Gang Formation Revisited:
A Human Development Framework to Inform Balanced Anti-Gang Strategies

by

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Abstract

This article provides a conceptual explanation of how human developmental processes promote gang formation as well as inform a balanced anti-gang strategy. The article describes how, in ethnic minority neighborhoods, poverty and marginalization lead to "street socialization" and the institutionalization of street gang subcultures that undermine the normal course of human development. This article suggests that we must look to the human developmental root of gangs by examining the historical and cultural experiences of ethnic minority youth through a multiple marginality framework. The use of such perspective, establishing the realities of time, place and people, can lay the foundation for the balanced prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies needed to circumvent gang involvement.

I was in a situation where I reacted by protecting myself. I don't look at myself as a killer... When I went to [prison], I was innocent. They corrupted me inside. They say they're doing society a better deal by locking you up. Uh-uh. Oh, hell no. You keep youth out. Do something to them for what the hell they've done, but don't put them in that type of place... I thought I was a killer, [but] I was in there with some killers. I wasn't no damn killer. (Bebee)

I always instilled in my children to have self-respect, to have education as a foundation, because I'm not rich. I don't have money to give to [my boys]; the only thing that I push them [to do is] to study. That is why I'm involved with that at school. Their foundation is to study. I tell them, 'I want a college degree from you. I don't have money to leave to you or a residency, house. The only thing I can give you is an education, and that's more than enough.' They pick up on this. They know that, if they don't study, they are not going to be anything. They know from the oldest one to the youngest one. That is the goal, the foundation that I have pushed them on. That is why they say, 'I'm going to study to become a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer.' I tell them, 'Okay. Just look out for what you are going to study.' (Sonia).

Introduction

The street gang has become a competitor to other sources of identity formation in high poverty neighborhoods. As such, for some youth they often replace family, school, and other conventional influences. Since their modern inception more than six decades ago, street gangs have been made up primarily of groups of male adolescents and youths who have grown up together as children, usually as cohorts, in the low-income neighborhoods of cities. It is those youth who participate as a group in both conventional and anti-social behavior. The anti-social behavior, of course, attracts the attention of authorities as well as the general public. Yet, what remain unclear are which factors and influences shape and which can circumvent gang involvement and formation.

Why do some boys and young men join gangs while others do not, given that they may come from the same community or even the same family? As demonstrated by the quotes above, some boys grow up in impoverished

backgrounds, veer off conventional paths and join youth gangs, experience marginalization, violence, and regrettably prison. Bebee was one of those young black men in Los Angles who joined a gang and unfortunately was imprisoned for second-degree murder. Although he lived a life of violence in his poverty stricken neighborhood of Los Angeles, Bebee states that he was more innocent on the streets than he was after he went to prison. He feels prison life truly made him a killer and does not want other youth to go through this experience. Bebee has been helping other youths avoid gang and prison life ever since he was released. What could have prevented Bebee from joining gangs in the first place?

On the other hand, Sonia, a Latina mother, highlights that some of the same boys from the same communities or families are shielded—although not entirely—from the devastating effects of marginalization and embrace a school-wise identity. She, as a single mother, was able to keep her two boys from disengaging from social institutions and instilled in them an aspiration to upward mobility. The experiences of Sonia's children—usually the exception and not the norm—suggest that protecting youth from the damaging effects of poverty may be the key to avoiding gang involvement, violence, prison, and possibly death. This article takes us one step in the right direction by conceptually explaining how human developmental influences promote gang formation as well as inform possible well-balanced anti-gang strategies.

Multiple Marginality and a Human Development Balanced Approach

Over the course of the past forty years, the co-authors of this article have initiated a series of studies using a street and school ethnography approach. This qualitative approach often requires authentic interaction with the community and schools for purposes of discovering and examining social issues from a human developmental and sociological perspective (Conchas, 2001, 2006; Conchas and Noguera, 2004; Conchas and Perez, 2002; Conchas and Rodriguez, 2008; Conchas and Vigil, 2012, 2010; Rodriguez and Conchas, 2009; Vigil, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1987, 1988, 2007, 2010). Their combined work aims to illuminate street socialization and the factors and influences that lead to success and/or failure among low-income youth.   This article specifically employs this perspective within a multiple marginality framework to explain the dynamics of gang involvement and avoidance.

We argue that street gangs are the result of marginalization, defined as the relegation of certain disadvantaged persons or groups to the fringes of society, where social and economic conditions result in powerlessness (Conchas and Vigil, 2012, 2010; Hazlehurst and Hazlehurst, 1998; Vigil, 2007). Multiple marginality begins with the place where people live and raise their families, the type of work and status people attain, how this place and status, in turn, shape the patterns of parenting, schooling, and policing, and finally, the personal and group identities that emerge in these marginalized contexts. A broad linking and sequencing of these features show the additive and cumulative effect of these aspects on the emergence of gangs and the generation of gang members. The multiple marginality framework reflects the complexities and persistence of these forces. As a theory-building framework, multiple marginality encompasses ecological, economic, socio-cultural and psychological factors that affect adaptation and underlie street gangs and youths' participation in them (Conchas and Vigil, 2010).

