Youth Crime

in an Urban Lower Class Community

Whatever the merits or demerits of these several models, the data of the Midcity study would indicate that any conceptual position, which leads to a characterization of urban adolescent street gangs as “deviant” or “outsiders,” indeed reflects a curious picture of American society. The term “deviant” may refer, among other things, to values which deviate significantly from particular statistical parameters, or to social manifestations which depart significantly from idealized standards. With respect to the first meaning, data presented in the last chapter showed that something on the order of two thirds of male adolescents in Midcity were affiliated with street gangs. From a statistical point of view, it was the boy who was not part of a gang who belonged to a “deviant” minority. There were many more gang members in Midcity than Boy Scouts—a membership organization not ordinarily considered “deviant.” Although comparative figures are not readily available, it is quite probable that the number of American adolescents who do or did belong to gangs is equal to or greater than those who do or did belong to the Boy Scouts. The gang cannot be considered “deviant” on the basis of statistical prevalence.
The characterization of gang members as “deviants” with respect to the normative standards of a cultural system, or as “outsiders” with respect to affiliation with an “inside” sector of society, depends on what “culture” or what sector of society one chooses to use as the basis of one evaluation. The present work represents the gang in its most developed form as a patterned and predictable product of the “conjunction” of four “prime” subcultures—those of males, of adolescents, of city-dwellers, of low-skilled laborers. Most analysts do not consider the subculture of the first three categories as “deviant.” Whether one designates the urban slum gang as “deviant,” then, depends largely on the extent to which one regards as “deviant” the subculture of some 15 to 30% of the American population—that portion (lower class III and II) which follows the customary style of life of the low-skilled laboring class.

If one chooses to view the gang within the context of the subculture of the urban laboring class community, it appears as a highly conventional form—both in that its myriad behavior patterns conform closely to well-established conventions, and in that it is, and has been, a highly prevalent form. A middle class woman of fifty who habitually congregated on street corners with eight or ten peers might quite legitimately be regarded as “deviant” with respect to accepted standards of her subculture; a laboring class boy of sixteen who engaged in this kind of practice is engaged in absolutely conventional behavior within the context of his subculture. Nor is he an “outsider” as a consequence of gang membership; quite the contrary, it is more often the non-gang member in the urban slum who feels himself to be on the outside. The lower class male who belongs or belonged to a street gang is just as much a part of the “mainstream” of American society as a middle class female who belongs or belonged to a bridge club. The urban adolescent street gang is a traditional and entirely conventional feature of American urban lower class life, and thus, a conventional feature of American life as a whole.
The Gang and “Normality”

During the 1950’s, the heyday of the “pathology” approach to social problems, it was fashionable to explain gangs and gang behavior in terms of abnormality—primarily emotional abnormality. One fashionable phrasing went: “These kids are sick!” This kind of explanation suffered a certain loss of popularity during the 1960’s, being replaced for some by explanations based on social rather than individual pathology, and for others by explanations locating causes in various forms of social injustice rather than in social sickness. However, the “pathology” approach to gangs still retains considerable currency in some quarters, and it will be useful to bring to bear on this issue relevant data from the Midcity study. What do the extended-term field data of the Midcity study indicate with respect to the notion that the existence of gangs and the behavior of gang members are manifestations of abnormality or pathology? Evidence will be adduced with respect to three forms of “normality”—physical fitness, mental capacity, and emotional stability.

Although evidence available from the study is largely indirect, it would appear, on a gross level, that the range of variation represented by the 205

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71 Issue of definitions of “normality-abnormality,” particularly when applied to mental or emotional states in different social-class contexts, like issue of what is “conventional” or “deviant,” is highly complex, can’t be developed here. Discussions of “pathology” frame of reference as applied to lower-class and/or gang populations in Miller, W.B., “Preliminary Theoretical Orientations to the Study of Gang Delinquency,” International Research Newsletter in Mental Health, Vol. I, No. 2, October, 1959; “Some Assumptions Underlying a Theory of Delinquent Behavior,” Paper delivered at Nat. Ed. Ass. Conference, May, 1959; “A Treatment Approach to ‘Conforming’ Delinquency,” Paper delivered at American Psychological Association meetings. One of best examples of “emotional pathology” approach to gangs in Yablonsky, op. cit. (Violent Gang). Saw gangs primarily as forming around highly disturbed leaders, and as representing a collection of outcasts or defectives unable to function in any group but a disturbed one. At least two of numerous meanings of term “normal” of relevance here: statistical normality (as in “normal” curve or distribution), and normality with respect to physical, mental, or emotional functioning by individuals or groups. Consideration of gang with respect to statistical normality included in previous discussion of gang as “conventional;” present discussion centers on latter meaning.

72 The Midcity study did not conduct systematic research involving measurement and/or testing of physical, mental, or emotional characteristics of individuals, nor attempt to obtain such information from organizations which may have compiled some of it. Insofar as this evidence is not derived from professionally-standardized modes of ascertaining physical health or intelligence (comparable methods do not exist for “mental health”), it must be regarded as inferential rather than direct.
members of the intensive-study gangs fell well within the range of “normality” for persons of this age category and social status level. Gang members appeared fit and healthy; there were few visible indications of chronic disease or malnutrition. One of the best forms of indirect evidence as to their physical fitness was the fact that almost all of the male gang members engaged in demanding forms of athletic activity; some very successfully so. All male gangs were active in football, baseball, and basketball; several produced championship teams; during one year the playoff for the city football championship was between the Kings and Outlaws. In addition, the Senior Bandits engaged in boxing, and the Kings were active in track and field. To perform effectively in sports of this kind, one’s physical condition must not only be up to the average, but above-average.\textsuperscript{73}

An appraisal of the mental capability of Midcity gang members must take into account the important distinction between intellectual capacity in the scholastic sense and intelligence in the sense of being able to cope effectively with the circumstances of one’s cultural environment.\textsuperscript{74} Plotted on a curve, the intelligence of the population of Midcity gang members would probably approximate a “normal” distribution, with some duller and some smarter than the average. There were no indications that the intelligence of the average gang member could be categorized as “sub-normal”; on the contrary, there were indications that the gang selected for membership from among the more able adolescents in the community.

The Senior Bandits provide an excellent example of the level of mental capacity of a gang regarded by some as of subnormal intelligence. The Senior Bandits ranked lowest of all gangs in educational attainment, and judged in terms

\textsuperscript{73} One of the Outlaws was a polio victim, and partially crippled. One of the Kings had a metal plate in his skull as a consequence of an accident. These physical infirmities apparently had little effect on the boys’ acceptability as gang members. For most of the gang members, “keeping in shape” was an important concern; see the discussion of physical fitness versus drinking in the chapter on drinking behavior.

\textsuperscript{74} The distinction between “book smartness” and “street smartness” is developed in W. B. Miller, 1958 (“Milieu”), \textit{op. cit.} Evidence for the “smartness” of gang members includes, among other things, the intellectually demanding pattern of mutual insult interchange so characteristic of gangs.
of their scholastic achievement might well be regarded as “below average,” if not
downright dull. Judged, however, with respect to their achievements in theft and
other forms of illegal enterprise, the term “brilliant” might well be applied with
little hesitation in several instances. Their escape from the maximum security
installation—the first in its history—was a mode of foresight, planning, ingenuity,
and efficient execution. However dull the gang members might have appeared in
the eyes of the classroom teacher, they had little apparent difficulty in outsmarting
policemen, store detectives, probation officers, correctional officials, jail guards, and
other adults of at least average capability. While many of the recorded actions of the
Bandits, as well as of other gang members, might be regarded as ill-advised or even
stupid by middle class adults, there was little evidence that the intelligence level of
Midcity gang members was below that of equivalent populations of American
adolescents whose actions might be similarly regarded.

An accurate appraisal of the degree of “emotional normality” of non-
institutionalized populations is extremely difficult. In cases of extreme abnormality
or psychosis characterization as “disturbed” on the basis of widely recognized
symptoms is fairly straightforward. In the case of “natural” community groups such
as gangs, however, appraisals of greater or lesser degrees of normality are highly
prone to influence by a complex set of subjective judgments which often reflect
social-status-based criteria of evaluation. On the basis of “harder” indications of
emotional normality such as commitments to psychiatric institutions, recourse to
psychiatric treatment, or suicide, there was little evidence of serious emotional
disturbance, or even of less serious disturbance, in the intensive-study gangs. None
of the 205 gang members was committed to a mental institution during the
intensive-study period, nor, so far as is known, prior to it. One of the Senior
Outlaws did, however, commit suicide during this period—a relatively “hard”
indication of serious emotional disturbance. There were no other suicides, nor any
information of institutional commitment during the ten-year follow-up period, with
one partial exception; a member of the Senior Bandits, after ring leading a prison
riot, was placed in the psychiatric section of the prison system. During the study period, four gang members were referred for psychological counseling or psychiatric treatment. Of these, three were girls referred (primarily because of truancy) by a female worker who was a particularly strong supporter of psychiatric methods. The fourth was a Junior Outlaw whose illegal activities included an incident of exhibitionism. Even if one assumes that several other gang members may have had psychiatric contacts which were not known, the total proportion of gang members for which there was “hard” evidence of more or less serious emotional disturbance was less than 5%.75

Despite the paucity of “hard” evidence of emotional disturbance in Midcity gangs, there was a tendency among many who contacted them to characterize them as “disturbed,” and explain their behavior as a product of disturbance. One reason for this relates to the tendency noted earlier to apply standards of “normality” based on the behavior of middle class adults to lower class adolescents; another involves a kind of circular reasoning which is common among psychologically-oriented persons who contact gangs. This generally involves some variation of the formula: “Emotional disturbance may cause repeated or serious involvement in illegal behavior; repeated or serious involvement in illegal behavior is a sure indication of emotional disturbance.” Among the intensive-study gangs it was the most-criminal Senior Bandits who were most likely to be characterized as “disturbed” on the basis of such reasoning. Evidence of disturbance, which is independent of criminal behavior, is obviously necessary to establish a causal relation between the two.76 In a similar vein, the Senior Bandits were characterized by psychologically-oriented

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75 A 1969 study, based on national-level statistics, reported that 10% of college freshmen avail themselves of psychiatric help during their freshman year (New York Times, August 24, 1969). The valid notion that psychiatric help is generally less available to low-status populations has little affect on study-population statistics, since field workers were highly oriented toward psychiatric services, and two psychiatrists served as consultants to the study.

