feel a sense of achievement. And the threat of future punishment is compromised. When they return to the streets, they have their own stories of triumph to tell; and the advice of older street-wise and prison-hardened young adults becomes more welcome than any discussion with school officials about progressing through the education system. School-age youth realize that their early institutional accomplishments can be replicated in adult jails and prisons with similar

positive results. And, in far too many cases, young people struggling to find an identity that can be respected and admired within the context of the inner-city neighborhood street system come to realize that the totality of their personal and institutional experiences in early life have prepared them better for continued success in careers which involve regular interaction with the criminal justice system than for any occupational role in the legitimate world of work.

Future Directions: Can Anything Be Done?

This chapter has painted a bleak and pessimistic picture of life for children in the inner-city neighborhoods of San Francisco. In the competition between the educational system and the criminal justice system to win the heart and minds of inner-city young people, it seems clear that the criminal justice system has been winning. If the present situation continues, the issue will not be whether the social, health, and educational conditions of inner-city youth can be solved "by throwing money at problems," but how many more tax dollars will be used to expand our jails and prisons in order to accommodate the predictable rise in the number of inmates who are destined to fill them. Presently, the interplay between the criminal justice system and the inner-city street system could not be

more finely tuned to guarantee the production of candidates for prison, to insure a continued escalation of violence, and to waste the lives and talents of young people. If the education system is to be the more persuasive force in the lives of young people, then it must address those issues which move youth away from the education system and toward the criminal justice system. What is needed is a bold, new policy direction which can address two essential issues: (1) how a reconsideration of our current prohibitionist drug policy might prevent drug arrests from stigmatizing young people and pushing them into repeated contacts with the criminal justice system, and (2) how the education system can through greater understanding of natural neighborhood street systems bring educational issues into those social networks which influence youth most profoundly.

Drug Policy Changes. The discussion of each of the San Francisco youth groups indicated that drug use plays a significant part in adolescent socialization and that drug trafficking is a valued and available economic alternative to poverty and formal education. Despite the prohibitions on drugs and narcotics and the various wars against them over the past three decades, illicit drug use continues to capture the imagination of young people in the inner-city and to persist as a social practice. Some believe that the public policy of prohibition has proved itself to be a

failure (Trebach 1987). Further, there is a growing sentiment to reevaluate these prohibitionist policies and examine the actual, not the desired, effects on youth. While we do not at this time proposed removing all criminal sanctions regarding drug use and traffic, it is important to note that one of the findings of our earlier research was that part of the attraction of illicit drug use is the thrill and excitement that young people find in challenging the public policy of prohibition that comes with the game-playing with police and other authority figures. Thirty years ago, Isidor Chein and his research team (1964) noted the interplay between a public policy which defined drug-taking as criminal and its attraction to youth who viewed breaking the law as an exciting pursuit:

> We saw the law as setting the framework for the problem, but we did not start with any suspicion that the law might be in some way contributing to the existence of the problem...It did not occur to us to ask how much drug-taking would not take place were it not for the challenge of the risk.

Feldman's (1977) street ethnographic research in the fictitious community of East Highland provided strong evidence for Chein's concern and found that:

> The interaction of the social control system [police and the courts] and the street system set

in motion a chain reaction that progressively magnified the criminality of drug taking so that its importance swelled within each of the systems. And once drug use was raised to a high level of importance, young men found that their behavioral tactics for achieving prestige, or even simple acceptance, became linked to drug use in one way or another.

Part of the consideration for removing criminal penalties for possession of some drugs is how the mass of inner-city youth might respond to a free market: whether they would hedonistically seek drug pleasures to the exclusion of other interests, or whether they might--once the risk has been removed--slowly lose interest in activities that have little adventure or challenge. And if our premise is correct that drug trafficking is essentially an economic enterprise, then the inevitable drop in black market prices would eventually make drug dealing no more profitable than the low-paying entry level jobs which they reject.

For now, we would support the recommendation of the Coleman Advocates who call for the "redeployment of police officers from high profile but ineffective narcotics squads which merely arrest large numbers of youth caught using drugs, to more community-oriented, proactive, preventive

activities." The recommendation would serve the schools well and steer teachers away from acting as substitute police. And it would seriously reduce the number of young people who are more damaged by the process of arrest than by the drugs they consume.

Local Neighborhood Planning Groups. In San Francisco, the Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth have developed a creative approach to rethinking the financing for children's services. In an era when government officials at all levels declare that limited resources prevent developing projects which would require tax dollars, the Coleman Advocates sponsored a Children's Amendment, which was approved by San Francisco voters, and will amend the City Charter and mandate spending one percent of the city's General Fund for programs serving youth. This will earmark approximately $12,000,000 annually for programs which will directly benefit children and youth. Not satisfied, however, with only the commitment of money, the authors of the amendment stated emphatically, "We are not willing to ask only for more money to continue the status quo" (Coleman Advocates 1989). As part of their general approach they recommended a focus on policies that increase accessibility, early intervention, and neighborhood involvement rather than getting locked into "ever-escalating and expensive demands for acute care."

Traditionally when the topic of community organization is broached, the inclination of those responsible has been to rally representatives of existing youth serving agencies and form a federation where the planning objective quickly gets converted to self-serving increases in each other's budgets. In many situations, the target groups we have described--rough and tumble gang kids or hard-core runaways--never have access to traditional youth programs because the personnel of these agencies frequently find their unruly or disruptive behavior unacceptable. Some programs that make their budget claim to serving these youth practice a kind of "creaming" process in which they select the more conforming or "motivated" individuals for service while screening out those who are less cooperative with agency requirements. In almost all cases, these agencies do not recognize the existence of a street system nor bother to understand its social structure as it occurs among the specific youth groups they purport to serve. As a result, age regulations and other justifications often exclude those prestigious street figures--like the "veteranos--who are usually more influential among street groups than the most conscientious agency workers.

In developing indigenous neighborhood planning groups, we would foresee an organizational strategy that identifies those individuals who have street influence, opinion leaders

who, whether through legitimate or illegitimate means, have achieved a status among the groups we wish to impact. In carrying out street-based ethnographic research over the past 10 years, we have found that when these street influentials are central to an intervention--whether it has been to stop or slow the spread of HIV/AIDS among injection drug users or to provide early intervention to young drug users--the program develops credibility on the street. What we are recommending is a neighborhood planning approach that utilizes a preliminary study of target neighborhoods to determine and select those key leaders who are respected by youths in the street system. In many cases, conventional residents and businessmen and their families hold high status among the street participants when they are viewed as sympathetic and helpful. Identifying and recruiting them can be accomplished through skilled street ethnographic research, which always aims to understand a group or a culture from the perspective of its members. We have consistently found that those individuals who have achieved high street status have managed that distinction because of their intelligence, their demonstrated concern, and their loyalty to their peer group and neighborhood. When they are excluded or purposely ignored, they can sabotage programs simply by mocking them.

We would recommend that selected representatives from the local school districts be members of these neighborhood planning groups. They would become directly involved with key members of the community who have the greatest impact on the youth most likely to become a problem for the school or to drop out. As a local planning group, they could sponsor street fairs--events that are popular and well attended in San Francisco--which might highlight education and schools. Perhaps the greatest benefit of these public programs would be to show to the conventional world the positive contributions of street leaders. In return, school officials and teachers, who are often derogated by street youth, might enjoy being cast in a different, less authoritarian role, one in which they can see and feel the tempo of the neighborhood and through mutual efforts help enhance the natural environment that shapes the everyday life of inner-city young people.

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