The processes and circumstances of displacement can serve as a starting point for understanding the initial stage of marginalization. America's long gang history

began in the mid-nineteenth century, when ethnically distinct and financially disadvantaged populations, including Irish and Italians, came to this country. The children of these immigrant parents were particularly affected. In their struggle to adapt to a new culture that did not hold their distinct customs in high esteem, these children quickly distanced themselves from their parents' ways of life. Meanwhile, their parents had to find jobs and a way to raise their families in a sprawling urban setting completely different from their mostly small rural environments of origin. Many present day immigrants from the southern section of the Western Hemisphere experience similar challenges (Garcia-Coll and Marks, 2008; Hern·ndez, Denton, & McCartney, 2007; Su·rez-Orozco and Su·rez-Orozco, 2005, 2008). These processes of adaptation and displacement experienced both by past and current immigrants, for instance, unfold on many levels as a product of pressures and external forces that occur over a long period of time (Conchas, 2001; Moll, 1992), and affect family structure and stability, schooling readiness in the context of language and cultural differences, and points of contact with police and the criminal justice system (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008; Landale & Oropesa, 1995).

Established gangs are a source of street socialization conducted, to a considerable degree, away from home, school, and other traditional institutions in poor disenfranchised ethnic enclaves (Conchas and Vigil, 2010). Socialization is the process by which a person learns the way of a given social group and is molded into an effective participant. The most disadvantaged youths are often the most unsupervised and reside in crowded housing conditions where private space is limited (Vigil, 2007). These youngsters are driven into the public space of the streets dominated by peers and adolescent males with whom they must contend. These peers and older males provide a sense of belonging, in other words, a social network and models for new normative behavior, values, and attitudes as well as protection from other combative gang members who pose a possible threat.

Thus, we argue that many urban youths are compelled to seek the dynamics of the street by their *situations* (e.g., exposure only to run-down and spatially separate enclaves, lack of or limited access to an identity though their parents and dominant institutions, social and cultural conflicts between first and second generation family members, and so on) and *conditions* (e.g., inferior, crowded housing, low or inadequate income, and so on). Often, boys and men of color in impoverished circumstances have very few alternatives to gangs.

One of the first goals on the street is to determine where one fits in with the hierarchy of dominance and aggression required for survival. Being from a family of gang members helps in gaining admission to the gang and offers generational continuity to the gang itself. Otherwise, a young new member must get protection by seeking out associates who are street-wise and experienced and willing to be friends (Vigil, 1988a, 1988b). In turn, this prompts the youth to return the favor by thinking and acting in ways approved by his friends. Thus, newly established social bonds are reinforced, a sense of protection is gained, and new behavior patterns and values are learned. Most street-raised youths must somehow come to terms with the gang cohort that controls their streets.

In the absence of positive adult supervision, the streets also provide youths with opportunities for adventure and the freedom to undertake those adventures. A boy can wander where he wants and return when he wishes, answering to no one or, at worst, facing a spanking or berating from his often-absent parents, when he returns home. Within this illusion of freedom, other children become the reference group,

and their values and guidelines encourage activities outside the limits of adult approval, such as experimentation with alcohol and drugs, the use of weapons as the equalizer when needed, and deviant actions taken on a dare. Bonds with similarly street-active school classmates are often intensified.

Pre-adolescent interaction provides a fertile ground for later adolescent-year bonding, when more serious gang affairs are introduced. Many of these incidents of protection, daringness, fear management and mischievous acts are seared into the memories of such youths. The remembrance of these intense incidents is often the basis for the strong loyalties and comrade-in-arms friendships that make later gang affiliations so resilient and durable as well as preserve gang lore and traditions.

Research has repeatedly shown that marginalization and street socialization greatly undermine and affect human developmental processes (Conchas and Vigil, 2010; Vigil, 2007). Marginal conditions compel youth in the affected populations into street socialization and thus an unconventional life path that undermines and transforms the conventional course of human development in ways that institutionalize a street subculture. Let us be clear: poverty and marginalization establish street socialization subcultures and, as such, are not inherent features within ethnic minority cultures. Instead, we present complex and myriad explanations of the social, cultural, and economic factors that combine to victimize boys who grow up poor.

Several aspects appear to dominate the early lives of children who become gang members (Noguera, 2001; Vigil, 2007, 2010). As compared to other youth who don't join gangs, gang children lead more traumatic lives and experience negative events and episodes that characterize their upbringing (Conchas and Vigil, 2010; Noguera, 2001; Vigil 1988, 2002, 2007). The gang life path comes with a whole set of different roadways, turns, narrow choices, and seductive draws, all of which shape personal and group identity. Growing up in an impoverished area within the eco-context of an urban gang affects the youth in a number of social, emotional, cognitive, and physical ways.

