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Who will you see? A positive typology of African American and Latino men involved in groups society labels, gangs

Margaret Jean Hughes

WHO WILL YOU SEE?: A POSITIVE TYPOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO MEN INVOLVED IN GROUPS SOCIETY LABELS, GANGS

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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Abstract

Urban groups, labeled as gangs by society, have become increasingly more visible in most urban cities. Yet, despite their growing numbers, little ethnographic research has been undertaken to understand their make up and behavior. Instead, a stereotypic characterization, generated some four decades ago, has been used to describe this diverse population.

A review of the literature indicated this population has been sorely ignored in recent decades by the social work profession. The results of this project are offered to social workers in practice arenas as a resource for working with this population and in research arenas as a basis for future studies.

This project researched the characteristics of members involved in African American and Latino urban groups. It looked at demographics, group functions, and ethos. The research focused on the positive impact of group affiliation and the positive characteristics of the members.

The research was a postpositivist study using field observations, interviews, and surveys. Data were analyzed using an open-coding technique. Results uncovered a diverse sample. Many positive attributes and characteristics were found in the sample including; high level of intelligence, articulation, organizational adeptness, self-sufficiency as a group, loyalty, and respect.

Acknowledgments

This study and poem are dedicated to all the young men whose strength has withstood the most brutal violence in existence historically, racism. Continue to stand proud and resistent. Continue to survive.

I thank the brothers in Los Angeles, Orange County, Riverside, and Boston who shared their thoughts and feelings with me. I also thank the caring individuals who daily offer their support to create better lives for these young men. Your cooperation in helping to make this study possible is greatly appreciated.

Society's Gangs

How will you greet me if you don't know who I am?
Will you acknowledge my presence despite my attire?
Will you be open to my language and recognize my intelligence?
Will you perceive my strength? I survive racism and oppression.
Will you see the positive in me and refrain from looking for the negative?
Or will you choose to walk by me in unfounded fear and ignorance
Later to tell the story of the danger you encountered
On my streets,
Through my community,
Into my reality.

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Introduction

Social researchers, along with society, have negatively stereotyped certain urban groups and labeled them gangs. The groups depicted have recognized, and many have rejected, the negativity surrounding this label and have chosen more positive terms to refer to themselves (vis., organizations, families, homeboys, homies, etc.). In an effort to avoid further negativity, these individuals have been referred to as groups whenever possible throughout this paper.

Symbolic interactionism and labeling theories helped explain the widespread negativity associated with these African American and Latino urban groups. According to these theories, society (the collective), bureaucracies (the organization), and individual members (the interpersonal) have been responsible for establishing what and who are considered negative. (Longres, 1990) Media, the criminal justice system, and many researchers have presented these groups to society in a negative manner. However, the negative images they've presented have not only been adopted by society; they have been internalized by these groups. The looking glass's reflection has become a feature upon which they act. Lemert (1951) concluded that labeling can lead to a secondary deviance as marginal members of these groups react by saying, "Well, the police believe I'm in this gang and treat me as if I am, so I might as well be in it" (cited in Huff, 1990, p. 313). Once this rationality has

been applied by group members for determining their behaviors, the secondary deviance takes effect. It therefore stands to reason that if society wants these groups to exhibit positive behaviors, the first logical step is to reinforce their positive attributes and those of their members.

The burgeoning of these urban groups, the associated increase in crimes against persons and property, and society's responses have created a cycle (i.e., labeling, internalization, fulfilled expectations, and further labeling). These groups have been held accountable for the deterioration of the quality of life in urban cities and, to a greater degree, in sections populated predominately by lower socio-economic classes. (Fox, 1985) This blame has been rampant in literature on urban groups, delinquency, and the environments in which they exist. They have resembled the negative headlines of newspapers and television, news broadcasts across the country that echo from paper to paper and channel to channel. Yet, findings in recent studies have refuted this one-sided blame. Cohen states, "If all the gangs were suddenly to vanish, we would still have a plethora of youth crime" (cited in Huff, 1990, p. 11). Fagan noted that, "Despite versatility in offending patterns for both gang and nongang youths, there appear to be a 'violent few' within each group" (cited in Huff, 1990, p. 199).

Disturbingly, the social work profession has laid virtually dormant in their direct work with these urban groups. Decades have passed since social workers have taken on the task of going into communities, into the streets, to work with these youth. The last major effort evoking social workers into the streets as a body was described in Spergel's (1966) book, Street Gang Work: Theory and Practice. In it, Spergel indicated that street worker programs were widely utilized in the 1960s in major urban cities throughout the United States. The literature revealed one other effort directly associated with social work in the late 1970s, however, it was an individual effort concentrated in only one area of the United States. The article was also the sole article the researcher found in a literature review of the Social Work journal from 1980-1992 that was specifically about these urban groups. (Fox, 1985) Brilliant (1986) described social workers from the 1980s on as cautious and/or uninformed about their responsibility to do advocacy field work. The contacts social workers have made, for the most part, have been in clinical settings and not related to the problems leading to or associated with group membership. The very nature of the clinical setting could be a negative with this population. Direct-service contacts have been "inherently a labeling process, since identifying the problems of clients entails calling attention to their deficits....Social service workers

therefore cannot avoid labeling" (Longres, 1990, p. 442). Spergel (1992), as a result of his survey of current literature on these groups, criticized the social work profession's lack of involvement. He stated, "The youth gang problem has received extraordinarily little attention from the social work or human service communities in the past 2 or 3 decades....Social work increased its clinical interest in treatable individual youth and their families and reduced its concern with outreach to youth gangs" (p. 121). Fox (1985), also critical, stated, "As the quality of life in American cities has declined, social workers have paid little attention to the urban youth gang, which symbolizes and embodies what is most feared about human behavior and about the urban environment" (Fox, 1985, p. 25). Social work's role in servicing these groups must revive the innovation of the past and avoid negativity.

