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summary of the learning that takes place when a subcultural reference group, such as those found on the streets, begins to shape and dominate one's thoughts and actions. Last, to account for "becoming a man" during the psychosocial moratorium of adolescent passage, acting out of hypermasculine behavior directs some youngsters through conflicts of identification.

In the past ten years, ethnographic investigations, in combination with other methods, have contributed new information about contemporary gangs, thus adding to the broader understanding of how basic elements of the gang are deeply embedded within the fabric of society. When anthropologists began to turn their focus onto the cities, they found what social reformers had noted during the large-scale immigration to the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Culture contact, conflicts, and a breakdown of social control had produced such changes in the lives of the children of immigrants that an errant street population had emerged. At that time these youths were known as pavement children and boy gangs. Where those earlier gangs were mostly white ethnics of southern and eastern European backgrounds, the gangs of the 1990s (note that labeling them as children is now eschewed) are mostly Mexicans and Latinos, African Americans, some Asian Americans, and a few skinheads and neo-Nazis of the disaffected white working and lower-middle classes.

In all that has been written about gangs, it has become increasingly evident that no one single factor can explain gangs and gang members. Working on integrated models that approximate the working notion and point of view of holism, it is commonly suggested that several factors, or clusters of variables, dynamically act and react with one another in the making and shaping of gangs and gang members.

First, what makes a gang and where might one be found? As noted, it is the inner-city area, commonly an ethnic or racial ghetto or *barrio* (neighborhood), where gangs are forged (since the 1980s aspects of the gang lifestyle have spread to suburban environments, affecting white working and lower-middle class youths). It is fairly clear that, both in the present and the past, certain neighborhoods have spawned gangs and that these neighborhoods were spatially separate and visually distinct from those occupied by the

dominant social groups, whose housing developments and neighborhoods were better tended. The gangs originated in sections of the city in which incomes were low, poverty rates were high, and unemployed, untrained, and unhirable youths abounded. Unsupervised by conventional authority, such youths would congregate to while the time away. In time, a street gang subculture emerged. Being born into a neighborhood at such a socioeconomic level subjects one to many social, cultural, and psychological reverberations and ripple effects, such as strains and breakdowns in family life. Educational problems often develop early in the lives of children who are at risk to become gang members. This downturn then contributes to associations at school with similarly troubled youths in special classes or programs, and bonds are formed that make for a more solid pregang foundation. Similarly, on the streets or in the schools there may be older brothers or other relatives who have already charted a path toward gang involvement and who, by their presence, function as role models. Without a meaningful education and the acquisition of adequate skills and knowledge, these at-risk youths are poorly positioned for employment or even training opportunities. Street socialization to a street subculture takes over the reins of their lives.

Anthropology has amassed insights into a number of fields that can help to illuminate gang dynamics. Age-graded cohorts, initiation, and rites of passage, as documented worldwide, provide a context for considering the habits and customs of many contemporary gangs. Similarly, cross-cultural studies of adolescence and human development, early child-bearing practices and later adult-character formation, and especially the marginal crisis status in the passage from adolescence to adulthood, where age-sex clarification is expected and required, provide frameworks for the consideration of gang phenomena. The burgeoning debate on gender role and socialization is testimony to this fact: interest and research in the 1990s on female gang members has enhanced knowledge of them, but there are still major gaps to be filled. Females apparently comprise a little more than one in twenty gang members, and an even smaller proportion of gang research has focused on them.

Gangs exhibit age-grading and initiation features in some ways similar to patterns found in kinship-based non-Western societies. Each gang, to a degree and intensity determined by the neighborhood and

sition of important but physically or socially perilous skills—such as those required for the hunt, warfare, or social interaction—in a buffered learning environment. At the individual level, the degrees of involvement, choices of games, and meanings attached to them may differ, depending on the ages, gender roles, levels of expertise, and personal idiosyncrasies of the participants. Last, games are functionally related to and reflect the values of the cultures of which they are a part. As such, they are neither trivial nor random in design or distribution.