Social Impact

All human beings possess the need to belong, both for protection and for social reasons. Therefore, the social dimension of the gang is perhaps its most important. The "desire to be well liked" is common across most adolescent groups, but this human aspiration takes very different turns and twists among gang members. The judgment as to being liked, with whom, and for what reason, is made within this street-based arena (Conchas and Vigil, 2010). In the absence of conventional influences, the caretakers and teachers that guide youth through these "mean streets" are mostly older gang members, the most significant players of the multiple-aged peer group. These *veteranos* (veterans, Original Gangsters, or OGs), feared as potential predators and respected as potential protectors, are the power brokers of the street, and everyone must contend with them, including youth who are non-gang members. As a matter of fact, much of the gang behavior of these youths stems from their relationship to these veteran gang members. Youths tend to emulate those they fear most while simultaneously seeking protection from them. In the world of the streets, the OG is an object of both fear and admiration worthy of emulation. But more than this, the older gang member represents power, and the youth seeking to mold his own self-image longs for his favor and acceptance.

Emotional Impact

Puberty is a time of passage and crisis, accompanied and strongly affected by bodily changes and hormonal adjustments and imbalances. For all youths, making the passage from childhood to adulthood involves a marginal status crisis known as the psychosocial moratorium (Erickson, 1968; Vigil, 1988a). During this phase, adolescents tend to wish to avoid, and in fact often strongly dismiss, traditional adult supervision. The youth experiences a heightened sense of personal ambiguity and confusion that affects self-identification pathways, with these developments becoming more self-conscious in the context of street life, where pressures and demands are sometimes overwhelming (Erikson, 1968; Vigil, 1988a, 1988b, 2002). This period is dominated by the processes of ego formation, group affiliation, and adoption of role behavior, made more intense by the developmental tension existing between early household socialization, often dominated by females, and the new street socialization under the aegis of the male multiple-aged peer group (Garcia-Coll and Marks, 2008). Statistically, youths between 13-16 years of age experience the most personal tension and conflict and are more prone to run afoul of the law (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983; Noguera, 2003). It is therefore no accident that these poverty stricken and attention deprived youths find solace within the street gang. This is where, together with other similarly emotionally deprived peers, they find the "completeness" that provides a feeling of security seldom experienced.

Cognitive Impact

Peer pressure is a well-known cognitive shaping force. Seeking friends to like you on the streets and relying on them almost exclusively for guidance and direction can play havoc on the cognitive processes of the affected youths. Namely, the construction of identity becomes complicated in the gang context. Gang members exhibit many physical and mental incongruities that undermine cognitive development, such as trying to act tough when one is not, over dressing in the street style, refusing to carry school books home, playing to the gang audience, and faking defiance of authorities. Some gang members often maintain gang and non-gang associations; some gang members portray a veritable Jekyll and Hyde character, nice one moment and cruel the next. Although more common among Asian-American gang members, flexible identities are cultivated for the gang life whereby some are schoolboys by day and street boys by night (Vigil, 2002). This is an interesting balancing act that highlights the precarious and shifting identity formation of the street life, home life, and school life. Young gang members are forced to develop their reasoning and decision making abilities within an environment fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty, which often leads to confused and fear based cognitive processes.

Children learn by actively doing things that are progressively exciting and stimulating. Unless children are involved in regular programs with a set schedule and trained caretakers, their cavorting and participation is a hit or miss affair often conducted away from home, where irregular, spontaneous street flare-ups and disputes dominate—older children bullying or taking toys away, the possibility of adult neighbors or strangers as potential molesters, and temptation for risky, dangerous behavior. This incongruity, however, is handled rather masterfully by presenting a social front. For the Mexican gang member, for instance, it is the *cholo* role, where dress, talk, walk, and demeanor become the street style to emulate and follow. Erikson (1968) once said of this universal phenomenon: "There are uniform

ways of doing things (i.e., patterns, norms) and s uniformed way of doing it (dress, physical appearance)" (p. 63).   This front assuages deeply perceived changes in expectations. It is a cardboard image that trumps all the human development tensions, helping merge ego, group, and role all in one swoop.

Physical Impact

        Much of what has been said above regarding the emotional state of the mind during puberty applies to the physical aspect of human development. While the interior of the young person is undergoing mostly masked changes, the physical body is burdened with multiple telltale signs of ambiguity and uncertainty. The voice changes, height increases, the body is neither here nor there. Adolescents are trapped in a body that places control and management of one's self-image under siege. All these physical transformations seem to send the message that the youth is a work in progress, and in response to this transformation, the youth feels an aching need to show mastery by achieving or shining in some capacity. However, in contrast to teenagers who are socialized in conventional areas of accomplishment, street youths demonstrate their prowess in a different arena. First and foremost they must show "toughness."

        A few youths are actually very tough, even "out of control". These individuals have usually experienced early childhood traumas or are unsure of themselves and over-dramatize their toughness to compensate for their insecurity. A street world shapes a protective physical appearance, a posturing that can serve both to deter potential aggressors and to intimidate. On the other hand, many more street youth are often tentative and uneasy in how they demonstrate and manage this toughness. This is especially so for those lagging behind in all or most of the developmental categories. Lacking assurance on how to affect the sought-after image and behavior, and not particularly predisposed by early emotional setbacks that would instill a sense of rage, these youth have trouble pulling off the tough posture. In any case, for those that succeed in attaining this image, whether they are really tough or faking it, the reward is the admiration of fellow gang members and especially the street community in general (Vigil, 2007).