Other organizations, private and public, have taken on the task of working with these groups. Initiatives like Boston's Street Worker Program and the Community Youth Gang Services (CYGS) of south-central Los Angeles have recognized the importance of having trained workers literally "hang out" with these youth on "street corners, door stoops, arcades, playgrounds, etc." (Lewis, undated, p. 1). Such programs have had a substantial impact on problems these youth and their communities encounter. (Ribadeneira, 1991) The multitude of existing programs have developed outside

the social work arena and have resulted in successful interventions. One notable program for its work in the Boston community with these groups, Rodney Daily's Gang Peace, recently became the 1,000th "Point of Light" under the Bush Administration. (Boston Coalition, 1993)

Although many successful efforts to intervene have taken place, others involved with these groups and their communities are still groping in the dark. In a study of 512 youth programs for delinquency prevention thought to be promising, the majority were unlikely to prevent delinquency effectively because they failed to address the causes [italics added]. They also targeted individuals in a negative manner. Additionally, their adopted theories of the causes of delinquency often did not relate to the programs they offered. (Hawkins and Fraser, 1981) The Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) recently evaluated a diverse selection of violence prevention programs in effect across the nation. They too concluded that further evaluation was needed to inform violence intervention/prevention advocates about how to develop future programs. (Wilson-Brewer, 1991) Sociological theories have also contributed only limited, useful information because they have focused on delinquency, not the individuals. (Jankowski, 1991) Existing programs need to be evaluated by social work researchers in order to structure the best model for use by their agencies.

Some current research has been conducted focusing on the positive functions of urban groups. Jankowski (1991) gave an account of his ten-year study in which he offered an in depth look at urban groups and their individual members. Although this view included negative aspects and characteristics, many aspects and characteristics previously viewed as negative were addressed from a positive perspective. His book has been a most notable contribution and effort to date. Felix Padilla (28 March 1993) looked at groups in Chicago as a business enterprise. James Diego Vigil (1990) steered clear of the blame-the-victim conclusions and instead looked at how groups have withstood social and cultural changes. Writers like Luis Rodriguez (1993) have brought new insights to the table by reliving their own experiences as group members. With few exceptions however, there has been a void in research literature focused on identification of the positive characteristics of urban group individuals.

Researchers have theorized about the causes of these group affiliations and behaviors since the early part of this century. The more commonly held theories focused on genetic inferiority, prestige-seeking behavior, reaction formation to middle class society, and an urban underclass. (Cohen, 1955; Garrett, 1961; Jensen, 1973; Moore, 1985; Yablonsky, 1962) Many of today's views of these groups have continued to echo the views held by social scientists for

the past four decades. Johnstone (1981) notes that, "Since about 1950 the trend has been to view gangs as more pathological than functional, and to restrict usage of the term to a narrow set of groups, almost always delinquent and usually violent....Today, the term gang is reserved more or less exclusively for violent youth" (p. 357).

This research project explored the characteristics of each individual group member in the sample and determined that definitions could be formulated that differed from the negative definitions applied by most researchers. It also expl[illegible] unctions group affiliation serves.

Problem Focus

The majority of social work's innovative interventions with urban groups took place over three to four decades ago. Since that time, one has been hard pressed to find any social work programs specific to these groups. The severity of problems related to group affiliation has been of major concern to society. It has called for an all-out effort by social workers to reinstate their commitment to these problems and the communities most affected.

First however, new data which can define the characteristics of today's members and determine their needs must be developed. Studies using the "retroductive" strategies of Short and Strodtbeck are needed. They set out to expose themselves "to data not specifically relevant to existing hypotheses concerning gang delinquency and thereby to stimulate new perspectives and hypotheses" (1965, pp. 24-25). This postpositivist, exploratory study sought to uncover data other than that reported in the majority of literature on groups. The purpose of this study was not to portray these groups as lacking negative attributes. The criminal justice system and media have made it quite evident that they do engage in negative activities. However, many members who have positive attributes that can be redirected to create change have been passed over because we continue to lump all members into these negative portrayals. As Hagedorn states, "If the sole focus of the study of gangs is

on homicide statistics or drug arrests, we will inevitably be one-sided in our understanding" (cited in Huff, 1990, p. 247). By focusing this study solely on the positive attributes of these groups and their members, it was hoped that the findings would help balance the negative literature that exists.

Literature Review

A review of the literature revealed an array of innovative community programs with urban groups that involved the efforts of social workers as far back as the midnineteenth century. The earliest efforts were religious in nature and sought to reach and change youth groups viewed as delinquent through moral persuasion. Around the first quarter of the twentieth century, other organizations and agencies reached out to these youth, in the streets, when they could not attract them to the agencies. Boys' Clubs, Boy Scouts, and YMCAs grew out of such efforts. The Chicago Area Projects, New York's Mobilization for Youth, the Central Harlem Street Clubs Project, and other detached worker programs in the 1930s-1960s were geared toward social change as a means of solving the problem of urban youth groups. (Crawford, Malamud, and Dumpson, 1950; Fox, 1985; Klein, 1967; Spergel, 1966)

Social work has long been viewed as the profession most suited to work with these groups as street workers. Spergel (1966) noted,