GARRY E. CHICK

SEE ALSO: *Leisure; Play; Sports*

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GANGS

Gangs are typically viewed as groups of inner-city, low-income adolescent males who congregate for antisocial and criminal endeavors. Although

gangs fulfill many other functions—male socializing and counseling, courting, dating, sports and recreation, cruising in cars, and so on—it is the mayhem, violence, and other destructive and illicit activities that have captured attention, especially that of the media and law-enforcement authorities. Drug use, shootouts, and drive-by shootings have especially attracted public notice.

Explanations of the origins of gangs tend to focus on such features and forces as economic barriers and limited opportunities; breakdowns of family, schools, and other community institutions; subcultural developments and street socialization; and varied personal and psychological motivations. It has been suggested that, in the absence of other prosocial influences, gangs have become the parenting, schooling, and policing force of the streets. Because clusters of variables act and react to one another in an integrated holistic way in creating gangs and shaping gang members, no one factor can totally illuminate an understanding of gangs. Several theoretical constructs have been used to analyze gang formation and behavior, and most of these frameworks were generated in the 1950s and 1960s or earlier.

Some of the conceptual constructs that have been devised to explain gangs variously emphasize ecological, economic, social, cultural, and psychological issues and factors. The contribution of anthropologists to these formulations have been minimal, with the exception of the Chicago School researchers earlier in the twentieth century, when anthropology and sociology were typically housed in the same university department. These scholars utilized ethnographic approaches to urban issues and problems, including crime and gangs. The classic and seminal work by Frederic Thrasher, *The Gang* (1927), was a product of this effort, and even though the notion of social reform lies just below the surface of this social survey, current investigators still find it resonant.

The theories that have been advanced for understanding gangs and gang behavior can be subsumed generally under the labels of strain, control, subculture, and psychosocial. Strain explanations stress the discrepancies between present economic means and higher-status goals that especially handicap lower-income populations. Control theory focuses on the weakened social bonds of youths when family, schooling, police, and other socialization forces become problematic. "Birds of a feather flock together" is a short

ethnic group, follows a clique-formation pattern that incorporates early, middle, and late teens as well as seasoned veterans (*veteranos* in the case of Mexicans and Latinos and O.G.'s, or Original Gangsters, in the African-American instance) in the hierarchy based on age, experience, reputation, and prestige. These *cliques*, or sets, differ from age sets in that the larger culture affords them no legitimacy, and they are not lifelong entities. The group formed by youngsters aged fourteen to sixteen is the largest in membership and the most dedicated and active in gang involvement and commitment. In most instances, to bring the younger, lower cliques into this more active segment, there must be an initiation ordeal. Generally, this rite of passage involves a beating by a group of older fellow-gang members, and in the aftermath the novitiates wear the bruises and abrasions of the pummelings as badges of honor—each now belongs and is accepted as a "man."

All adolescents face major role and behavior shifts and adjustments, and the ease or difficulty with which they are met stems in part from early-childhood experiences. The early life and family experiences of gang members, especially the core members, are very strained and often involve a single-parent household. Economic and other social household hardships (e.g., crowding), often result in very little guidance and supervision for the child, who thus is likely to spend more time out on the streets. In the early childhood of many gang members, family ties are loosened and schooling influences are minimal; thus street socialization is the process in which the learning and acting out occurs. Children who grow up and develop in the streets must learn a street culture for survival. To do so, a street identity is fashioned.

At this point—the nexus of age grading, adolescence, and human development—gender roles and socialization become paramount. This process is especially difficult when the household is headed by a single parent, typically the mother, or when the mother regularly must handle all affairs because the father, although present, participates in the family only in an attenuated way. The gender influence of a female-centered household becomes all the more difficult for a boy who must contend with the streets, which are largely dominated by males. Many anthropologists have noted that cultures in which boys are largely raised in the absence of adult-male participation often require an initiation ordeal for pubescent

males, in order to break the female influence and quickly infuse a sense of masculinity in the young male. Street socialization makes its imprint in the period of early childhood and is further intensified during adolescence, when body and chemical changes accelerate a person's maturation and encounter with destiny, that is, when he or she must choose how to fashion, manufacture, create, or adopt an age- and sex-role persona.