76 Ref. to Spiller data on Senior Bandit emotional disturbance study. Careful analysis of all data cards relevant to. Five boys characterized as more than usual degree of emotional disturbance; bases of characterizations. Little relation between estimated degree of “disturbance” of families and four orders of illegal involvement (high-low). Some grounds for more-disturbance more-crime position, but evidence weak.
personnel as “disorganized.” As already suggested, the validity of such characterizations often depends on the kind of endeavor under consideration. With respect to job-seeking, for example, the behavior of gang members, as will be shown, appeared lackadaisical, unfocused, and ineffective; with respect to theft, however, as will be shown also, the Bandits exhibited a high degree of foresight, efficiency, and directed energy.

A final point of relevance to the “normality” of gangs concerns the level of “happiness” or contentment of gang members. The fashionable cliché of the 1950’s—“These kids are sick”—was supplanted for many in the 1960’s by one which became equally popular, as a product of the then-fashionable deprivation-alienation-exploitation approach to low status populations: “They are desperately unhappy.” Conclusions with respect to a concept as nebulous as “happiness” must, of necessity, rest on even less objective grounds than in the case of concepts such as “solidarity” or “normality,” but the currency of the “unhappiness” notion enhances the importance of adducing relevant evidence, however impressionistic. The intensity of involvement in athletic contests by players and spectators and the elation of victory; the air of expectancy, of promise, of adventure, in the milling crowds of black adolescents on the King’s corner on a warm summer evening; the whimsy, the horseplay, the high good humor of an “average” session of corner congregation; the fluidity and expressiveness of young bodies executing the latest dance steps before the corner juke box or at the local ballroom; the rapt attention and sense of special meaning attending the performance of the latest popular songs by the latest “star” performers; the dark electricity of the winter house party and the bright languor of

77 Deriving “operational” definitions of “happiness,” minimally influenced by subjective factors, probably impossible, certainly no success to date, even harder than concepts such as “normality” and “solidarity.” Issue of “happiness” discussed in WBM “Ideology” paper (1969), proposition that attribution of “desperate unhappiness” to low status populations probably due more to social reform objectives (if desperately unhappy then extensive reform programs are justified) rather than systematic appraisal of actual levels of happiness and unhappiness, and careful comparisons with content-discontent level of other population categories.
the summer beach party—all these and more were intrinsic aspects of the life pattern of members of Midcity gangs.

The existence of these kinds of activities and feelings—so common among members of Midcity gangs, white and black, as well as among slum adolescents throughout the country—simply does not accord with images of low-status urban communities as dismal ghettos whose suffering residents pursue pathetic lives of unrelieved misery, alienation, and deprivation. Midcity gang members were intensely interested in life; they were not apathetic, anemic, nor alienated. At the same time, it is important to note that members of Midcity gangs, in common with all other adolescents and all other human beings, experienced discouragement, depression, and discontent. There was fear of parental censure and disapproval after the loss of a job, drunkenness, or trouble with the law. There was gloom and disappointment at athletic defeat. There was frustration in failure to win the object of one’s love and sorrow in the end of a love affair. There was apprehension in passing through a strange neighborhood, worry over maintaining one’s place in the prestige hierarchy of the gang, fear of reprisals after a clash between rival gangs. But these elements of unhappiness in the lives of gang members do not set them apart as members of a deprived underclass, but show, rather, that they possess a prime qualification of membership in full standing in the human race—the recurrent experience of sorrow and discontent.

The lives of members of Midcity gangs, like those of most other gang members, were compounded of some complex mixture of joy and sorrow, of elation and depression, of gratification and frustration. Can it be said with any assurance that this mixture—when compared with that of other categories of persons such as middle class adolescents or working class adults or the upper class elderly—was disproportionately weighted on the side of unhappiness? The overwhelming impression, based on extensive study of thousands of separate events in the lives of hundreds of gang members over many months—is that it was not. The life experience of Midcity gang members, viewed as a total pattern rather than in terms
of specially selected events—does not support a conception of lower class adolescent life as abnormally unhappy. In the balance of happiness and unhappiness, these products of an American slum partook in full and abundant measure of the human condition—in all probability not more than other humans, and in all probability not less.

Gangs and Race

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s brought with it a set of images and conceptions of the urban lower class community, particularly the Negro portion thereof, some of which (alienation, deprivation, desperation) are discussed here and elsewhere. It was inevitable that the street gang, a major feature of such communities, be swept up in this set of conceptions. However applicable to the general circumstances of blacks in the United States, characterizations of gangs developed out of this perspective are not, for the most part, supported by the empirical findings of the Midcity study. Many of these conceptions center on the factor of “race”—a characteristic treated here as referring to the original or early geographic origins of populations (see discussion of geographical-national status classes in Chapter One). The two major “racial” categories represented in Midcity were “whites” or Caucasians (originating mostly in Europe), and “blacks” or Negroes (originating mostly in Africa). Three issues involving the “racial” status of gang members concern the question of gang origins, the relation of race to social mobility, and the power of race to differentiate among types of gangs.

It could probably have been predicted that as the composition of the central city in the United States became increasingly black (percent “non-white”; 1960, 18%; 1968, 22%), with highest proportions in lower-status areas, that the existence of urban street gangs would be attributed in some way to Negro status as such. In the late 1800’s, the prevalence of gangs in predominantly Irish slums was

attributed to special gang-forming propensities of the Irish; in the early 1900’s, a similar thesis was applied to gangs in predominantly Italian slums. The historical account of Midcity shows that the racial and/or ethnic composition of the community shifted many times between 1630 and 1960, and that the ethnic or racial status of gangs reflected that of the resident low-status population. In 1950 Midcity was about one-third Negro, and about one-third of its street gangs were Negro; in 1970 the majority of residents were black, and the majority of gangs were also black. Compared with the generative capacity of male status, adolescence, urban residence, and low social status, the influence of racial or national status on the forms and prevalence of gangs is weak, and this applies to Negroes as well as to Irish or Italians. The ethnic composition of gangs at any point in time and in any particular city reflects the ethnic composition of the low-status adolescent male population rather than special gang-forming propensities of particular ethnic groups.

A second issue concerns the concept of “restricted opportunity” which played so important a part in the Civil Rights ideology of the 1960’s. The gist of this thesis, as applied to gangs, is that the pervasive power of racial discrimination (“racism”) blocks off, for black youth, channels to social betterment (“upward social mobility”) which are available to whites, impelling them to form substitute social systems wherein they themselves can establish criteria of acceptance and prestige which are available to them, the gang being one such system.

The prevalence and potency of racial discrimination in the United States is undeniable, nor can there be any doubt that black skin may seriously restrict opportunities under many circumstances. The empirical findings of the Midcity study, however, and particularly those which involve comparisons of the educational and occupational experiences of black and white gang members, throw

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79 For a classic statement of this position, see Report of National Advisory Commission, 1969, op. cit., p. 278.
80 One example of the probable influence of race prejudice is cited on page N. (occupational “gap” between lower class III and middle class for Negro males)
into serious question the simple notion that racial prejudice is the principal element impeding the upward social movement of blacks. The Negro Kings showed a greater degree of “upward” educational and occupational movement than did any of the four white male gangs—both in the distance they moved from the status of their parents and in the level they achieved as young adults (see Table 2.4). It was the Negro Queens who showed the highest educational achievement of all gangs, and the contrast between their status as young adults and that of the white Molls is striking. The intensive-study gang which showed the highest rate of criminality, the lowest educational level, and the lowest occupational status was white, not black.

However one may account for these outcomes (one important element is parental social status), the experience of Midcity gang members indicates clearly that race prejudice does not operate in any simple or uniform manner to allow opportunities to whites which are denied to blacks. Members of the Kings and Queens had to face and overcome serious obstacles to achieve what they did, but however serious they were, if outcomes are any criteria, the forces which affected the social-mobility potential of the Senior Bandits—who certainly were not subject to discrimination on the basis of race—were far more potent.

A third issue concerns the relation of racial status to differences and similarities among gangs. A central feature of the Civil Rights approach of the 1960’s to low-status populations was its stress on the differentiating capacity of racial status. A highly influential governmental report reflecting this tradition projected a vivid picture of the United States as comprising “two societies, one black one white—separate and unequal.”81 Some Negro leaders during this period pushed this notion even further—representing “blackness” as a powerful and pervasive basis of differentiation—with the black ethos, personality, perspective, and life-style radically different from the white. The findings of the Midcity study, based on systematic comparisons of white and black low-status populations, and in particular

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of white and black gangs, indicate that these representations are greatly overdrawn.

As noted earlier, the ethnic and/or racial status of gangs impart a particular “coloring” to certain aspects of their conduct (Jewish-type humor in Jewish gangs; Italian profanity in Italian), and there was ample evidence in black Midcity gangs of certain forms and practices (whatever their ultimate origins) traditionally associated with the subculture of low-status Negroes. Among these were dialectical patterns and items of vocabulary reflecting the southern regional subculture, and more extensive use, relative to whites, of the “playin’ the dozens” type of patented repartee. Certain differences in criminal patterns are cited in later chapters. The most direct and obvious influence of racial differences among Midcity gangs lay in the racial composition of the gangs themselves. There was no “mixed” gang among the seven studied most intensively. Several of the other study gangs did include one or two members of a different race than the majority: a core member of the predominantly white Hoods was Negro; a highly influential member of the predominantly black Knights was white. Moreover, despite the low degree of racial mixture within gangs, there was a good degree both of direct contact and mutual knowledge among Midcity gangs of different races. Black and white gangs engaged mutually in one of the most “intimate” forms of male interaction—athletic competition—and, as already noted, the two playoff teams for the Port City municipal championship one year were the black Kings and white Outlaws.

If, however, one turns to consider the impact of racial differences on customary behavioral practice rather than on group composition, the degree of difference between white and black gangs diminishes radically. On this level, differences become a matter of shadings, of nuances, of subtleties, whose magnitude is sufficiently small so that their delineation must rest primarily on the reporting of impressions. A point-by-point comparison of white and black gangs, with respect to

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82 Several gangs in a district adjacent to Midcity were “racially mixed” in that they contained representatives of three major races—Caucasian, Negro, and Mongoloid (Chinese and Micmacs).
the approximately sixty forms of behavior examined by the Midcity study, indicates that similarities between the two races were far more in evidence than differences. Some of the latter have already been remarked, and it should be repeated that the following impressionistic comparisons include citations of differences which were often extremely subtle. Compared to the white gangs, black gangs appeared somewhat less “solidary” (more individualists, fewer “team” men) and slightly more faction-prone; somewhat more religious; more creative with respect to language and terminology; somewhat more involved with drugs vis-à-vis alcohol; more likely to become involved in procuring (boys); more concerned about formal education; rather more ambitious; somewhat more active in sexual and mating activity; somewhat more prone to involvement in person to-person fighting (girls); less active in vandalism (girls); generally better dancers; more helpful with domestic chores (boys).