> While the writer cannot empirically justify the superiority of social work education over other types of training in the preparation of the street worker, the theoretical argument in its favor is very strong. To provide a foundation for the street worker's role the curricula of schools of social work offer courses in the dynamics of individual and group behavior, community process, structure and function of social agencies, research techniques, and methods of work with the individual, with the group, and with the community. (p. 28)

However, it has also been noted that since the 1960s, many social workers have been unwilling to enter communities to work directly with these groups. Some reasons cited include: (a) a preference for more regular work that offers emotional security and comfort; (b) professional self-interest, career advancement, and mobility into powerful positions; and (c) caution and lack of leadership in advocacy. (Brilliant, 1986; Spergel, 1966; Wagner, 1989)

The caution has been due, in part, to exaggerated fear. The fear has been provoked by negative, one-sided media coverage of group violence and literature that reinforces negative images. It has been a rare occurrence when media covered any positive aspects of these groups. Media coverage has served to promote Yablonsky's (1962) definition of group members as "violent...socio-pathologic...prestige-seeking...with psychic gratification as their goal" (p.149). A review by the researcher of significant articles published by the L. A. Times between January 1988 and September 1991 involving violence, revealed that 20% of the articles focused on "gang" violence. (L.A. Times, 1988-91) As Davis (1988) notes, "This very real epidemic of youth violence has been inflated by law enforcement agencies and the media into something quite phantasmagoric" (p. 28).

The majority of literature concerning these group members has come from other professions (i.e., criminal justice, medical, sociological, psychological, and public

policy-oriented) and has been either descriptive, theoretical or stereotypically biased. (Cohen, 1955; DeLattre, 1990; Garrett, 1961; Jenkins and Bell, 1992; Jensen, 1973; Pierce and Fox, 1992; Thrasher, 1963; Yablonsky, 1962) Quantitative data documenting the number and types of crimes as well as the number of groups and members have been widely published. (Flowers, 1989; Larkin, 1979; Miller, 1975; Robin, 1964; Thrasher, 1963; Yablonsky, 1962) Quantitative data on sentencing and incarceration of group members by the criminal justice system have been made easily accessible. (U.S. Dept. of Justice, annually) Society has been kept current of recent trends in violent crime nationally. (Pierce and Fox, 1992) Some of this information has been of necessity to keep those working in areas of violence prevention abreast of current trends so their efforts could be focused efficiently. However, this information has merely described the behaviors and characteristics of these individuals without the balance of ethnographic data, an analysis Hagedorn refers to as "courthouse criminology" (cited in Huff, 1990, p. 244). Surely literature, in which violence, prevalence, disorganization, delinquency, and other negative attributes are emphatic, should not be the primary focus of those working with these individuals. (Maxson and Klein, 1990; Miller, 1990; Spergel and Curry, 1990; Taylor, 1990)

Spergel (1992) stressed the great possibility of not

observing actual behaviors in most ethnographic studies because researchers have not been present on a consistent basis. Although he emphasized overlooking negative behaviors, the same holds true for positive behaviors. Since historically the negative has been reported in literature by researchers who have not observed or reported the positive behaviors, stereotypic literature has predominated.

Researchers such as Jankowski (1991) who attempted to create a balance have borne the challenges of other researchers who appear reluctant to look at the other side of the coin, the positive side. Spergel (1992) stated in reference to Jankowski's work, "This is a definition that is likely to be challenged by many public officials and social scientists" (p. 126). These officials and researchers have seemingly chosen to validate Rodriguez's (1993) answer to the question, "What [do we do] with those whom society cannot accommodate? [answer] Criminalize them....Place society's ills on them" (p. 250). Literature that balances the negative aspects of these groups with the positive is needed to understand group affiliation. Padilla, in a recent interview about his study of urban groups, stated,

> What the gang does, as a way to boost the self-esteem of each member, is that it celebrates each individual member: It makes them feel good, it embraces each member for what he is. That's something that society doesn't do. The larger society is constantly stigmatizing, demeaning, belittling our young people....I think until we start paying attention to some of the wonderful

> ideas that these young people have, we're going to keep reproducing the old system again and again and again. (28 March 1993)

Another example of positive literature made reference to the role of the extended family. The extended family has been an important support network for African Americans. (McAdoo, 1981; Stack, 1974) Group membership was found to be a part of the extended family in African American, urban communities and used by members as a mutual aid and survival mechanism. It was used to build large networks of personal relationships which enabled members "to function safely and efficiently in the ghetto" (Brown, 1978, p. 39). Communication within the "ghetto" environment has lead to elaborate personal networks that can be counted on for meeting the needs of group members. Older group members were found to serve as role models and father figures for many younger members. These findings implied an important positive function of group membership in the past which may still exist in today's urban groups. (Brown, 1978)

This study set out to determine whether current definitions of urban group members and their functions could indeed be applied to all members and groups or whether new definitions showing diversity needed to be established. Spergel (1992) found fault with the acknowledgment and/or establishment of variant definitions for these groups. He saw various definitions as leading to confusion when developing policies and programs for these individuals.

What Spergel overlooked was the further necessity to develop variant policies and program interventions that meet the needs of the variant individuals. What has been done to date is comparable to using one definition for cancer so that the medical community can avoid confusion and develop only one intervention for its cure. The same cure won't work on all types of cancer. Just as there is diversity in cancer types, this study found diversity in the types of groups and their members, and one policy or program won't work for all the individuals involved.