        As we have outlined, certain developmental phases unfold on their own, such as hormonal and physical transformations. Other phases, in contrast, depend on the eco-cultural system that a person lives in, such as home, school, or the streets, and the role models found therein. How the ego is shaped and grows determines if there is an over-reliance on the group, in which case the person becomes peer-dependent and surrenders to the group. This can be complex to ascertain, and to complicate matters further, aside from developmental issues, most adolescents and youths share basic needs and indulge in many normal activities. These outlets can be the striving for friendship, selection of social gatherings, participation in the daily gossip of their cohort, and even drinking alcoholic beverages and taking drugs. However, the streets present different obstacles and dictate various options to complicate such phases and conventional activities. This article suggests that, to understand the developmental processes of gang affiliation and identification, one must intertwine ego, group, and role psychologies present in heavily street socialized contexts in order to assess how the young personality morphs into a street gang persona and how to find solutions.

Understanding the Human Developmental Roots to Promote Solutions

The facts gleaned in this summarized analysis of the roots and traditions of gang lifestyle may serve as a template for a balanced strategy to combat gangs emphasizing prevention and intervention. A broader, more inclusive approach to improving community health by focusing on youths whose circumstances place them at risk must address human developmental processes (social, emotional, cognitive, and physical) as well as problems associated with gang families and reequip adults with coping strategies to guide children. Families and schools are under siege and a serious effort is needed to remediate the problems of children growing up in poor neglected contexts (Conchas, 2001, 2006; Conchas and Vigil, 2010; Noguera, 2003).

Prevention must begin in the early childhood years and continue throughout. Communities and agencies must take a proactive approach in addressing the primary problems of the general population in low-income areas, as well as factor in secondary prevention for specific youths in need and any related issues. Interventions must be aimed at the crucial preteen years, from about age 9 to 13, and should involve treatment and work with youths who are close to, but not yet deeply connected to the streets (Rodriguez and Conchas, 2009). Dissuading youths early on from the attitudes and behavior that clearly lead to delinquent and criminal paths opens the possibility of a return to more pro-social activities (Conchas and Vigil, 2010).

Lacking in many of these youths' lives are pre-employment experiences that assist human growth and development, such as beliefs and behavioral traits reflecting discipline, obedience, punctuality, responsibility, and the value and honor of work (Conchas, 2001, 2006). It is for this reason that many observers and writers have emphasized that economic concerns matter most in getting youths off the streets (Noguera, 2003; Rothstein, 2004). Training, work, jobs can engage youths in productive, conventional activities and ground them in the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will stay with them for life and give them a stake in society (Conchas, 2001; Rothstein, 2004). Successful programs must consider three crucial variables: time management, location modification and people.

Stealing time

The time and effort most of us put into our life generally lead to results. These outcomes can be positive or negative, depending on what we have exposure and access to and whom we identify with. For a conventional life, we learn certain skills, acquire knowledge, and develop attitudes that become lifelong tools for survival and success. Parents strive to teach their children these things or introduce them to role models, guides, and resources that aid in the acquisition of these goals. In neighborhoods where limited social control and street socialization have taken over, these possibilities are considerably curtailed or lacking. In fact, research has shown that the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are shaped by the streets lead to a destructive, unconventional life (Conchas and Vigil, 2010; Rodriguez and Conchas, 2009; Vigil, 2007). Therefore, stealing time away from the urban youth most susceptible to street socialization and gang life is a difficult task because it involves programs and activities targeted at the three most important social control institutions of our society: homes and families, schools and teachers, and law enforcement and police.

Time and timing is the issue not only with respect to the general time available to youth--who and where they spend it, how and what they do--but also in regard to key points in life that are "time" pivotal to the youth's growth and human

development. The first target is the home, the most complicated as it involves so many levels and is largely a private matter. However, these prevention and intervention activities can and should start at the community level where various groups and agencies can meet to develop a collaborative, coordinated strategy for local homes and parents. Parental counseling initiatives would pull together existing programs and practitioners working in low-income areas to develop a curriculum to aid parents most in need. Homes would be selected by demonstrated parenting practices or lack thereof, and without stigmatizing them, parents would be helped to reconnect (or connect) with their children in ways that would allow them to have some influence over their children. Gang research has shown that strained family life often involves little or no parenting, especially in research that shows parents that are either overworked or hamstrung because many of their own childhood experiences or problems have never been addressed or resolved (Vigil, 2007). In effect, counseling must center on the parents as individuals as well as parents and the child as the end product in order to break the cycle of pathology present in families that have children in gangs.

The counseling could be augmented by parenting classes. Having never experienced it in their own youth, many parents lack an understanding of what constitutes good, sound parenting. For some parents, this type of training would go hand-in-hand with the counseling noted above. In fact, information and insights generated by counseling sessions could easily serve as the basis for parenting training. Generally speaking, a focus on homes and families is the first step in stealing time away from street socialization. This family focus should be considered a start to a process that would continue with other social control influences.