But differences of this kind—fascinating as they might be both individually and in combination—appear as relatively minor stylistic variations on a basic subcultural theme, and provide scant basis for the position that whites and blacks in Midcity represented, or were moving towards, two distinct and contrasting racially-based societies. As fellow gang members, blacks and whites in Midcity shared a thousand similar life experiences, a thousand close perspectives, a thousand mutual concerns. As age-mates, they sang the same popular songs, danced the same popular dances, and followed the same popular performers; as residents of a common district, they knew the same downtown stores, the same street-corners, the same parks, the same theaters, the same transportation system; black females shared with white a focused concern with mating and motherhood; white males shared with black an intense concern with male competence and male honor. These areas of similarity, shared by virtue of common age status, common social status, and common residential locality, far outweighed those areas of differences consequent on differing racial status.
The “Solidarity” of the Gang

The complex and intricate developments concerning cliques, factions, and leadership, detailed in the last chapter, indicate with little ambiguity that members of Midcity gangs were related to one another in highly significant ways, were sensitive and responsive to the actions and opinions of their fellows, and were contained within an orbit of mutual understanding and concern. Of all the characteristics of gangs thus far discussed, one would expect least disagreement with respect to the “solidary” character of the urban adolescent street gang. This is not so. Influential scholars not only deny “solidarity” to the gang, but some even go so far as to deny them the relatively neutral status of “group.” Relationships among gang members are characterized as “fragile” or “diffuse;” the gang itself is characterized as a “pseudo-“ or “near-“ group. How can one account for such conceptions?83

One possible reason is that such characterizations have been derived from observations of adolescent assemblages which in fact were not “solidary” in either the common or sociological senses of the term.84 Such assemblages undoubtedly occur, and may legitimately be characterized as “non-solidary.” However, the condition of “solidarity,” considered as an attribute of gangs, is not an either-or condition, but a “variable” like the several other gang characteristics discussed here. Degrees of solidarity may vary from gang to gang, just as in the case of other collectivities (families, army-squads, card-players’ cliques) commonly considered to “solidarity,” and would apply these to those adolescent assemblages which fit the five defining criteria presented here. Some gangs would undoubtedly rank higher

83 It might at first appear ironic that the intellectual fashions of the later 20th century denied solidarity to a kind of group regarded earlier in the century as the virtual apotheosis of male gemeinschaft—“that old gang of mine.” However, it is not unlikely that this oversimplified image itself played a significant role in provoking an oversimplified counter-image—the gang as an anomic, disorganized, aimless collection of rejects and lost souls.

84 It is obvious that the core of this issue is semantic—that is, how one defines “solidarity” and “group.” Although subsequent discussion will give some indication of the sense in which these terms are used here, there will be no extensive or systematic treatment of these complex definitional problems.

218
and some lower in solidarity, just as some rank higher and some lower in social status. If characterizations of the gang as “non-“ or “pseudo-“ solidary have been derived from observation of assemblages which do in fact fail to conform to customary sociological conceptions of “solidarity,” then the major error here is that of generalizing from such groups to “the gang” as a generic unit, as most of these authors do.85

But it is not the actual or possible existence of adolescent assemblages whose solidarity is low or minimal that provides the primary basis for concluding that gangs are non-solidary—however common or uncommon such assemblages might be. The primary reasons are methodological and conceptual, with conceptual reasons paramount. With some exceptions, to be noted, conclusions as to the solidarity of gangs are derived from methods of gathering information which suffer from the same kinds of defects cited earlier as characteristic of many gang studies. Among those relevant to the likelihood of obtaining adequate information as to “solidarity” are: basing conclusions on overly brief study periods; on information collected during unusual circumstances (e.g. periods of gang warfare); on overly small study populations; on study populations representing single or limited status-characteristic categories; (e.g., one race, one social status level); failure to specify or distinguish relevant status characteristics (e.g., social status level); failure to

85 The major formulation of the “pseudo-solidarity” position is that of Yablonsky (Lewis Yablonsky “The delinquent gang as a near-group” Social Problems, Vol. 7, No. 2, Fall 1959). It is adopted with minor qualifications by Klein (Malcolm W. Klein and Lois Y. Crawford, “Groups, Gangs and Cohesiveness,” Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency Jan. 1967) and his associates, the Meyerhoffs (Howard L. and Barbara G. Meyerhoff, “Field observations of middle-class ‘gangs’ Social Forces, Vol. 42, March 1964), among others. Yablonsky classified certain New York gangs he observed, primarily in the context of an intense gang-war situation, as “near-groups” rather than “true groups,” on the grounds that they were characterized by “diffuse role definition, limited cohesion, impermanence, minimal consensus of norms, shifting membership, disturbed leadership, and limited definition of membership expectation.” An additional and partially overlapping listing cites 12 features of “near-groups.” The Meyerhoffs, on the basis of two weeks of participant-observation in a Los Angeles suburb, conclude that adolescent groups they observed “precisely conform to Yablonsky’s conception of a near-group.” Klein also maintains that Yablonsky’s “near-group” criteria apply to some of the Los Angeles gangs he studied, although with some qualifications (he rejects, as do the Meyerhoffs, the “emotional disturbance” characteristic stressed by Yablonsky, but accepts others such as “diffuse role definitions” and “little or no norm consensus”).
distinguish between “core” and “peripheral” affiliation; basing conclusions primarily on expressed sentiments rather than systematically processed data derived from direct recording of specific behavioral events over time. Conclusions derived from data-gathering methods characterized by any of these defects are suspect, and the more such defects in any given study; the more suspect the conclusions.86

86 The study which provides the major basis for Yablonsky’s “near-group” formulation incorporates almost all of these defects. His conclusions are based primarily on the experience of two male New York gangs, both black. Much of his information was obtained through interviews conducted in the heat of a highly volatile and atypical “gang war” situation. Particularly serious is his failure to ascertain the “customary” composition of the aggregates involved, and the related failure to distinguish between “core” and “peripheral” affiliation. Many of those he interviewed and reckons as part of the “diffuse and amorphous gang structure” were undoubtedly persons temporarily swept into the area by the attraction of the gang-fighting situation and whose relationship to the “core” hanging group under ordinary circumstances was tenuous or non-existent. Yablonsky decries the gullibility of those who accept at face value gang-member statements as to gang size, but has little apparent hesitation in granting full credence to other interview responses concerning group composition, rationales for fighting motivation for joining gangs, and so on. The major defect of the Meyerhoff’s study is its extremely brief time span. Conclusions are derived from an observation period of only two weeks. Accurate listings of gang affiliation in Midcity required from six months to a year in order to accommodate membership variation by season, day of week, and so on. They Meyerhoff’s themselves recognize that the empirical basis of their conclusions is very weak, and characterize them as “speculations” based on observation, not “findings.” Relevant to the issue of solidarity is the fact that observed assemblages were largely middle class; the present study concludes that the gang as an associational form is best developed at lower status levels; observations of middle class gangs in the Port City area show them to be smaller, less frequent in congregation, and of shorter life. Accurate determination of the relative degree of “solidarity” of lower and higher status gangs would require careful comparative studies based on uniform measurement techniques. Klein’s work is characterized by only a few of the methodological defects cited here (no white gangs; failure to specify or distinguish social status levels, age levels), and it is significant therefore that his research supports the “pseudo-solidary” position less strongly than the others. For example, he rejects the “emotionally disturbed” characteristic stressed by Yablonsky, and acknowledges that Los Angeles gangs in some communities are “cohesive.” He mentions three such neighborhoods, call them an “exception,” but fails to present figures on the relative prevalence of cohesive and non-cohesive gangs. Despite its methodological sophistication, however, Klein’s analysis provides surprisingly little clarification of the “solidarity” issue. His treatment of gang “cohesiveness” is ambiguous and inconsistent—both in that his general statement contains internal inconsistencies, and that his empirical findings are poorly articulated with his general statements. He states, for example, that gang member turnover is so high that “it is hard to conceive of, much less observe, a continuing cohesive group.” A few paragraphs later, apparently discussing the “exceptions,” he states that “strong external sources of cohesion are everywhere apparent,” but later characterizes this cohesiveness as “tenuous.” Oddly, Klein grants “cohesiveness” to highly artificial and extremely short-lived groups such as T-groups and laboratory groups, while denying it to the gang (partly because of “transitory” membership). Klein’s work is far superior to Yablonsky’s in that he makes a conscientious effort to develop an “operational” measure of cohesiveness, based on careful counts of interaction frequency over six-month periods. However, his empirical findings articulate poorly with his theoretical statements, and provide little support for the “near-group” thesis. The data he presents are ambiguous and inconclusive with respect to group cohesion, and in fact appear to
It is not fortuitous that research methods used by competent investigators tend to accentuate “non-cohesive” elements of gang life and de-emphasize elements of cohesion. Both choice of methods and interpretations of findings reflect pervasive conceptual traditions which are inhospitable to the depiction of the urban adolescent gang as “solidary.” One aspect of these, more common among scholars, relates to notions of the gang as “anomic” or “disorganized,” to be discussed shortly. Another aspect derives from a set of sub-culturally influenced modes of perception similar to those affecting conceptions of gang prevalence.