In many poor, distressed neighborhoods, a proportion of the youth (depending on the community, anywhere from about 4 percent to 15 percent) are street socialized to the point that for them the gang has become a substitute for family, school, and police. This street life and culture leads to violent and destructive activities, which have always been a part of gang behavior. The increased access to firearms and drugs that has occurred since the 1970s has escalated the former fist fights and rumbles with knives and sticks into drive-by shootings, in which homicides and serious injuries are far more common, and increasingly involve innocent bystanders, including children.

Gang members have also instituted certain norms and values that set them apart. The protection and friendship that gangs provide to members solidify the bonds that may have developed earlier—bonds that certainly harden by the early teens, when street socialization reaffirms these ties. Objectives and goals of the group are established to defend the turf or neighborhood territory and to keep outsiders from threatening or harming its members. Individuals come to think of themselves as subsumed in a group entity, and they protect, serve, counsel, and offer nurturance to one another. To effect this end, older, experienced gang members—sometimes relatives—tutor the younger gang members in what to do, how and when to do it, and so on. Learning the gang's values in this fashion brings a person status and prestige within the group, as does joining in the protection and demonstration of friendship by fighting the intrusions of rival gang members.

As adolescence proceeds, gang youths typically have increasing amounts of time to engage in gang activities. Most of them quit or are expelled from school, and their limited skills preclude most employment opportunities. They thus fill their time with such activities as drug and alcohol use and abuse, gang-banging (i.e., responding to other gangs' threats or

acts), and other criminal pursuits. These activities become a central part of the day's agenda—things to do when all else fails. Last, a belief and value system becomes internalized. Blueprints for action include showing that one can act "crazy" in situations that call for daring and unpredictability, often for fending off real or imagined threats. Mexican-American gangs refer to such behavior as *locura* (quasi-controlled insanity), and doing "loco" things operates as an outlet for those youths, who act out their aggressions and frustrations from a traumatized childhood. Younger gang members are expected to learn how to do loco acts, if not become loco actors.

Many signs and symbols involving dress, manners of walking and talking, gestures, and other habits and customs have become a part of the gang subculture. Many of these patterns overlap with the behavior patterns of nongang youth. Rap music of African-American entertainers, for example, has disseminated nationwide many of the baggy-pants, baseball-cap, and earring costumes of the street-gang subculture, to the extent that even upscale suburban populations have attempted to mimic this posture. Dress varies, however, among the distinct street groups; that of blacks contrasts with that of Mexicans and Latinos, and so on. Gang members also often sport nicknames acquired through gang membership, which they scrawl on all types of public and private surfaces. Usually such a monicker is written with the name of one's clique or set (age cohort within the gang) and neighborhood gang name. Thus, "Wino" (monicker), "Termites" (clique), and "White Fence" (barrio and gang) might be written in a vertical arrangement to draw attention to oneself as well as to mark turf boundaries or intrusions into rival territories. Often, gang fights between different neighborhoods are initiated or fanned when *placas* (Chicano gang term for graffiti markings) are either placed on enemy grounds or written over an enemy's *placa*. Tattoos are personalized graffiti.—*placas* on the body. Drawings and designs are placed on the arms, shoulders, and even face (for example, below the outer edge of the eye in the form of a teardrop). With incarceration, especially with long-term "revolving door" gang members-prisoners, tattooing often becomes intensified.

Since the 1970s, changes in U.S. society have also led to increased street-gang membership and intensified street-gang activities. Immigration from Mexico, Central America, and Southeast Asia has brought new types of immigrant gangs; Chinese, Vietnamese, and

Cambodian gangs in southern California in the 1980s caught the attention of public authorities. Mexican and other Latino immigrant youths have often either joined existing Chicano gangs or, in response to threats from these gangs, formed their own street groups that borrow extensively from the prevailing street-gang subculture. In addition, the economic restructuring in the United States since about 1970 has further eroded the lives of residents in entrenched African-American and Chicano communities. Greater unemployment and underemployment, coupled with the competition of a reservoir of immigrant labor in some cities, has led to a descending deterioration of opportunities and options. The persistence and concentration of poverty in neighborhoods already rife with gangs results in many youths turning to the illicit economy of drug sales and criminal-opportunity structures. Thus, gangs not only persist in U.S. cities but have multiplied, becoming more pervasively violent, and turned more systematically to crime for economic gain. As long as the urban conditions that foster gang formation and growth persist, these trends are likely to continue.

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