The literature review did indicate very recent similar studies, however, there were marked differences. This study differed from Jankowski's (1991) study in that it excluded Asian and white groups. The exclusion was for the following reasons; (a) The eastern culture and experiences of Asian groups was too different from that of African Americans and Latinos, and (b) white groups haven't shared the same oppressive background as the two groups in this study. Asian and white groups may have confounded the study if included. The geographic comparisons were different from other studies as were the groups chosen. The primary difference found was that other studies did not restrict their efforts to uncovering the positive attributes of these groups. Although data were collected on criminal activities, it was with the intent of; (a) dispelling the myth that these individuals commit these criminal activities

because of some pathology that induces violence, and (b) to show the positive function of some criminal activities (i.e., economic basis through drug dealing).

Research Design and Methods

The sample was comprised of African American and Latino males involved in urban groups generally considered a problem by society. The identification of variances lead to new descriptions of the members as well as clarification of their needs and the function of group affiliation. These descriptions focused on the positive characteristics and strengths in order to balance the negative literature so abundant.

The use of a postpositivist approach enhanced the exploration that led to the makeup of the sample. The approach also enabled analysis and interpretation of data progressively throughout the study. The data gathered revealed unforseen topics in need of further evaluation.

A qualitative approach was used to obtain the data. Hagedorn offered four reasons for conducting field studies on these groups: (a) Times have changed, and today's groups have been understudied; (b) the studies that have been done on today's groups indicated they have changed substantially from those in past decades; (c) current research indicated wide variation in many aspects of group life; and (d) field research has offered different portrayals of groups than have been offered by the criminal justice system, media, or researchers whose self-interest, grant money, has led to portrayals based on crime statistics and/or secondary sources. (cited in Huff, 1990) Multiple collection

techniques were employed (vis., unstructured observations, interviews, surveys, and an analysis of the literature.) Two notable advantages to using the qualitative approach proved true: (a) The researcher was able to personally enter the natural setting of the group while studying the individuals with minimal disturbance to the natural state; and (b) the diversity of methods used leant itself to cross-validation and cross-fertilization of research procedures, findings, and theories. (Brewer and Hunter, 1989) The field work method has the disadvantage of being subjective both in data collection and analysis. As Spergel (1992) points out, "Actual behaviors, particularly delinquent or criminal behaviors, are not frequently or systematically observed" (p. 124). Two aspects of this study adjust for this methodological problem; (a) The behaviors being observed were not delinquent or criminal, and (b) consistent observations of the same group in their natural setting took place over a six month period and were used to validate the findings from the other sources. Precaution was taken to avoid subjectivity during analysis of the data. However, one of the most helpful techniques, using multiple collectors and/or interpreters, was not possible due to confidentiality issues. Being a researcher of color increased the chances of developing feelings of trust with the individuals. Caution was taken to prevent overidentifying with the individuals. Although the study

could have been construed as showing withholding tendencies (i.e., leaving out the negatives to avoid stigmatizing), it was felt that the purpose of the study warranted doing so.

The researcher had close contact with group members in their natural setting during a routine function. Had this been a structured observational study (i.e., one where the researcher is present solely for the study's data collection), there would have been an increased chance that the participants' behaviors were altered due to the presence of the researcher, an outsider. The fact that the field observations were only a matter of circumstance during the routine contacts eliminated this drawback. The researcher's presence, having been a usual part of the setting all along, did not detract from the consistency of the members' behaviors. There was no reason for the researcher to obtain informed consent from these members since data were not collected from them; what was observed was used merely to validate the collected data from other sources.

The interview and survey process collected uniformed information yet allowed participants the opportunity to initiate new directions during the interview. The researcher encouraged expansion in these new directions during the interviews and, if important findings were indicated, attempted to incorporate the topics in further interviews when appropriate. Although interviewing was costly in time required, the quality of data collected made

it a worthwhile method for obtaining information to address the research questions proposed.

The research questions the study addressed were as follows:

1. What were the demographics of the members (vis., age, education, family status, and family income)?
2. What were the reasons for entering and remaining in groups?
3. What needs did the groups meet for their members?
4. What were the members' attitudes toward group crimes?
5. Did all members participate in violent criminal acts?
6. What functions did the groups serve for members?
7. How did members view society and its policies?
8. What needs did members see society meeting for them?
9. What message(s) did they want society to hear from them?

The questions were the same for the surveys and the interviews. The obvious difference was that the interviews allowed for greater expansion since the researcher could encourage elaboration of ideas.

In order to achieve a greater comparison, two distinct geographic areas, southern California (Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside Counties) and Boston, Massachusetts were

studied. The members studied were males eighteen to twenty-three years of age. This age group was chosen to eliminate the need for parental consent. The drawback of limiting the age was that findings can only be generalized to this age group. Further studies are needed on members under 18 years of age, female members, other ethnic groups, and groups from other geographic areas. The study used a nonprobability, judgmental, convenience sample. Using this choice of sampling was almost mandated given the fact that field work design was being used on an often inaccessible population. The group members included had to be willing to fully cooperate with the researcher and complete the interview or survey. The groups chosen had to fit the description of a social problem (i.e., one that has engaged in crimes against persons and property at some point during its formation). Although, as Spergel (1992) points out, researchers have various definitions for these groups, those individuals who engage in crimes against persons and property as an organized group are generally considered "gangs" by other members of society.

The use of nonprobability instead of random samples has generally been considered a weakness of studies since there may be a difference in members who agree to participate versus those who don't. This issue was not considered a problem in the study since all individuals asked to participate agreed. It was hoped that the geographic

variation as well as the varied techniques of data collection also lessened the effects of this weakness. The data were strengthened because of the members' willingness to participate (i.e., more information was probably divulged).