As will be shown later, adolescent street gangs are best developed at the point of conjunction of four “prime” subcultures—male, adolescent, urban, and low-skilled laboring class. Customary features of the way of life of at least two of these categories—adolescent and lower class—strongly engage the disapproval of most middle class adults. With varying degrees of justification, the adolescent street gang is seen as “bad,” and the conception of “badness,” based primarily on the criminal propensities of gang members, is extended to all aspects of gang life. One of the most important “good” things in the adult middle class subculture is the concept of the close, warm, “primary group”—persons related to one another by intimate ties—mutually considerate, dependable, and most of all, loving. This concept in fact derives from and reflects sub-culturally developed images of the ideal middle class family. It is here that one finds true solidarity, true cohesiveness, and true intimacy.87

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87 The central importance of “true” group closeness to the adult middle class subculture means that the concept of group solidarity is seldom dealt with as a neutral descriptive concept, but rather is invested with strong evaluative overtones. Of the authors cited here, Yablonsky is perhaps the most explicit in this respect. He regards the state of “near-groupism” not only as morally bad, but as a
This image of the ideally-solidary group affects representations of gang solidarity in several ways. Since true group closeness is so highly valued, there is great reluctance to grant it to groups which are highly disvalued (skid row drinking cliques, motorcycle gangs). Whatever the empirical evidence might show, many persons simply cannot conceive of street gangs as “cohesive.” What might appear to be closeness, or mutual loyalty, or “in-group” feelings, is seen as the pseudo-solidarity of the near-group. Moreover, insofar as gangs are seen as manifesting cohesion of some kind, it is regarded as having been forced upon them by external forces rather than arising naturally and spontaneously from within, as in the case of the good family. 88

In addition, the idealized image of the perfectly loving and solidary group serves as a standard against which the gang may be weighed and found wanting. The fact is that no actual group meets the criteria of solidarity implied by the idealized image—certainly not the middle class family itself. 89 This does not vitiate the utility of the image as an ideal; it may still serve most effectively as a model on the basis of which one may point out the deficiencies of existing groups (including families) of which one disapproves. The relational systems of gangs, like those of families, are highly complex. They are compounded of many elements of affection and hostility, trust and mistrust, intimacy and remoteness, loyalty and disloyalty, altruism and selfishness, and others. Moreover, gangs, like families, vary greatly in

88 The discussion of gang solidarity as a product of “external” rather than “internal” forces is contained in Klein, Op. Cit.
89 Lamar Empey, who subscribes somewhat cautiously to the “pseudo-solidarity” position, is uncomfortably aware of the fallacy of measuring actual gang relationships against a theoretical image of ideal solidarity.” While this (the practice of mutual insults by gang members)…may…be found…in a host of other status-conscious groups, the point is that such interaction is not characteristic, at least hypothetically, of primary groups. Primary groups, ideally, are supposed to provide warmth and support” (Lamar T. Empey. “Delinquent Subcultures: Theory and recent research” Jnl. Of Res. On Crime and Del’y, Vol 4, No. 1. Jan. 1967). The presence of the phrases “at least hypothetically,” “ideally,” and “supposed to” reveal his uneasiness in the attribution of idealized characteristics to actual “primary” groups.
the degree to which they manifest one or more of these diverse components of “solidary” relationships.

The association of “cohesiveness” with “affectionate interaction” implied by the idealized image also contributes to serious misunderstanding of the role of overtly aggressive behavior within the gang. Middle class observers of lower class gangs are uniformly struck by what appears to be a constant stream of mutual invective, insult, and deprecation. How can groups whose members behave so angrily towards one another be considered “solidary”? Applying to lower class populations conceptions of solidarity based on middle class perceptions can result in serious misinterpretation. Interaction among lower class people is often characterized by formally hostile expressions of considerable force, but these seldom carry the emotional impact attributed to them by middle class persons on the basis of what they would signify in a middle class context. An alternative to categorizing ideal middle class relationships as “solidary” and lower class relationships as non-or pseudo-solidary is the possibility that the behavioral concomitants of “solidary” relationships might be quite different for different classes of persons—males and females, middle and lower class, adults and adolescents. In fact, in the gang as in many male work groups, overtly hostile expression may represent a sub-culturally acceptable way of expressing affection. One conclusion of the analysis of 1,500 aggressive acts by Midcity gang members was that “aggressive action within the gang itself, rather than appearing as disruptive or disintegrative, served as an effective device for producing and maintaining group cohesion.”

The experiences of the Senior Bandits and Junior Outlaws earlier further throw into question simple notions of “solidarity” as affectionate face-to-face interaction. Despite assertions that “one halfa them guys don’t know the other half,”

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90 The character and functions of aggressive behavior in one Midcity gang is analyzed in detail in W.B. Miller, H. Geertz and Henry S.G. Cutter “Aggression in a Boys’ Street Corner Group” Psychiatry Vol 24, No. 4, November 1961, pp 283-298. Approximately 1,500 separate “aggressive acts,” verbal and physical, engaged in by gang members over a one year period were recorded, coded and analyzed with respect to form, targets, content, and other characteristics.

91 Miller et al, ibid, p. 296.
analysis showed that Senior Bandits, separated by institutional incarceration, maintained effective channels of communication between “inside” and “outside” gang members, remained well informed as to events affecting their fellows both on the corner and in the institution, and continued to be involved in developments respecting leadership, prestige, and clique formation in the gang. The case of the Junior Outlaws suggests that some significant degree of “solidarity” may be obtained, even in the face of overtly intense hostility and fairly extended physical separation. Following a serious intra-gang dispute, one faction separated from the other and maintained a separate hanging locale for almost a year. But during this period both factions remained intensely interested in happenings on the “other” corner, well informed as to the activities and sentiments of their opposite numbers, and finally rejoined. In the case of Midcity gangs it would appear quite meaningful to talk of “solidary” groups so long as gang members were contained within a relational orbit of mutual understanding, concern, and information-exchange, even in the presence of overtly hostile behavior and some degree of physical separation.92

This discussion has suggested that attempts to assign observed collectivities to one of two categories—“true” groups and “false” (or “near”) groups, like attempts to categorize persons or gangs as “delinquent” or “pseudo-“ delinquent, involve complex matters of definition and conception which frequently reflect particular subcultural perspectives. In the case of adolescent street gangs it would seem to be more in accord both with the nature of other gang characteristics and with accepted analytic practice to consider “solidarity” as a condition which may vary in degree, rather than as a present-or-absent criterion which characterizes “true” groups, but not “near” groups. Whatever degree of solidarity one might feel is required in order to grant the status of “group” to various kinds of adolescent assemblages, there can be little doubt that Midcity gangs which were studied intensively and for extended periods ranked high in “solidarity” on the basis of almost any reasonable criteria.

92 Coser on “integrative” and “disintegrative” group conflict; Ham on CB radio cliques as firmly “solidary” without face-to-face interaction.
one might apply. Five such criteria will be noted briefly. These are: affiliational continuity, kinships, interconnections, long-term mutual knowledge, and the character of intra-gang relational dynamics.

The gang, as already noted, is an “informal” rather than a “formal” group, such as women’s clubs and “service” organizations, which maintain official attendance records. Even when compared with such groups, however, Midcity gangs maintained a high degree of affiliation continuity over time. Contact was maintained for periods of one to three years with those groups which were contacted with sufficient intensity and frequency so that the identity of individuals participating in gang activities could be recorded on a continuing basis. For the intensive-study gangs the degree of affiliational continuity (percentage of individuals “active” during the final contact phase who were also active during the initial phase) ranged from low to high. For example, of 25 boys categorized as “active” Senior Outlaws during the initial contact phase, 21 (84%) were still active 20 months later. Of the four boys who had moved away or terminated participation in gang activities, only one was a “core” member. This degree of affiliational continuity for an “informal” group with no official membership roster would appear to fall well within the range of “high” continuity, in contrast to those reports which represent gangs as “transient” or temporary assemblages. It should also be recalled that the older brothers, fathers, and grandfathers of some of the intensive-study gang members, in common with other Midcity gangs, had maintained an affiliation with the same corner for two generations or more.

However one might choose to characterize the quality of relationships among gang members, there was amply in evidence in Midcity gangs a kind of interpersonal tie whose existence requires no imputation or evaluation—that of kinship. Previous accounts cite some of these ties in individual gangs and aggregates; summary data as to kinship linkages among all seven intensive-study gangs.

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93 Further detail on method, results of “affiliational continuity” findings. Cite Billy Robinson not counted, death.
gangs give some indication of their extent. Available information indicates that a minimum of 65 (32%) of 205 gang members had close relatives (siblings, first cousins) within their own subdivisions. Percentages ranged from 18% for the Kings to 58% for the Senior Outlaws. Furthermore, a minimum of 72 (35%) had close relatives in subdivisions other than their own, with percentages ranging from 28% for the Senior Bandits to 58% for the Junior Bandits. A minimum of one-third of all gang members, then, were related by close kinship to members of their own and other subdivisions, with over half of the gang members in some subdivisions so related. Kinship linkages were complex and extensive. There would appear to be little basis for characterizing as “diffuse” or “transient” groups thus linked by the most traditional of interpersonal ties—blood kinship itself.

An important indication of how solidary a group is concerns the amount of knowledge group members possess as to the life circumstances of their mates. It is not surprising that members of Midcity gangs were well-informed as to the circumstances of their fellows during the period of their most intensive gang affiliation; quite surprising, however was the amount of mutual knowledge they displayed during later periods. As noted earlier, “follow-up” information respecting the residence, marital status, parenthood, occupation, education, and other characteristics of each gang member was collected after a lapse of seven to ten years following initial field contact. Three to five informants per gang, selected primarily

94 No systematic investigation of kinship ties among gang members was made. This would have entailed specific inquiries of gang members as to their kinship relations, analysis of social welfare and other records, and systematic analysis of the network of existing kinship connections. Data presented here are derived from the method used in the case of most of the behavioral information in this study—the accumulation of facts and events as recorded in the course of daily contacts for periods of one to three years. Close and obvious relationships such as siblingship, and to a lesser extent first cousinhood, emerged readily on this basis, but there is no doubt that some substantial number of more distant relationships such as second cousinhood, step-cousinhood, and relationships based on past affinal ties at the parental and/or grandparental generation were not ascertained. Partial data showed kin ties among these low-status persons to be very complex, and considerably more extensive than was evident on the surface. It is thus clear that the data presented here represent an undercount of the actual number of kin ties, and probably a substantial one. The data are presented to document the kinship component of “solidarity” in Midcity gangs, and make no pretense of being a systematic study of kinship among gang members—a study which might be undertaken with some profit.
on the basis of ready accessibility rather than any expectation of unusual knowledge, were queried as to the current status of each of their former gang mates. Remarkably complete information was obtained; gang members had lost track of only three or four of the 205 original members; information was current and detailed, and there was high concordance among the several informants. Particularly striking was the case of a member of the Kings who was a first-year medical student at the time of the follow-up inquiry. Not only was he able to provide accurate information, but did so on the basis of his own recall of the roster of gang members—a roster almost identical with that compiled by research personnel. Nor was his knowledge confined to the more “successful” Kings, as one might have expected from someone who was upwardly mobile, but extended as well to those involved in procuring, narcotics, and other illegal ventures. This degree of detailed information as to the circumstances of their fellows five or more years after the period of most active gang affiliation indicates that relationships among members were sufficiently meaningful as to transcend the gang phase itself—certainly an indication of considerable solidarity.