Schools are the next most important arena that take up the time of the youth and affect the development of characteristics necessary to adhere to the life ways of our society (Conchas, 2001, 2006; Conchas and Vigil, 2010; Noguera, 2003). As we know so well, schools have failed in this regard in too many low-income gang neighborhoods, where schooling often becomes a familiar process of disaffiliation and dropping out. As the outside street world takes over, less and less time is spent in school and at home.

The authors have outlined some of the practices and methods that would help set youths on the right path educationally elsewhere (Conchas, 2006; Rodriguez and Conchas, 2009; Vigil 1999, 2004), but more thought and work are needed on the subject, especially in collaboration with parent leaders and teachers. For now, suffice it to say that sound prevention and intervention strategies must follow basic educational thinking and human growth and development principles. Social, emotional, cognitive, and physical aspects must be specifically addressed. Respect, emphasis on positive reinforcement, attention to self-image, a democratic learning process, sensitivity to cultural differences and nuances, and recognition of variation in student talents are just some of the factors to consider.

Time spent at school is crucial. There have been many innovative but unsuccessful efforts to keep adolescents in school. For example, tracking low achieving students in learning groups is a common practice among educators (Oakes, 2005). However, this technique should be avoided as it adds to the "grouping" tendency and pattern generally common to gang formation (Vigil, 1999). Instead, individualized instruction should be attempted beginning with a personalized reading program involving high school students and community college helpers from the neighborhood (Conchas and Vigil, 2010). In fact, reading jointly and

independently should be the primary focus in the early elementary years, for that is when the process of disaffiliation with learning and school begins. For example, an often-successful time-intensive technique utilized by many teachers to aid students in reading development is to have a student compose a story about an incident or person in his or her life. The teacher writes the story as the student is telling it and both of them discuss what illustrations should accompany the account. Here, the local helpers play a role in the drawings and illustrations to construct this children's book. The student thus obtains a personal book to work from and share with the other students, perhaps students who have created similar teacher-aided stories.

In addition to facilitating the reading enterprise, the story and/or drawings also provide the teacher with insight into the emotional or social life of the child. With the right, sensitive approach, this information could then be fed back into the parental counseling process. Moreover, this process offers freedom to introduce elements and realities from personal life and gives the student a more "active" role in his own educational process. Such a technique mirrors the eco-cultural approach of researchers (Weisner, 1997) who encourage an interview format that relies on the interviewee to set the tone and direction of the exchange. In this way, the academic climate is also improved, as teachers acquire new insights and information on which to base their teaching strategies. Finally, as mentioned above, a feedback loop can be created to connect with the parental counseling and training sessions.

Alternative schools, initially formulated to address the learning and behavioral difficulties of high school students, have devolved largely into an intervention ploy. Unfortunately, the grouping and tracking phenomena in the early grades is further strengthened when a student reaches an alternative or continuation high school. These institutions mediate a state of additional cohesion by putting all the students with serious problems together. These types of institutions have become, as some observers have blatantly stated, a type of "soft jail." Sadly, this circumstance often goes beyond metaphor. That is, Jackson high school was an East Los Angeles school for bad boys in the 1930s. When school officials recently converted it to an elementary school, they discovered a jail cell in the cellar.

The authors believe that, instead of creating more "soft jails", what we need to consider is keeping students in high school in a different, more structured and meaningful way (Conchas, 2001, 2006; Conchas and Vigil, 2010). Recent innovations in this area include a boot camp arrangement in a facility that can house the students 24/7. Students would self-select for this schooling arrangement in terms of the nature of their attitude and behavior. For example, a football coach in Pico Rivera, California used to recruit gang members for the football team by virtue of their behavior. If he saw them doing something wrong, like stealing a purse, he considered it an act of courage and therefore anointed them as a football player. Self selection of this sort, a kind of ethical ju-jitsu, with parental participation and approval, is one possible mechanism whereby the volunteer boot camp learning module can address aspects such as tardiness and absenteeism, class disruption, street-like gang behavior, and other forms of anti-schooling attitudes and acts. A comprehensive and positive strategy of reaching out to marginalized students would thus go in the opposite direction of present day school initiatives such as pushing or kicking out students if they evidence gang attire or behavior. The boot camp approach would involve a type of grouping, always a problem, but structure it in a way that every moment is accounted for in guiding and directing youth.

The following story of a high school principal who reached out and co-opted

key individuals, converted them, and then used this as a basis to redirect and co-opt the street culture as a whole shows the potential of these types of strategies. In this suburban neighborhood of mostly Mexican Americans, a group of teenagers at the high school belonged to the local gang. The male principal, who had also grown up poor and on the streets, approached a couple of the group's leaders one day and engaged them in a conversation about why they just hung around the gym restrooms. He followed this up over the next few weeks with more discussions that strategically brought the other gang members into the picture. After a while, the group faÁade of the gang members melted away. The principal then asked them what they thought the school lacked in programs they would be interested in. A boxing program was initiated based on their requests. Later, the idea of a student-governing group to complement regular student body activities was born. A Boy's Council was created with mostly marginal gang students, and they began to meet weekly to discuss matters of campus interest.