Sampling, Data Collection and Measurement

The initial group of members interviewed in southern California came from two sources. The first source was contacted with the assistance of two personal acquaintances of the researcher who grew up in neighborhoods where these groups are prevalent, in Riverside, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties. These acquaintances continued to have access to current group members. The second source was contacted with the help of a gang task force worker with the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office. This worker arranged a contact with a local community worker in south-central Los Angeles who set up the interviews. Additional members were identified using a snowballing technique. One group, due to time constraints and unforseen circumstances affecting the group, were given surveys. Six surveys were completed and returned. (see Appendix 1) Sixteen face-to-face interviews were conducted in the southern California and Boston areas. (see Appendix 2) The Boston area interviews were set up with the assistance of a street worker. Observations that took place over the six-month period of routine contact with a large pool of members, approximately 30, was used solely for validation of the data collected from the surveys and interviews.

During the interviews, members were informed as to; (a) the purpose of the study, (b) techniques used, (c) expectations of the researcher, (d) ethical considerations

such as confidentiality, and (e) reporting procedures the researcher would be using. (see Appendix 3) All members interviewed and surveyed were included in the sample. The total number of cases from California and Massachusetts combined was n=22.

Data collection took place over a one-year period. Debriefing Statements (see Appendix 4) and Informed Consent forms were distributed and read to each of the members interviewed. Verbal consents were received from each participant. Members surveyed were sent Debriefing Statements and Informed Consent forms. The Informed Consent forms were returned with a yes or no reply along with the completed survey. Since observations used for validation were not done as part of this research project but were instead a part of the researcher's routine experiences with group members, Debriefing Statements and Informed Consents were not distributed. No statements, damaging information, or demographic data were used from this group. Due to the fact that incriminating information was released by those interviewed and surveyed, no identifiable information which could possibly link informants to the information, such as signatures, was taken. In this way, the anonymity of the participants was protected, and they were more apt to be open and candid during interviews and survey completions.

During the course of the one-year period, individual interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. The

behaviors of members were also observed and recorded during the interviewing periods. Field notes were written up directly following each interview. Field notes were written following routine observations when applicable. All information from the transcribed interviews, the returned surveys, and the field notes from the interviews were analyzed using an open-coding technique.

Due to the probability that members would be hesitant to release information of a confidential nature to a stranger, the researcher attempted to create a feeling of mutual respect and acceptance prior to beginning each interview. This relationship was accomplished by beginning the interviewing process with nonthreatening, open-ended dialogue that did not include questions, had nothing to do with the project, and followed the lead of the participant. The researcher began each interview when the dialogue appeared to flow with ease and comfort. Open-ended questions were introduced at times during the interview when they were believed to be acceptable to the participant.

The strength of the postpositivist approach, that of being able to expand and redirect the study during data collection, enabled the researcher to continue interviewing to the point at which the data overlapped and no new, significant information emerged. Second interviews were not possible. Therefore, the project was a one-shot case study, and the design was strictly exploratory.

The subjects have continued to be protected by keeping information confidential. All transcripts, recordings, and other data have been safeguarded and kept in the sole possession of the researcher until their eventual destruction at the end of the study. All participants were given a phone number and contact person in the event any questions or concerns should arise and also as a means of obtaining further debriefing information if needed.

Results

The researcher was able to validate the varied demographics and other data collected in surveys and interviews through the random statements and observations made during the six months of routine contact with the 30 group members. The quantitative frequency analysis of the demographics and other data that follows comprised only the twenty-two cases from the surveys and interviews.

Demographics

The majority of cases, eleven, 50%, were 18 years of age; five, 23%, were 20; four, 18% were 21. Only one case existed for 22 and 23 year olds, 4.5%.

Only a little over a fourth of the members, six, had less than a high school education, however, of these cases, 83% were still attending school. Half of the members, eleven, had a high school degree, but only 36% of these were still attending school. The group rarely if ever mentioned in the literature, those with some college education, comprised 23% of the cases, five, and 80% of these were still attending college.

Contrary to what the literature presents, little difference was found in the number of members who lived with both parents in the home, eight, 36%, and those who live with single, mother, head of households, nine, 41%. None indicated living with their father only, and five, 23%, live with someone other than their parent(s).

The majority, twelve, 55%, had 3-5 siblings in the home. Four, 18%, had 2 and under, and six, 27%, had over 5.

Only five, 23% of the members, had relatives who belonged to an urban group. This number included those with siblings in a group.

Aside from the three, 14%, whose family income was under ten thousand, family income was nearly equally divided between those with ten to twenty thousand, ten, 45%, and those above twenty thousand, nine, 41%. These figures were limited by the fact that they were estimates given by the members based on their perceptions, not verified by parents.

Involvement with violent crimes (i.e., crimes which caused physical harm to another person) was very high, twenty-one, 95%. However, only eleven, 50%, had been arrested for such crimes including one member who stated he was arrested but not involved.

The remainder of the data were transcribed and analyzed using the qualitative, open-coding technique. The analysis concentrated on addressing the questions listed in the Research Design and Methods section. However, unanticipated information that arose from the study was also analyzed and included.

Group Functions

The members' reasons for joining and remaining in groups were mainly centered around three areas; (a) support, (b) relationships, and (c) safety. Support was the number

one reason given in surveys and interviews. Two statements by those interviewed in the Boston area alluded to support. "If I have a problem, I can go talk to them [their group]," and "We try to do what's better for all of us." One southern California member surveyed commented, "No, not all African American gang members are out doing crimes. There are some who educate their young brothers." During the six months of routine contact, an overwhelming number of statements were made verifying support was of major importance to group members.