A fourth and final indication of the degree of solidarity of Midcity gangs concerns group interaction and group processes. The accounts of individual gangs described leadership, followership, cliques and interaction patterns within the gangs, and the integral relationship between these and elements such as prestige and criminal behavior. Also treated were continuing developments with respect to these features—developments which were often dramatic and of extended duration. It is hardly conceivable that phenomena such as the intricate and ingenious multi-leader power-balance system of the Senior Outlaws, the delicate control of competing factions by the dominant clique of the Junior Bandits, the capacity for effective activity coordination of the Senior Outlaws, and the intensity of conflict between the finally reunited Junior Outlaw factions could be found in groups whose relationships were casual, diffuse, or fleeting. These developments embody classic

95 Ref. to Short, Strodbeck “Group Processes” book
group processes—reciprocity, balance, equilibrium-maintenance, and mutually responsive interaction—which have characterized solidary collectivities for centuries.

There can be equally little doubt that involvement in these developments was of compelling emotional investment, in one extreme instance, as to provide a major incentive for suicide. All of the features cited here and in previous paragraphs—affiliational continuity, kinship ties, detailed knowledge of the life circumstances of ones’ gang mates, classic forms of group process, continuing developments concerning subgroup alliances and opposition, heavy emotional investment in the status of the collectivity—characterize groups whose solidity is high, and of deep significance to members.

What was the “source” of the solidarity of Midcity gangs? There is almost universal agreement among those writers who grant a measure of “solidarity” to the gang (as well as some who do not) that the solidarity of the gang results from opposition or conflict of some sort. In this they follow the lead of Thrasher, who in turn followed the classic thesis forwarded by Machiavelli and others that the solidarity of any collectivity is enhanced through common opposition to a clearly-defined enemy. Thrasher used the term “integrated through conflict” in delineating the defining criteria of the “true gang.” Scholars differ somewhat as to the nature of the “external” entity which induces gang solidarity. Thrasher himself cited clashes with other gangs and run-ins with adult officials; Albert Cohen and his followers postulate opposition to a “conventional” or middle class subculture; Malcolm Klein follows Thrasher in citing police and local adult behavior, and cites in addition “sets of environmental frustrations” such as disrupted families, poverty, and the like, as “strong external sources of cohesion.”

There can be little doubt that opposition to, and a sense of difference from, other groups and categories of persons contributes in some degree to gang

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96 Ref. to Billy Robinson. Returned from correctional institution to find bases of prestige and leadership shifted, hanged himself.
97 References to Yinger “counterculture” idea as in Cohen tradition, Cavan also.
solidarity, but in this respect gangs are no different from other groups whose solidarity derives in part from a sense of difference from and opposition to those unlike themselves. Some component of solidarity among female groups derives from a sense of difference from and opposition to males; some component of the solidarity of football teams derives from opposition to other teams; some component of solidarity among company employees derives from competition with other companies.\textsuperscript{98} The issue here is not that gangs are unique by virtue of achieving some measure of solidarity through opposition to outside entities, but rather whether the degree of gang solidarity thus induced is significantly greater than in the case of other kinds of groups. In the case of Midcity gangs it would be misleading to formulate this issue in terms of the notion that amounts of solidarity can be parcelled out and attributed to either “external” or “internal” sources. Midcity data indicates that the major sources of gang solidarity derive from those general social conditions which underlie the existence of the gang as a stable associational form. Gang members are close age mates sharing a multitude of common concerns and pursuits. They generally share common age status, social status, locality status, sexual status, and a relatively uniform set of life perspectives. They engage repeatedly and jointly in a wide range of collective and cooperative enterprises such as hanging out, athletic involvement, recreational activities, parties, and many others. Moreover, as shown elsewhere, the frequency of involvement in inter-gang combat as such is quite low relative to participation in the kinds of activities just noted. It would appear that the extent to which gang solidarity is enhanced by opposition to outside groups and categories of persons does not differ to any marked degree from that of many other kinds of groups, and that the more fundamental bases of gang cohesion arise from the extensive complex of general social processes which underlie the existence of gangs, and from the myriad commonalities in

\textsuperscript{98} Ref. to discussion of “status classes” in Chapter Three
outlook, participation, and understanding which gang members share with one another.  

**The Gang as “Conventional”**

Street gangs are generally regarded by middle class adults as a kind of aberration, and frequently represented by scholars as a manifestation of “deviance.” During the 1960’s representations of gangs were caught up in a highly fashionable conceptual framework—that of “alienation”—which pictured them as “outside the mainstream” of American life. All these conceptions of gangs—as aberrant, as deviant, as alienated, as outsiders—derive from two closely related models of American society. One model represents certain orientations and behavioral practices as comprising a “core” or “dominant” culture (whose content for the most part is based on certain idealized behavioral forms of middle class adults), and those which depart there from as “deviant.” The other designates certain categories of Americans as “insiders” and others as “outsiders” with respect to certain elements of power, prestige, and the like which are selected, by and large, in accordance with standards derived from elements of the postulated “core” culture.  

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99 Caution not to create wrong impression of “perfect” solidarity to counteract misleading “near-group” formulation. Three points: 1) How to account for the differences re other authors? Are less solidary groups and/or assemblages, probably some approaching “non-solidary.” But need careful and operational definitions of “solidarity” for accurate characterization. 2) Within intensive study gangs, also a range of solidarity. Senior Outlaws prob. most “cohesive,” Queens least. Queens were looser agglomerate of cliques, clique structure more shifting. Not analyzed in detail. But Queens “solidary” re other criteria, e.g., degree of kinship linkage, of mutual knowledge 8 years later, impact of group standards on individual behavior. 3) Role of field worker in enhancing solidarity. Undoubtedly of some influence, particularly with respect to “formal” organizations developed out of gangs. But “comparison groups,” without direct worker action, appeared similarly solidary, although impossible to get same degree of detail [e.g., Mauraders (WM4), Midget Outlaws (WMI), Hoods].  

100 Issue of conceptual models very complex, can’t develop here. Involves basic controversies re “common” vs. “diversified” value system in U.S., relationship of power and prestige to “insideness” and “outsideness,” definitions of “conformity,” etc. Issue developed in part in other writings (e.g., W. Miller, ’69, “Elimination of American Lower Class,” other refs.), and in the present work in Chapters 11 and 12 (Patterning of Thefts).
Summary: The Urban Adolescent Street Gang

as a Stable Associational Form

The present chapter consists primarily of a large amount of detailed information relating to youth gangs and gang members in Midcity in the 1950’s and ‘60’s. The bulk of this material is empirical and descriptive rather than general or theoretical. This emphasis has been quite deliberate, and is responsive to a circumstance discussed earlier—that much of what is “known” about gangs and gang members is based on methods of obtaining information which are critically deficient. Media writers, with an eye to the market, tend to select for attention those gangs which are most unusual, and those aspects of gang behavior which are most spectacular. The media are therefore of limited value as a source of information as to the day-to-day behavior of the average American street gang. Much descriptive treatment by scholars also embodies serious methodological weaknesses which cast doubt upon the validity of the more general conclusions derived there from.\textsuperscript{101} Since the present study has been able to accommodate many of the more common methodological deficiencies (although by no means all), the interests of factual accuracy justify the presentation of a considerable amount of descriptive detail. From this perspective the descriptive material can be seen as a contribution to the ethnography of the urban adolescent street corner gang.

This is not to question the importance of generalized propositions, but rather to emphasize the necessity of having such propositions based on empirical foundations which are as solid as possible. The final chapter of this work develops a general explanation of gangs and delinquency which builds on a level of proposition which is somewhere between empirical finding and abstract theory, and which might be called “descriptive generalization.” Accounts of the individual gangs center around a set of descriptive topics—character of the neighborhood, gang haunts and hangouts, subdivisions and relations between subdivisions, kinship

\textsuperscript{101} Citation of deficiencies in scholarly works; cite BU School of Soc. Wk article for comparison with Thrasher, Cohen, Cloward-Ohlin: cite need of cross-cultural data.
links, illegal involvement, cliques, leadership, and so on. The previous section
developed a set of propositions on the “descriptive generalization” level out of the
analysis of the more readily quantifiable “status characteristics” (sex, social status,
etc.) of gang members; it would be possible to follow a similar procedure with
respect to the less-readily-quantifiable characteristics such as leadership and clique
patterns. This analysis will not be presented at this point; instead, the empirical
data of this chapter, along with a limited amount of information from other sources,
will be brought to bear on a set of issues relating to gangs and gang behavior at a
somewhat higher level of generality. These are: real and perceived changes in the
prevalence of gangs; definitions of “the gang”; the “solidarity” of the gang as a unit;
gang members as “disturbed” or “unhappy”; the gang as “deviant” or “alienated”;
and racial differences among gangs.

General Characteristics of the Urban Adolescent Street Gang
Characterizations of the urban adolescent street gang, as noted earlier, are
particularly susceptible to misrepresentation. Specific examples will be discussed in
later sections; an important underlying reason is that the gang is anything but a
“neutral” phenomenon, and the existence and activities of gang members engage
deep and often unexamined values and emotions of both lay and professional
observers. As in the case of any highly-charged social phenomenon, what one sees as
well as the way he interprets what he sees is significantly influenced by what one
approves and disapproves, wishes to be and wishes not to be. Largely because of
this the task of presenting a balanced and accurate picture of the gang is far from
easy, and the methods one uses to obtain information bear a direct relationship to
the kind of picture one derives. Methods of media-writers are particularly conducive
to distortion, since the daily routine activities of the average gang have little
market value, and are seldom reported. Instead, what the media do consider

102 Analysis in preliminary form, unpublished mss.
newsworthy are those kinds of gang activities which are most extreme, those gangs which are most spectacular, and those periods in gang history which are most flamboyant. The media are therefore of limited value as a source of information on the day-to-day behavior of the average gang, since their reporting criteria operate so as to emphasize the extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary, and provide little basis for accurate conceptions of the average gang.