These examples demonstrate that a different and often very vulnerable person emerges when you are able to communicate and interact with a gang member separately from the group. Acknowledging this reality, school officials and teachers should attempt to carefully separate and individualize the counseling and remediation of a pre-gang or gang member. The more privacy and intimacy, the more likely the individual behind the group-induced faÁade can be reached. With this opening, rapport is established and trust gained, and the child develops the confidence needed to speak freely about his trials and tribulations. Using materials gained from education courses on gangs, teachers can also utilize information constructively in making sure children who have already bonded socially in the street do not have negative bonding further reinforced in the classroom. There are many more ideas and examples where school officials and learning programs can make a difference in occupying the time of students, keeping them in school and off the streets, engaging them in reading and learning, and helping to address the pervasive gang problem.

Since gangs have taken over where home and school influences have left off by providing affection and nurture, instruction and learning, police and law enforcement in general have also stepped in as "street social control specialists." For some particularly out of control children, the police are often the only controlling force in their lives. Oddly, sometimes this is the only role model they have. If homes and families and schools and teachers have their role to play, then so does the law enforcement community. This is particularly the case with the police, members of whom have daily contact and interaction with street populations.

Police departments in gang areas have developed several successful approaches and programs. The most difficult goal for police is to get gang members off the streets and involved in other outlets, and in so doing to nurture more mutually respectful police-youth relations. Plenty of examples can be cited where the police have served this role of making social control a matter of providing pro-social places and activities for children, and thus have presented a different face to the children and community.

In fact, many non-suppressive strategies have been initiated but dropped for one reason or another. VIDA in the late 1999s was such a Sheriff's program that was like a boot-camp experience for young first time offenders. The current L.A. Bridges program that brings parents, teachers, and police together to intervene with middle school children is another fine idea that has been somewhat hamstrung by a lack of

proper funding. Another example is the L.A. Sheriff's Community Oriented Police (COPS) program. There are several components to COPS, but the primary goal is to narrow the gap between the police and community residents in ways that break the historical enmity that exists between the two. Bringing a type of "Officer Murphy" patrolling and community-based policing strategy back has generated good will and opened lines of communication where police are viewed by at-risk youth not as a threat or problem but rather as a part of the solution.

In effect, the above strategies assist the home, school, and law enforcement entities in taking time away that would otherwise be spent in street socialization and replacing it with action that can build the habits and skills of a solid member of society. Up to now, street socialization has consumed most of the time of youths, and this has forged street gangs and street gang members. If we can rob all or some of that time away, we can then work on the next target area, location.

Place and Location

Street socialization generally produces a subculture of violence. There are neighborhood "hot spots" which undergird a pattern of violence, where the potential for street mayhem and violence is a product of opportunity. A youth who spends more time with criminal offenders is more likely to participate in offending activities. In short, motivated offenders, suitable targets, and an absence of capable guardians converge at certain times and places to increase the possibility of crime.

Location can be examined from at least two perspectives. First, there is the reality of certain "hot spots" of greater crime and violence. The police have usually addressed hot spots by stepping up patrolling patterns and schedules to drive out criminals. But records show that usually this just leads the culprits to gravitate to another location to continue the street group activities, criminal or otherwise. So the hot spot, in essence, is mobile. There will always be hot spots, set or roving, in neighborhoods where there is a criminal element. Therefore, the goal in this instance is to lessen the impact of the factors and influences that create the hot spots**.**

Second, there are the areas contested between gangs. Two reasons can be alleged for the gang activity in these locations. On one hand, gang members proudly boast that they protect the actual space and their homes and women. On the other, there is the symbolic space or "turf" that must be defended from pecuniary intruders set on controlling local black market transactions (i.e., drugs, weapons, prostitution, etc.)

The romantic notion of the gang as protector of the community, although still occasionally uttered by gang members, is a thing of the past. While it may once have been true that gang members saw their purpose as defending their neighborhoods from other street people who entered the area to harm the homes and people there, especially the sisters and girlfriends who were considered fair game, the fact that gang fights and deaths have accumulated with no concern for innocent lives lost and narcotic and other illegal black market operations have taken over the streets seems to indicate that the main impulse for resistance to intruders is avoiding infringement into the gang's "business" territory.

However, illegal trafficking as the dominant explanation for gang conflict shows a mixed record of evidence. In the 1980s it was discovered that the association between being a gang member and drug seller was not a one-to-one correlation (Klein and Maxson 1994). Even though drug sales do occur in certain places and gang members are involved in the trafficking, it still is unclear if this is the primary

reason for gang conflict over turf.Matters are complicated further by several other factors. Gang graffiti usually separated gang turfs, but of late "tagger" graffiti has muddled the picture. Gang members now usually just have a general idea of the boundary markers between neighborhoods. Because of this blurred awareness, rival gangs often carry a roving notion of gang turf with them into any place they might run into an enemy. As a result, some gang members might even claim a whole section of a city. Thus, the traditional idea of turf is no longer applicable in the same way as before. Street gang life has become so riotous and unpredictable it is more than likely that there are multiple explanations for its conflict and violent activities.