The aspect of relationships as a drawing force for these youth was indicated in responses to why they joined the group. Four of those surveyed indicated, "My homies were in the gang." In both regions, statements were made such as, "We grew up together. That's why it's like a family."

In regards to the issue of safety, one southern California member said he had joined, "to get away from being harassed by other gangs." Two of those surveyed indicated they joined, "to feel safe in the hood." In the Boston area interviews as well as field observations, the members stated, "We watch each other's back [i.e., We look out for and/or protect each other]."

Several of the needs these groups meet for their members coincided with their reasons for joining and remaining in the group (vis., support, relationships, and

safety). Additional needs identified were; (a) respect, (b) entertainment activities (e.g., dances, sports, or just socially hanging out), (c) acceptance, and (d) economic support (generally through drugs). One member from the Boston area stated, "Drugs is a sure thing. You're going to make money. I mean the cops are going to be on you, but there's going to be that time when they're not around, and you're going to make your money. That's what lures alot of kids into drugs; it's the money aspect of it."

As indicated by various responses, the group served several functions. It served as a type of extended family. This function was intimated in statements such as, "It's a family, not a gang. Gang is a label society uses," and "It's home." One southern California member indicated that the group served as a support. "My father's too old to rely on, so I have to rely on my gang." As mentioned previously, support was the number one reason for joining and remaining in these groups. Groups also served as a social organization where strong bonds were formed. Social activities evolved from these groups. Lastly, it served as a financial support mechanism.

Ethos

Several statements expressed how the individuals felt about crime. One Boston area member stated, "You stop caring, cause like you can go out and interview for 35 jobs, but if nobody calls you, you stop caring. Inside you might

care, but you're dealing with what you can do on the outside, not with what you're feeling on the inside." Another member from the Boston area commented that, "Beating someone up or stabbing someone is much more violent than drive-by shootings because in drive-by shootings, you don't see the hurt and pain you're causing; you're removed from it." The most common response in regards to intergroup violence was that it was done for protection or to retaliate for harm done to people they cared about.

The majority of members from southern California and Boston placed primary responsibility for what their lives become on themselves, not society. When asked what society could do to better their lives or help them achieve their goals, most responded similarly to one southern California member who stated, "Nothing, I've got to do it for myself." When a member in Boston was asked whether having a positive role model working with him would help him decide to leave the street life, he responded, "No, you could send in twenty role models. It ain't going to make any difference. The only thing that's going to change anything is me making up my own mind."

Most of the youth expressed their desire to achieve goals. Their goals included careers in the legal professions, sports, and business. Most wanted to start their own business so they could be in control. They also indicated they would use their profession or business to

help their brothers and to correct the injustices against their people that now exist in society. Several members expressed their awareness that, in order to achieve their goals, they needed to distance themselves from that part of the group's activities that involved crimes because of the resultant criminal record.

Members, particularly those in Boston, felt very strongly that social policies blocking their access to legal means for earning a living were most responsible for continued illegal drug trafficking. One member stated, "Drugs are so bad because there's no jobs. I'm not going to go to my mother and ask her for money. I'm my own man. I got to go out and make my own living. Right now, I ain't got no job, so I got to do drugs." Another member stated, "I can't get a job. I've got to feed my son." When asked if they would choose a legal job if they could get one over dealing drugs, every member of the Boston area group interviewed stated, "Yes." These responses coincided with what Rodriguez (1993), a former group member, feels. He stated, "If decent work is unavailable, people will do the next best thing--such as sell sex or dope. I've talked to enough gang members and low-level dope dealers to know they would quit today if they had a productive, livable-wage job" (p.251).

One Boston area member had strong feelings about the lack of commitment by local public officials in his

community. He stated,

> I would just like to see community people come out. The only time they come out is when the violence occurs. A friend of ours just recently passed away, a very good friend of ours, and the only time I saw anyone from City Hall come racing down was the day after....I don't wish that more violence will occur but I would just like to see more faces from there to here. It's like they're rich; we're poor. They stay there; we stay here. I don't want them to come out everyday like someone forced you to come out here. No, I want you to do it on your part. If you can constantly keep coming in, ten, fifteen minutes on your lunch break. Not stopping your daily routine, just stopping by saying, "Hi, how you doing?" so everybody gets to know you.

This member also wanted to know whether this lack of commitment was just in Boston or whether southern California groups felt the same about their public officials.

At the end of all interviews and surveys, members were asked what they wanted society to know about them. One southern California member wrote, "The only thing that I would like society to know about gangs is this. A gang member is a person or should I say a human being too, just like you and me. The only thing that makes a gang member different is choices." A member being interviewed in an auditorium in Boston stated,

> I want them to know just how kids think. Put kids in every seat in here. Ask them what they think! Alot of kids are very talented. They may not show it the way they act, but then people can see how much they're talented and how much they're not. People tend to say they're not good enough based on what they are [group members]. Everybody has potential.

Other comments made by the members repeated one or more points discussed in this section.

Discussion

The most significant findings of this study were; (a) the high percentage of group members who were educating themselves beyond the high school level, (b) the expressed need to be acknowledged and understood, and (c) the expressed willingness to stop dealing drugs if employment could be found. Throughout the study, the participants were found to be very articulate. Many of the members were well versed in current affairs and literature as well as historical events and how they impacted upon their lives and the conditions of society today. Several members were working as well as attending college. During the six-months of field observations, opportunities arose to observe different members during speaking engagements. They were able to express their thoughts with skill and affect.