Many studies by scholars also embody methodological weaknesses which throw into question the validity of their general conclusions. Insofar as the present study has been able to accommodate the more common of these, it provides a more adequate basis for valid generalizations. Particular features of the present method—the extended duration of the study period, the intensive and intimate nature of field observation, the large volume of detailed recording by a corps of field workers, the comprehensive and systematic processing of field records, the use of demographic, historical and ethnographic bodies of data, and the mutual articulation of these and other bodies of data—make the accumulated information of the Midcity study an unusually strategic basis for addressing a set of fundamental questions concerning gangs. What is a gang? Are gangs temporary or lasting? Is there a “crucial element” of the “true” gang? What features of gangs vary and which remain stable? To what degree are gangs deviant? Disorganized? Abnormal? Alienated? Unhappy? Racially distinctive?

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103 Some of the more common deficiencies are cited on page particularly as these affect the issue of gang “solidarity.” Some of the deficiencies of several major works on gangs—Thrasher, Whyte, Cohen, Cloward-Ohlin—are discussed in Miller, W.B., “City Gangs: A Report on the Midcity Delinquency Study” in Boston University School of Social Work Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan. 1963. One of the points of this discussion is that most of these works are strong on either an empirical or theoretical level, but none represents an effective integration of the two. One major defect of the present study is the paucity of “comparative” data—both within the United States and with other countries—on an equivalent level of intensity and detail.

104 Poss. Descriptive material in accounts of individual gangs centered on several topics—leadership, cliques, subdivision, illegal involvement, and so on. Would be possible to do “all-gang” treatment of these topics in fashion parallel to “study-population” analysis to “higher” level represented by cited questions. All-gang generalizations will be incorporated into these analyses rather than more specific topic-centered analyses.
Discussions of these issues will draw on studies conducted in a number of other cities—principally New York, London, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. Utilization of findings from these studies will add comparative breadth to conclusions derived primarily from the intensive study of a single community. But it should be pointed out that the consideration of such findings—even those which are most adequate methodologically—will not serve to modify public misconceptions nor resolve scholarly differences. For at issue here is not merely the availability of factual data or the validity of available factual data, but the interpretation of available data—or rather, a complex mixture of fact and interpretation with particular theoretical perspectives serving both to guide the initial collection of data and provide the basis for its subsequent interpretation. It is difficult to know, in any given case, the degree to which disagreements derive from different factual findings, differences in the interpretation of similar findings, or some combination of these. The weight granted to conclusions of the present study must rest on an appraisal of the adequacy both of its data collection methods and the general framework used to interpret its finding. The most conservative statement one can make here is that conclusions of other studies which do not accord with those presented here cannot be taken as validly applicable to the gang as a generic form.

The Gang as a Persisting Form

The gang, in one or another of its various forms, is as old as human history, and the urban adolescent street gang is as old as the American city. The band of young males, maintaining an identity separate from that of the breeding or child-rearing unit, and carrying out a set of activities independent of but complementary to those of the latter, is a ubiquitous form in primitive and near-primitive human societies, and close analogues are found in other primate societies as well. Despite radical differences in environmental contexts, there are direct continuities between such bands and the twentieth century urban adolescent street gang, both with
respect to form (size, age composition) and patterns of activity (predation, protection, recreation).\textsuperscript{105}

Modern historical evidence indicates that there have been adolescent street gangs, similar to those of today, wherever there have been urban lower class communities. The crowd that congregated at Riley’s store in Midcity Highlands in the 1830’s (see Chapter 11) manifested classic characteristics of the “hanging” corner group. Henry Adams described in vivid detail the gang fights between the “Northsiders” and “Southsiders” on the Boston Common in the 1840’s. An 1856 account from Brooklyn states that:

...at any and all hours there are multitudes of boys...congregated on the corners of the streets, idle in their habits, dissolute in their conduct, profane and obscene in their conversation, gross and vulgar in their manners. If a female passes one of the groups she is shocked by what she sees and hears...

The account of the Outlaws cites evidence that gangs with the Outlaw name had hung out on the same corner at least since the 1930’s; similarly, gang fighting between the “Tops” and “Bottoms” in West Philadelphia which started in the 1930’s was still continuing in the 1970’s.\textsuperscript{106}

Despite the historical continuity of the street gang, many observers in each new generation tend to perceive it as a new or emergent phenomenon generated by contemporary conditions and destined to vanish as these conditions vanish. As in the case of explanations for the lower class discussed in Chapter Two, the existence of gangs during any historical period is generally explained as a product of conditions peculiar to that era—frequently conditions of which the observer does not approve. Gangs in the 1910’s and ‘20’s were attributed to cultural dislocations and community disorganization attending the massive immigrations of foreigners; in the

\textsuperscript{105} Analogues of “Midcity” type gangs and Otoro system of East Africa cited in “Total Community Delinquency Project” paper (Miller, 1962). The present work, as discussed in greater detail elsewhere, conceives the urban lower class child-rearing unit and adolescent street gang as related and complementary forms, each performing various parts of the total task of child-rearing and enculturation (along with other units), rather than conceiving the latter form as a consequence of malfunctioning of the former (“the gang is a product of the broken home”).

\textsuperscript{106} References to sources. Outlaw reunion in 1969.
1930’s to enforced idleness and economic pressures produced by the great depression; in the 1950’s to mental or emotional disturbance of parents and children resulting from the increasing stresses and tensions of modern life; in the 1960’s and ‘70’s to a range of social injustices including racial discrimination, unequal access to educational and occupational opportunities, resentment over inequalities in the distribution of wealth and privilege in an affluent society, and ineffective or oppressive policies of service agencies such as the police and schools.107

In consequences of these and related factors, public perception of the prevalence of gangs at any point in time varies widely. Statements such as “the gangs are all gone,” “the gangs are breaking up,” or “the gangs are coming back” are typical. How can one account for this general conception of gangs as disappearing and reappearing? Two questions are at issue; first the empirical question of the actual prevalence of gangs in different localities at different points in time, and second the question of what affects public conceptions. The empirical question is obviously the prior one, but the kinds of comprehensive and carefully collected information necessary to an accurate answer are not available.108 Changing perceptions of the prevalence of gangs must therefore be based on something other than verified factual information. Although it will not be possible in the present work to treat in detail either the empirical or conceptual question, some light may

107 The explanatory fashions of this period also accommodated explanations for the non-existence of gangs by those whose perspectives led to a belief in such a situation. Most of these centered on the notion that urban slum adolescents had converted their gang-forming propensities into various “substitute” activities or ventures such as the use of narcotics, “politicization” which consumed their energies in ideologically-oriented radical or reform activities, involvement in collective enterprises modeled on commercial ventures, and involvement in publicly financed education and/or training programs.

108 Adequate information as to the prevalence of gangs in the United States would require a kind of data-gathering effort on a national scale analogous to that by which the federal bureau of the census ascertains the number of family units in different localities at different times. Such an enterprise does not exist and in all probability is not contemplated. Information utilized in the present work relating to the prevalence of gangs is derived from a variety of sources, including published accounts, newspaper reports, contacts with researchers in various cities, and direct observation of gangs in a number of large American cities, including Boston, Providence, Springfield, Philadelphia, Washington, Miami, New Orleans, Houston, Chicago, national data, conclusions relating to prevalence on a nation-wide basis must be considered as tentative.
be shed on the latter by an examination of two kinds of reasons for changing perceptions. These will be called “definitional” and “perceptual.”

**What is a Gang?**

How one defines a “gang” is of critical importance to one’s perception of how prevalent gangs are. Many observers, both scholars and non-scholars, maintain special, restricted, and often private notions of what a “real” gang is. Frequently a single, sine qua non element is regarded as the essential feature; without it, observed groups are regarded as near-gangs, pseudo-gangs, or non-gangs. This “crucial element” is frequently different for different observers. Among the more common are names, autocratic one-man leadership, some “absolute” degree of

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109 In the late 1960’s and early ‘70’s, during a period when considerable unanimity existed among most New York-based observers that the gangs were gone or no longer a problem, nearby Philadelphia was experiencing a wave of gang violence which probably resulted in more murders in a shorter period of time than during any equivalent phase of the highly-publicized “fighting gang” era in New York. Police estimated that about 80 gangs comprising about 5,000 members were “active” in the city, and that about 20 were engaged in active combat. Social agencies put the total estimated number of gangs at 200, with about 80 categorized as “most hostile.” Most gangs were designated by the name of their major “hanging” comer (12th and Poplar Streeters; 21W’s, for 21st and Westmoreland); others bore traditional gang names such as the Centours, Morrocans, and Pagans. Between October 1962 and December 1968, gang members were reported to be involved in 257 shootings, 250 stabbings, and 205 “rumbles” or gang fights. In a 17 month period between January 1968 and June 1969, 53 homicides and over 519 injuries were attributed to armed encounters involving gangs. Of the homicide victims, all but 8 were known to be affiliated with street gangs. Assaultants ranged in age from 13 to 20, with peak years at 16, 17, and 18 (70% of the cases) and with the frequency curve sloping down toward 13 and 20, closely resembling the “assault frequency” curve shown for Midcity gangs. Although detailed research-based information as to the forms and activity patterns of these gangs was not available, existing evidence appeared to indicate that most of the Philadelphia gangs approximated the classic Midcity type, with a territorial base, age-graded subdivisions, related female groups, and a range of “customary” forms of criminal activity centering on the “central complex” crimes of theft, assault, drinking, and vandalism. The wave of violent gang activity in Philadelphia was virtually ignored by the national press. It seems most likely that if these events had occurred in New York where most of the media have their headquarters, a spate of newspaper features, magazine articles and television “specials” would have created the impression that the country was engulfed in a “new” wave of gang violence. (Sources of information: Division of Youth Conservation Services, Philadelphia Department of Public Welfare; Gang Control Unit, Philadelphia Police Department. See also “Teen Gang Carnage Reaches Peak; 47 dead, 519 injured in 17 months” The Philadelphia Bulletin, May 25, 1969. A similar situation existed in Chicago, with 33 deaths attributed to gang fighting during the first six months of 1969. During this same period, gangs were also active in Boston. In a 90-minute period on May 10, 1969, one of the two channels of the Boston Police radio reported 38 incidents involving gangs (one every two-and-a-half minutes), including two gang fights. Simultaneous field observation in several white lower class neighborhoods showed congregations of street gangs at numerous corners throughout the area. None of the 38 incidents was reported in the newspapers.)
cohesiveness or mutual loyalty or stable membership; a dominant involvement in violent conflict with the gangs, and participation in activities seen to pose a threat to other sectors of the community. Reaction to groups which lack the crucial element often takes the form of – “Oh them. That’s not a gang. It’s just a bunch of kids out on the corner.”