Precisely for this reason, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Gang prevention activities could be introduced into this muddled mess in the form of balanced strategies that complement police activity to co-opt and transform gang neighborhoods and introduce (or reintroduce) other, more conventional socialization venues, mainly by eliminating the present either/or belief of gang turf and set up situations (i.e., social and personal outlets) and conditions (i.e., buildings and safe houses) that reestablish a sense of pride in the character and identity of the neighborhood.

During the 1950s there was a concerted effort to develop social clubs or car clubs in gang neighborhoods. For a while this initiative was making inroads. However, the effort could not be sustained and eventually died out for financial and other reasons. In the 1960s War on Poverty a similar idea was implemented in the form of the Teen Posts where the greater Los Angeles area had about 135 Teen posts. In a presentation one of the co-authors made to south central Los Angeles youth workers in the late 1980s, he asked if the Teen Post was still around and someone answered that there were 5 left in the city. The strength of this place was formidable because it drew gang members to it by offering minimum wage jobs to youth for 25 hours a week in a neighborhood youth corps (NYC) program, and this was in addition to the other services and programs mentioned above. Trained and caring people, in essence, stole time in a supportive and supervised place.

Today, there is such an explosion of gangs with obscure and overlapping territorial boundaries that the places where gangs are spawned and hang out need to be rethought if we are to adapt the old social club strategy. A new strategy would integrate the concept of stealing time away from street activity, as noted above, including parental, teacher, and police involvement, and bring community clubs (e.g., sports, recreation, social outings, youth and parent counseling, job outreach, education/mentoring, community service, and so on) to the places that need them the most.

Although such a renewed "Teen Post" style effort seems like a tall order, something like this must be attempted. And the formulation, implementation, and evaluation must be community based with parents, teachers, and police working together to deliver a balanced program. A pilot program could serve as an initial trial to determine the effectiveness of the module, and funds and resources could be drawn from various entities, public and private, with a strong evaluation component to assess whether the initiative is doing the job.

However, we need not put all our eggs in one basket. As this larger initiative is developed and tested for effectiveness, there are other smaller prevention, intervention, and suppression actions that can make a difference. Indeed, if larger efforts cannot be mounted, we can and should reach for less ambitious but equally promising interventions.

For example, local libraries could become mobile and introduce Bookmobiles (like the ubiquitous ice cream and produce trucks in low-income neighborhoods) to make weekly rounds to facilitate children checking out books, all with the parents' support and participation. These bookmobiles could also adapt technologies to help introduce and demonstrate the uses of computers and the Internet to bridge the Digital Divide that so often leaves less fortunate neighborhoods lacking access to services and information. Structured Internet cafes can enable wireless access to information. Almost all gang neighborhoods have stable working poor households that could become safe houses or study centers to help anchor the disenfranchised children in the area. Existing youth clubs and programs such as the Boys and Girls Club or Boy Scouts can be beefed up and augmented with additional resources and funds.

The fundamental point of implementing all these different initiatives in the same areas is to saturate them with all types of positive influences and thus bombard youth with multiple constructive alternatives to street life. We must create and offer new realities, scenarios, and scripts if we want new outcomes for our children. Recapturing youth in this manner goes hand-in-hand with them saying "YES" to options that heretofore were non-existent or minimal.

People

People are the essence of the equation. Every effort to steal time away from street life and change the locations where youth congregate requires the concerted commitment of parents, teachers, and police. People can and do make the difference. And, contrary to popular belief, the pool of people that can potentially join the fight for community health is potentially large. Heading the list are the residents of the community itself, parents, teachers, and police included. Members of stable poor working households can be tapped as community leaders. Also, it is important to note, that up to 80% of all gang members eventually "mature out" of serious gang activity, and these individuals can either help accelerate the process for youngsters at risk or be converted into participants in a positive solution. There are ways to co-opt current and former gang members to subvert the gang values and norms and assist the younger members in maturing out of the gang. Some of these individuals have tired of the unpredictable, destructive street mayhem or have served time in penal institutions and undergone an awakening. These people can and often do become strong models and examples of positive reform.

In times past, there have been programs that recruited and screened former street gang members to help steer new generations away from gangs. The Community Youth Gang Services in the 1980s and early 1990s was one such Los Angeles effort. The 1960s War on Poverty had a similar component in the aforementioned Teen Posts and youth outreach programs. The current L.A. Bridges program has integrated some aspects of this community philosophy into its operation, and there are many skeletal remnants of this practice in other areas of the city. The idea is a good one, but improvements must be made to reinforce these programs.

Unfortunately, due to certain scandals and irregularities associated with former gang members turned street counselors, many officials and citizens now frown at the idea of a former felon involved in a youth gang prevention or intervention program. However, if the screening process is carefully crafted and includes the involvement of parents, teachers and police along with other members

of the community, ex-gang members can become a strong motor to speed up the maturing-out process in gang-infested neighborhoods.

Especially important in formulating this facet of a balanced strategy is to ensure proper preparation and training for the selected persons who would provide the counseling and guidance to street youth. The concept is simple: if some of these guys are the OGs and *veteranos* that the younger brood emulate and follow, why not attempt to co-opt the willing ones to direct youth in the other direction? It goes without saying this is more likely to be successful if all the other recommended programs are in place, thus providing the reformed gang counselors with a menu of options and choices to steer the younger generation towards a positive path.