Involvement in drug related activities was seen as the only option for their livelihood. Various members made reference to the fact that the money they were making from drugs was nothing compared to what the elite in society were making off drug trafficking. They felt strongly that the overabundance of drugs and weapons in their communities was no accident.

My findings and observations disproved the stereotypic view of these members as being predominately pathologically delinquent and violent. The ethos of these members was no different than society's at large. There was as much

variation among group members as in the rest of society's members. This study did not question that these members engage in violence and other illegal activities. However, throughout the study, statements were made indicating many of their behaviors were a reaction to the human need to survive under oppressive conditions beyond their control. As one member put it, "I'm just handlin things!" It seemed obvious by statements in Boston concerning the lack of presence of public officials in their communities that these groups felt a sense of abandonment by those who could make the greatest changes. They were frustrated with idle promises and had chosen to find their own solutions. As the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service stated, "We must remember...that minority men are not naturally less caring or more violent. There is always a reason, sometimes many terrible reasons, for this behavior" (Novello, 1991, p. 232).

The majority were only in contact with those in authority under negative circumstances; it is no wonder they were seen as defiant individualistic by Jankowski (1991). However, the findings were contrary to theories that define them as dysfunctional and lacking competitiveness. (Thrasher, 1962; Yablonsky, 1962) As noted, these groups served several very important functions:

1. They were able to perform functions for each other where our dysfunctional society has not. Society has not

built their self-esteem. The groups have. Society has not offered employment opportunities or other money-making opportunities to many of these individuals. Albeit often illegal, these groups have offered their members ways to earn money. Society has not offered support and safety in the streets.

2. This study's findings supported observations that these groups were highly organized both socially as well as economically. They exhibited leadership skills often lacking in our broader social system. (Jankowski, 1991)

3. As for lacking competitiveness, these members were found to be more competitive than their peers outside of groups since many of them were competing despite added disadvantages in their lives. They've competed without motivations and resources others in society receive. Even their dealings with drugs was a highly competitive business venture.

The findings of this study also questioned the limited impression that these individuals come from families living in poverty and deprivation. Certainly, many do. However, the demographic data did not indicate poverty and deprivation across the board, although it could not definitely disprove it due to the possibility of misrepresented information. However, accounts of family status given by members during the routine contacts also indicated a varied population in regards to these issues.

Most of the members were perceived to have a higher than average self-image and feelings of being able to use alternate means than society would suggest to empower themselves. These characteristics were alluded to in Jankowski's (1991) ten-year study. He stated, "The individual believes in himself and has strong resolve" (Jankowski, 1991, p.27).

The notable difference in the results of this study as well as Jankowski's ten-year study was most probably due to the methodology used. In both studies, qualitative methods were employed over an extended period of time versus using "courthouse criminology" (Hagedorn's study cited in Huff, 1990). This methodology enabled the researchers to gain an in depth insight versus merely studying delinquent behaviors and constructing theories about the individuals based solely on these findings. A second common feature of these two studies was the ability to obtain data in different regions for comparison. This study differed in its incorporation of three different qualitative techniques (vis., surveys, interviews, and observations) which also leant to a more valid in depth understanding because the results of the three techniques were corroborative.

Because this study was exploratory and under a time constraint, the significant results were not brought to the researcher's attention soon enough to focus on them in great depth. Further studies that concentrate on these findings

are suggested.

Given the indication by these members that; (a) role models were not enough to make changes, (b) economic resources were needed, and (c) they desired to utilize their positive characteristics and strengths, the following implications are suggested for the social work profession:

1. Certainly, the need has existed for interventions at the macro level through policy analysis. Change has been urgently needed in policies on criminal justice, employment, and other areas that act as barriers to many of these youth. The social work profession can best serve this population through advocacy in these areas.

Policies around employment, must be changed. Employers have to be more open to hiring these individuals, including those with criminal records. Better use could be made of incarceration time by training and/or educating these individuals for jobs that are of interest to them.

Society has maintained that imprisonment is to rehabilitate. Yet, once released, these individuals have been blocked from demonstrating any rehabilitation that may have occurred. Contrary to the stated objective of rehabilitation, for youth convicted of felonies, one barrier has been state policies denying them access to business licenses once their sentence has been served. Many of these youth received felony convictions for engaging in illegal businesses (i.e., drug trafficking.) Denying them access to

a business license, coupled with blocked access to jobs, has encouraged, if not forced, them to return to the same illegal business. These stifling policies must be revised if any change can be expected in developing the positive strengths of these individuals.

2. Lobbying efforts for more stringent gun and drug trafficking control are needed. These two areas are key problems among this population. However, to solve these two problems without offering alternative economic resources will defeat the purpose.

3. There are many intervention programs for this population that have been successful in directing the positive strengths of these members toward a more healthful life. Recent trends in violence intervention/prevention have incorporated a multidisciplinary approach. Through this effort, the medical profession has become involved. (Jenkins and Bell, 1992) One area of great need is counseling these members while still in the hospitals after emergency treatment for injuries of intentional violence. Social workers, specifically trained to work with these individuals, with knowledge of available intervention programs and resources, would be an asset in hospital emergency rooms.

4. As social science researchers, social workers need to focus on the positive aspects of these groups. To advocate for disbanding them would be a serious mistake

since, as indicated by this study, they serve many positive functions sorely lacking in society. To continue to focus on the negative aspects of these groups will only serve to reinforce them.