Extensive involvement in gang fighting serves for many as the essential element of the “real” gang. This was explicitly true during the New York-focused “fighting gang” phase of the 1950’s. The only “real” gang was the fighting gang—that is, a gang perceived to be specifically organized around the conduct of gang warfare. If there is no gang fighting there are no gangs. A closely related conception defines the gang in terms of the degree of “threat” or “problem” it poses; a group whose “problematic” behavior is hard to ignore is a gang; one less problematic is not. This mode of definition is particularly common among agencies charged with responsibility for maintaining order or working directly with low-status populations. Given a situation wherein resources are very limited relative to the potential “need” for services, such agencies must of necessity develop relatively simple defining criteria which will serve to delineate a limited and manageable domain of responsibility. For these purposes, general definitions based on formal criteria are of little relevance. Unless a group acts in such a way as to call responsive action by the agency it is not considered a real gang. 110

110 This kind of definitional criterion is applied not only on the basis of whether or not “action” is called for, but also on the basis of the kind of action seen as appropriate. The previous footnote cited police estimates that there were 80 gangs in Philadelphia, of which 20 were “at war,” whereas social workers estimated that there were 200, of which 80 were “most hostile.” It is obvious that the 80 “most hostile” gangs of the social workers were the 80 “gangs” of the police. The additional 120 groups defined as “gangs” by social workers because they were seen as appropriate objects of social work action were “non-gangs” to the police since they were not sufficiently troublesome to require consistent police attention. Similarly, it is quite possible that there were other groups in the city definable as gangs by some criteria but which were not considered gangs by the social workers since they were not seen as appropriate objects of social work attention.
It becomes obvious from these considerations that an explicit and detailed definition of the phenomenon under consideration is an essential prerequisite to any informed statement as to the prevalence of gangs. Such a definition must be based on formal characteristics which may be ascertained through direct observation. Intangible characteristics such as “esprit de corps,” “a sense of we-ness,” “morale,” “group awareness,” “tough self-image,” and the like, while not irrelevant, are of limited utility since their attribution depends so heavily on subjective judgments by observers whose evaluative standards are difficult to formalize. Nor must the definition incorporate hypotheses or speculations as to origins or developmental history (“originally formed spontaneously,” “integrated through conflict”) but must depend rather on contemporaneously observable characteristics.

The development of a satisfactory definition along these lines would require extensive information, on the order of detail and specificity here presented for Midcity gangs, as to gangs and related groupings in a wide range of contexts. These would include not only the major urban centers of the United States, but also the many locales in other countries where gangs are and have been prevalent. Ideally, both national and cross-cultural data should include as much historical depth as can be achieved. Information of this type would make possible not only an adequate and generally acceptable definition, but also the development of taxonomy—the range of types and subtypes of gangs and related groupings.

As already stated, information of this order is not now available. In its absence, it is essential to delineate as precisely as possible the sense in which the term “the gang” is used in the present work. This definition is based primarily on the substantive findings of the present study, but also incorporates findings of other empirical studies.\footnote{References to Thrasher, White, Scott, Short and Strodtbeck, B. Cohen, others.} Two orders of characteristics will be distinguished—“defining criteria,” which serve to define the unit and which remain stable over time, and “variable characteristics,” aspects or attributes of gangs which may vary over time or in different localities without destroying the identity of the unit as here defined.
The Urban Adolescent Street Gang: Defining Criteria

Five major criteria serve to define the urban adolescent street gang, as the term is used in the present work. These are presented in Chart 1.4, along with sub-criteria intended for amplification or clarification. The five major criteria are: recurrent, extra-residential congregation; a territorial or area basis of assemblage, recruitment, activity, and self-defined use-and-occupancy rights; an age basis for affiliation and subgroup delineation; a versatile activity repertoire, with “hanging,” mating, recreational, and illegal activities of central importance; and intra-unit differentiation by authority, prestige, role, and cliques. These criteria apply both to the more inclusive or independent units (“aggregates”) and to recognized subunits (“subdivisions,” “segments”). “Recurrent congregation” appears in Chart 1.4 as the paramount defining criterion of the urban adolescent street gang. This is described earlier as “the practice of leaving one’s home at recurrent intervals and assembling with others of one’s age at designated locales.” Forms, frequency, and locales of hanging have been discussed in some detail. The exact nature of hanging locales may vary from gang to gang and for the same gang at different times (“the” corner, a local store, a poolroom, a parking lot etc.) and may be indoors or outdoors depending on the season or other circumstances, but they are almost invariably “extra-residential.” The propensity to assemble away from the residential unit reflects conditions of at least two subcultures—adolescent and lower class. A central requirement of adolescent peer congregation is that it be sufficiently removed from the household unit so as to facilitate a variety of objectives—including freedom from adult supervision and attention and the conduct of mating activities. The propensity for out-of-home assemblage also relates to the fact that at lower status levels, particularly lower class III, the “hearth” does not serve as a life center in the way

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112 Ref’s. to other definitions. Thrasher one of earliest, still one of best. Also, Scott, B. Cohen, others. Not defined at all in many works, examples. (Check A. Cohen, Block, Cloward, Short, etc.)
113 Term “segment” first used in WBM 1957 paper, still used in some cities, e.g., Philadelphia. Present work generally uses term “subdivision.”
that it does at higher levels, with much life activity taking place out of the home, in barrooms, on door stoops, at street corners.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 1.4</th>
<th>The Urban Adolescent Street Gang: Defining Criteria</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1) Recurrent Congregation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Extra-residential</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Self-defined inclusion-exclusion criteria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Continuity of affiliation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2) Territorial Basis</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Customary frequentation locales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Customary ranging areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Self-defined use-and-occupancy rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Residential-proximity recruitment basis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3) Age Basis</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Age-limited affiliation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Subgroup delineation by age</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4) Versatile Activity Repertoire</strong></td>
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<td>Central role of:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Extended periods of “casual” interaction (“hanging out”)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Mating involvement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c) Illegal activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Recreational-athletic activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5) Intra-unit Differentiation</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Authority, roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Prestige, cliques</td>
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The gang is not an “open” group, but maintains well-developed criteria for inclusion and exclusion. These are not formalized, and can seldom be readily articulated, but exert a compelling influence nonetheless.\(^{114}\) Nor is the gang a transient assemblage, but maintains continuity of affiliation over time. As in most groups, the degree of continuity may vary both over the short and long run. Membership varies with the season, and there is always some turnover in the course of a year. A group formed in early adolescence will seldom include all the same individuals at the point when it starts to dissolve in late adolescence. Nevertheless, under conditions of average residential stability, there will almost always be a sizable core of persons who may be depended on to be “out on the corner” during most of their adolescent years.\(^{115}\)

Territorial aspects of the street gang are manifested in several ways. The bulk of membership is drawn from nearby residential areas; most “regulars” live within walking distance of the major assemblage locale or locales.\(^{116}\) The advent of the automobile has to some degree weakened the powerful influence of territoriality and localism on traditional modes of gang life but has by no means eliminated it. Gang members tend to operate within specific “ranging areas” whose major activity locales (the movie, the hamburger stand, the lovers’ lane, the bowling alley) are highly routinized. Such ranging areas may be extended by the availability of automobiles but they never become randomized.

Perhaps the best known manifestation of territoriality in gang life is what Chart 1.4 designates as “self-defined use-and-occupancy rights.” Many species of

\(^{114}\) A discussion of criteria used by gang members to determine who is “one of us” is included in Miller, 1968 (Milieu), op. cit., pages 00. These center on adherence to certain standards of acceptable and estimable behavior as defined within urban adolescent lower class subcultures.

\(^{115}\) In order to draw up membership lists for Midcity gangs it was necessary to make careful counts of the “hanging frequency” of persons on major corners for periods ranging from one to three years. Despite temporary fluctuations, these lists showed a high degree of affiliational continuity for the major study gangs. The degree of membership continuity for shorter periods was on the order of 80-85%, and for longer periods on the order of 75-80%. (Check exact figures).

\(^{116}\) Ref. to “residential areas” study of Midcity gangs. Maps were made up for each corner, members’ residences spotted. Series of concentric zones around the corner. A few instances of persons coming from longer distances, always some specific reason (kinship, moved away, etc.).
animals, including man, carve out geographically-delimited areas or zones within which they exercise certain special rights of occupancy and use.\textsuperscript{117} The “turf” concept has caught the fancy of popular writers, who often misleadingly represent the “gang turf” as a rigidly defined no-trespass zone into which outsiders may intrude only at the risk of serious danger. As in the case of other sub criteria discussed here, the “turf” concept is not a present-absent situation, but rather a principle which may vary in degree or intensity. More intensely developed instances of the “turf” principle do exist, but they are not typical, and for most gangs the special relationship of the gang to “their” neighborhood area is more diffusely developed. For example, the “trespass at your own risk” ethic applies primarily to male peers, with adults seldom affected. However, all gangs do make some sort of claim of special rights of occupancy and use for what they define as “their” territory, and this phenomenon serves as a major defining criteria of the street gang.