Revisiting Human Development and Contemporary Gangs

Certain core demographic facts and historical transformations have undermined community health and well-being and set the stage for the institutionalization of street socialization. Social neglect, ostracism, economic marginalization, and cultural repression are largely responsible for the fueling and persistence of this street subculture. Gang formation accelerated when the economic structure of the city changed with large-scale immigration from the 1960s onwards. Especially hard hit are the children in neighborhoods whose time is spent mostly under the influence of older street people. The latter are the culture carriers of the earliest gangs, which tend to emerge primarily in low-income ethnic minority neighborhoods. Some of the Los Angeles gangs can be traced as far back as the 1930s. However, since the 1980s, the number of gang members has increased dramatically from fifty thousand to over one hundred thousand in the greater Los Angeles region. No ethnic community has been immune to the problem, although the Chicano, African American, Vietnamese, and Central American communities have been especially affected.

The gang experience is shaped by the way in which the particular history and culture of each ethnic group and family interact with the overriding economic and social forces in the larger society. Time, place, and gender are central to this dynamic. Basically, the street gang is an outcome of marginalization. That is, the relegation of certain persons or groups to the fringes of society, where social and economic conditions result in a sense of powerlessness. This process occurs on multiple levels as a product of pressures and forces in play over a long period of time. As we have shown, the term multiple marginality reflects the complexities and persistence of these forces that leave urban youths with few options or resources to better their lives. As a result, they often seek to belong somewhere where they are not marginalized and find this place on the streets and within gangs. Multiple marginality thus sets the stage for the emergence of street gangs and generates gang members. The same kinds of pressures and forces that push male youth into gangs also apply to females, who must also shoulder the additional burden of manipulation and exploitation by male gang members.

In the wake of marginalization, the street socialization process reflects several features of the lives of gang members. Family and home life become destabilized, especially for the most marginalized segments of the population (Vigil 2007); haphazard schooling soon follows (Conchas and Vigil, 2012). With voids in their home and school experiences, youngsters find their way out into the streets, alleyways, rooftops, empty lots, and street corners, and what starts off as a play-group, initially merely mischievous and adventurous, ends up evolving into a local street gang subculture with specific rules and regulations. In time, a multiple-aged

peer group makes up the gang. The end result is a street population bereft of conventional socialization influences from home, school, and law enforcement. As mainstream society has stood by impassively, street gangs have evolved into a quasi-institutionalized youth subculture where older males help guide and induct the novitiates into street gangways.

Conclusion

Prevention, intervention, and law enforcement strategies can be implemented throughout the life of the individual, taking note of the human developmental model outlined in this article. The social life of a person begins in the place he or she is born and reared, and as noted, gang members emerge in some of the most deteriorated, rundown sections of a city or region. The occupations of these gang members' parents, and their grandparents before them, are also of the lowest paid and hold the lowest status, all of which contribute to a life fraught with extremely limited resources and opportunities for education and social mobility. Place and status often are detrimentally associated with family structure and organization, where strained household orderings and living arrangements reflect an attenuated social control, coupled with a poor learning readiness home situation and the commonly recognized inferior schooling available in poor areas. Self-identity processes are rendered fragile and fragmented under these circumstances. Given these difficulties, it is in fact amazing that only a small but sizeable portion of youth in gang neighborhoods are street socialized and thus inducted into a gang pattern early on.

Other processes are also affected along with social growth and stability. For instance, living in an obviously impoverished, visually distinct and spatially separate neighborhood can have untold consequences on the emotional, cognitive, and physical integrity of a person. Volumes of research underscore how such neighborhoods compromise the mental and physical wellbeing of residents. Similarly, cognitive and physical personal transformations are affected by environmental constraints and surroundings.

The integrative multiple marginality framework provides the depth and width needed to explain why and how there are social control breakdowns. Many other factors need to be considered, such as the ecological, socioeconomic, socio-cultural, and socio-psychological marginality that additively affect some members of particularly low-income, ethnic minority groups. These factors all intersect strongly with one another and lead some struggling families to maladaptive, destructive behavior. We must understand all the forces at work here in order to understand and target the individual circumstances through a broadly based strategy. The breakdown of social control unfolds in the throes of larger forces, so any successful examination and intervention of the issue must consider the complete picture.

Fundamentally a macro approach is suggested for the partnership of public and private entities in formulating, implementing, and evaluating gang programs (Klein and Maxson, 2006). Specific micro objectives can aim at the ecological, economic, social, cultural, and psychological details, particularly as they affect families, schools, and law enforcement. Concentrating on what youngsters do with their time, where they do it, and whom they do it with and where, could be a very solid start. This approach can provide a common sense way to reevaluate the role and experience of low-income youth—who are mostly ethnic minority—within a broader strategy of healing our communities. Any initiatives undertaken should be

understood as a societal strategy for the good of all, where coordination and cooperation is of the utmost importance in assuring success.

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