5. As this study indicated, there are many programs such as the Boston Street Worker Program, Gang Peace, and CYGS performing tasks the social work profession previously performed. Programs addressing the immediate needs of these group members, implemented through agencies and carried out in field work are an essential part of the solution to the problem of how to develop their positive strengths. Perhaps it is time that social workers joined in the struggle to direct the strengths of these members in positive directions.

6. Social work can take the lead in acknowledging these individuals and their groups as having many positive strengths to be developed. One very important area where society needs these individuals is in correcting the dysfunctions in our urban cities (i.e., drugs, violence, weapons, etc.). We need leaders in this struggle who are from these communities, who understand the individuals in trouble. We need leaders these individuals in trouble will trust and listen to. As one member stated, "It's going to take the streets to clean up the streets." We must begin to reach and work with these leaders by empowering them.

Summary

There is clearly a varied population within these urban groups. They have many positive strengths and characteristics that can be developed and redirected. This population certainly falls within the definition of social work adopted by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and stated in the citation, "Social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and to create societal conditions favorable to their goals" (NASW, 1973, pp. 4-5).

Appendix 1 SURVEY QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions.

1. What is your age? _____

2. How many years of school have you completed? _____

3. Are you still attending school? (Circle one.) yes no

4. With whom do you live? (Circle one.)
   A. both parents
   B. mother only
   C. father only
   D. other

5. How many brothers and sisters do you have? _____

6. Do you have relatives that belong to gangs?
   (Circle one.) yes no

7. Which do you estimate you family's annual income to be?
   (Circle one.)
   A. under $10,000
   B. $10,000-$20,000
   C. above $20,000

8. Have you been involved in a violent crime?
   (Circle one.) yes no

9. Have you been arrested for a violent crime?
   (Circle one.) yes no

10. Why did you join your gang? (Circle one.)
   A. to feel safe in the hood
   B. to get involved in crime and violence
   C. my homies were in the gang
   D. to deal drugs or hustle
   E. other

11. Why do you remain in your gang? (Circle one.)

A. to feel safe in the hood

B. to be involved in crime and violence

C. to deal drugs or hustle

D. it's like my family

E. other

Use the space below to talk about the following:

A. What good you see in belonging to a gang?
B. What some of the differences are you see in other gang members?
C. If you had the chance to say one thing to the people across this country, what you would say?
D. What you want to do with your life if nothing was there to stop you?
E. How you feel about the way society is run?
F. What you think is the reason some gang members get involved in drugs?
G. How you feel about the victims of crimes by gangs?
H. How you feel about acts of violence by gang members?
I. What you think is the main reason for gangs existing?

Appendix 2

QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF GANG MEMBERS DURING INTERVIEW

1. What is your age?
2. What is the highest grade you completed?
3. Are you still in school?
4. Do you live with your parents? If so, are both parents there, only your father, or only your mother?
5. How many brothers and sisters do your have? Do any of them belong to gangs?
6. Which of the following annual income groups would you say your family is in:

   under $10,000
   $10,000 to $20,000
   above $20,000
7. Have you ever been arrested for a violent crime? If not, have you ever been involved in a violent crime?
8. Why did you join your gang?
9. Why do you continue to remain a part of your gang?
10. What good do you see in belonging to a gang?
11. What are some of the differences you see in other gang members?
12. If you had the chance to say one thing to the people across this country, what would you say?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS WHICH MAY BE ASKED

1. If you had the chance to do whatever you wanted with your life, what would you do?
2. How do you feel about the way this society is run?
3. Why do you think some gang members get involved with drugs?
4. What are your feelings about the victims of crimes by gang members?
5. How do you feel about acts of violence by gang members?
6. What do think is the main reason for gangs existing?

Appendix 3

INFORMED CONSENT OF ADULTS

I understand that I am being asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Margaret Hughes who is an MSW student in the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. My participation in the project is completely voluntary and will be in the form of a taped interview or written survey. I further understand that I am free to discontinue the interview at any point, and all information given by me and any written notes pertaining to me will be destroyed, and none of the information given will be used for any purpose now or in the future.

If I do decide to complete the interviewing process and consent to it being used in the research paper, my confidentiality will be upheld in the following manner:

(1) No statements will be included or details given which could be connected to me.

(2) My name and physical description will not be used.

(3) No other person(s) will have access to the information given.

(4) All information and materials will be kept under locked conditions and will only be accessible to the researcher.

(5) Any unforseen situations which jeopardize my confidentiality will be handled with the same caution.

I understand that the research is being conducted to identify the characteristics of African American and Latino, urban gang members. The researcher will be asking questions concerning; (1) my family life, (2) my economic status, (3) my educational history, (4) my criminal justice history, and (5) attitudes toward gang involvement. Additionally, I will be encouraged and given the opportunity to express any other feelings, opinions, and/or information I would want society to know about African American or Latino, urban gangs and their members.

I understand that by giving my verbal consent, I am agreeing to participate in the above described study.

Appendix 4

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The research project you participated in is sponsored by the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. The researcher, Margaret Hughes, is a graduate student in the masters program in social work.

The information you made known will be used to produce a research document which will be available for viewing at the school's library sometime after June 1993. You may obtain information concerning this final document by contacting the Department of Social Work at C.S.U.S.B. or the Heller School at Brandeis University at the addresses or phone number listed below. The information may, at some time in the future, be used in other published works.

Additionally, if at any time hereafter, you have questions or concerns about the report or your involvement in the project, you can also contact the Department of Social Work for assistance.

I sincerely appreciate your cooperation in my effort to change the view society has of African American and Latino gang members and to make known the positive aspects of gang affiliation.

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