The urban adolescent street gang is, preeminently, an assemblage of age-mates. Age serves in diverse and complex ways to define the limits of gang aggregates and to order internal relationships, but the operation of the age principle as such is powerful and pervasive. One of the principal ways in which age affects gang composition is that it establishes, within rough limits, the upper and lower limits of the adolescent “hanging” phase. These limits may vary considerably from community to community, but in most instances the lower limit runs, very roughly, from about 10 to 13, and the upper from about 18 to 22 for males, and 16-18 for females.\textsuperscript{118}

Age also exerts a decisive influence in the delineation of gang subgroups. Sub aggregation by age is a complex process involving interaction between several sets of variables, including the number of individuals in the hanging aggregate, local statutes respecting age of school attendance, work-force participation and armed-

\textsuperscript{117} Ref. to Ardrey Territoriality book.
\textsuperscript{118} Further discussion of age limits of “hanging” phase in Male Sex and Mating, Chapter 9. Age also plays important role in composition of other “genera” of “territorially-localized self-selected peer association” such as the adult male corner gang and the elderly male “crony” gang. Age span for older groups generally considerably wider than for adolescent.
services membership, the age-period within adolescence, and characteristic gang activity patterns. Total size of the aggregate is very important. By and large, the greater the number of congregating individuals, the more sensitively age serves to delineate subgroups. When the local community can support only one or a few gang units in a given locality, the age-span within the unit is wider than when larger numbers are present. Similarly, the age-spread within units tends to be wider at the oldest (and sometimes the youngest) age levels, and narrower for middle-adolescent units.\footnote{The age spread was computed for the seven intensive-study gangs with some results reported in the accounts of the individual gangs. For middle-adolescent gangs age-spreads were very restricted; typically, 70-80\% of gang members were born within two years of one another, and 90-100\% within four years.}

The urban adolescent street gang is represented in the present work as a stable and conventionalized associational form—one of a number of forms which compose the totality of social arrangements in the urban community. The gang, like the “family” or child-rearing unit, is “multi-functional”—that is, it engages the lives of its members in multiple and diverse spheres of endeavor, rather than centering around single or restricted concerns. As a multi-functional unit its members engage in a wide range of diverse activities.\footnote{As discussed elsewhere, (e.g., Violent Crimes paper, Op. Cit.) the Midcity study collected and analyzed information on over 60 separate forms of behavior (e.g., economic, religious, recreational, etc.) with these 60 themselves representing a selection from a potentially larger number. Detailed treatment of 9 of these (kin-oriented, educational, occupational, sex, mating, drinking, assaultive, theft, and general criminal behavior) is presented in subsequent chapters. In this connection it is important to clarify the meaning of the term “gang behavior.” As used here, the term refers simply to behavior engaged in by gang members, whatever its context. A contrasting notion conceives “gang behavior” only as these collective or “organized” enterprises in which all gang members or most gang members participate, (e.g., B. Cohen). Thus, a mugging executed by three gang members is not “gang crime,” but rather a crime by individuals who happen to belong to gangs. As shown elsewhere, participation by the full complement of persons associated with a particular gang is extremely rare; while most forms of gang activity are “collective,” the great bulk of activities involve variously composed subgroups of the larger aggregate. Even hanging, the central gang activity, generally occurs in shifts; all persons affiliated with a gang are seldom out on the corner at the same time. One situation where concerted and close-to-complete participation occurs is a large scale gang fight, but for the average gang, as shown in the chapter on assault (Chapter 13), such events are very rare.} Chart 1.4 selects from this range four kinds of activity sufficiently intrinsic to gang life to warrant their being designated as “defining” criteria. These are hanging (“casual” interaction), mating, recreational-
athletic activity, and illegal activities. Each of these forms, in turn, represents a diversified set of sub forms.

Hanging, the central form of gang activity, is often perceived as aimless and amorphous—as “loafing,” “doing nothing,” or “killing time.” This perception is reinforced by the tendency of gang members themselves to characterize this activity in similar terms. Hanging is in fact a highly complex and diversified form of activity, whose many components (arguing, discussing, teasing, ranking, repartee, horseplay, flirting, gambling, etc.) are discussed elsewhere.¹²¹ “Recreational” activity, with its important component of athletic spectatorship and participation, is a dominant activity for gang members as it is for most American adolescents. Among the more common forms of collective recreation which frequently involve both sexes are expeditions to beaches or amusement parks, dancing, and listening to popular music. Involvement in music and dancing as such is a permanent part of gang life, but the actual forms current at any point in time vary greatly, being highly susceptible to fashion. The predominance of mating activity—all those forms of behavior related to the process of establishing mating partnerships—also resonates a dominant concern of the larger adolescent subculture, and is discussed in detail in future chapters.

Of all the customary activities of the street gang, the nature and role of illegal activity is perhaps the most misunderstood. The term “delinquent gang” is highly misleading; as generally used it implies the existence of two distinct kinds of gangs—one whose members engage primarily or exclusively in criminal behavior and another whose members are law abiding. In point of fact, there is no street gang whose members do not engage in some form of illegal activity, nor is there any gang for which specifically illegal activity comprises more than a minor portion of its total range of customary activities.¹²² The repertoire of illegal activities engaged

¹²¹ References. Include “Aggression in a Boys’ corner gang” article.
¹²² Statistics on proportion of criminal to other forms of behavior. City Gangs chapters. Thefts, Assault, Patterning of Crime. Also “Violent Crimes” paper. Much of customary gang crime is quite mild; petty theft, noisy congregation, disturbances while drinking.
in by the average gang is “versatile,” as in the case of other defining activities. It includes various forms of theft, assault, drinking, narcotics use, and property destruction. There is, however, wide variation in the forms and frequencies of illegal activity—among different gangs, at different age levels, in different communities, at different periods in history. Preferred forms of crime are strongly influenced by fashion just as in the case of popular music. For some gangs during certain periods narcotics may be more fashionable than drinking, with different kinds of narcotics, as well as different kinds of alcohol, moving in and out of favor. The frequency of organized inter-gang conflict is particularly subject to time-and-place variation; as already shown, the “rumble” was “in” in some cities during the ‘50’s, and enjoyed a revival in the 1970’s. But it is most important here to be quite clear as to just what it is that changes and what it is that persists. Criminal activity of some kind comprises a persistent component of customary gang behavior; the particular form it takes at different times and in different places may vary, but the practice of illegal activity in some form remains universal.

In common with other kinds of human groups, the street gang is characterized by internal differentiation of various kinds. Prominent among these are differentiation with respect to authority, prestige roles, and cliques. As in the case of other criteria, there is considerable misconception as to the nature of intra-gang differentiation, particularly with respect to authority or “leadership.” One prevalent conception of the “true” gang sees it as an autocratic despotism, with a single dictatorial leader imposing his will on compliant followers; another pictures the “true” gang as comprising a highly organized system of hierarchical authority, with presidents and war councilors, and the efficient execution by subordinates of decisions originating at the command level. Like other stereotypes, gangs, which approximate the “dictator” and “chain-of-command” conceptions, do appear from place to place and time to time, but such manifestations represent extremes in a range of variation, and are far from typical. Authority and leadership in the average gang is complex, fluid, and responsive. One has only to consider the variety of
leadership arrangements in Midcity gangs—the delicate power-balance among the
five Senior Bandit clique leaders, the two opposing and one mediating clique in the
Junior Bandits, the good-boy and bad-boy leaders of Junior Outlaws and Kings—to
appreciate the intricacy and variety of gang leadership. For the average gang
leadership is more diffuse than concentrated, and depends in large part on the
particular activity being conducted.\textsuperscript{123}

Related to but not identical with differentiation by authority is differentiation
by prestige. Members of gangs are mutually evaluated with respect to ability,
capacity, and esteemed personal qualities.\textsuperscript{124} Some writers have pictured the gang
as characterized by a rigid and stable pecking order. While the allocation of ranked
prestige is quite sensitive, it is considerably less rigid than implied by the “pecking
order” image, and, like leadership, may vary over time and according to situational
contexts. The gang is also differentiated by “role”—that is, a set of well-defined
“types” which occur with remarkable consistency from gang to gang. Among these
are: the lover, the clown, the scapegoat, the battler, and the operator. Finally, all
gangs include cliques or subgroups of various sizes and mutual relationships—
ranging from pairs and triads to relatively stable six to eight person groups. Both
leadership and prestige are related to ones’ position in a particular clique.

The criteria listed in Chart 1.4 and explicated in the accompanying
discussion serve to define the “urban adolescent street gang,” as the term is used in
the present work. It will be useful, in addition, to summarize the substance of the
discussion in terms of a formal definition, as follows:

An urban adolescent street gang is a group of adolescents who congregate
recurrently at one or more extra-residential locales, with continued affiliation
based on self-defined inclusion criteria. Recruitment, customary assemblage
locales and ranging areas are based upon location within a delimited
territory, over some portion of which limited use and occupancy rights are
claimed. Group boundaries and the composition of subgroups are delineated
on the basis of age. The group maintains a versatile repertoire of activities

\textsuperscript{123} The “situational” nature of leadership in Midcity gangs is discussed in “The Impact of...etc.,”
1957, Page 402.
\textsuperscript{124} Basis of esteem, prestige, discussed in Milieu, Aggression papers, Op. Cit. Also ref. to Spiller
thesis, paper.
with hanging, mating, recreational and illegal activity of central importance, and is internally differentiated on the basis of authority, prestige, personality-roles and clique-formation.125

**Variation in Gang Characteristics**

Having established an explicit basis of reference with respect to the term “gang” as used in the present work, it is now possible to return to the issue of persistence. This issue will be addressed in terms of the following question: Which characteristics of the urban adolescent street gang remain constant, and which vary? Since “variation” in gang characteristics may occur either in the same locale at different points in time (“change”) or in different locales (neighborhoods, cities, countries) at the same point in time (typological variation), treatment of issues relating to persistence is at the same time a treatment of issues relating to typology. Two kinds of variation will be discussed: first, variation in the defining criteria or sub criteria, and second variation in other characteristics of gangs.

It should be evident from previous discussion that the criteria which serve to define the gang are not conceived of as narrowly restricted states or conditions but rather as general characteristics which can and do encompass a good deal of variation. For example, “subgroup delineation by age” may take a variety of forms, but it serves as a defining criterion of the gang so long as it is present in one or another manifestation. Similarly, each of the criteria of Chart 1.4 represents a descriptive dimension along which gangs may vary in space of time. A brief discussion of such variation follows.

Among the aspects of “recurrent congregation” which show variation are the frequency of hanging and the composition of the hanging group. These may vary

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125Since available data do not provide a satisfactory basis for the development of a systematic typology, it will be useful, on a preliminary basis, to “place” the urban adolescent street corner gang with respect to related groups according to the classificational scheme used in biological typology. The unit as defined here is conceived to be at the species level of biological taxonomy. The genus is “territorially-located self-selected peer associations,” which includes forms such as the middle-class adolescent drug-store crowd, the urban adult male street gang (treated by W.F. Whyte, 1943, and E. Leibow, 1967, Op. Cits.) and the elderly male “crony” assemblage (urban, small town, rural). Forms at the family or order level include the organized adult criminal “mob,” and the young adult motorcycle gang. Subtypes of the unit under consideration here (e.g., multi-unit age-graded aggregate, two-unit male-female aggregate, and so on) are at the subspecies level.
according to the season, the day of the week, and the age period within adolescence. Territorial characteristics which slow variation include the size and boundaries of ranging areas and the “recruitment zone” from which the gang draws its members. The number and location of hanging locales may vary seasonally and according to the local availability of appropriate points of assemblage. The kinds of “use and occupancy rights” to which a gang lays claim will vary, as will the area over which it claims such rights. Both the upper and lower age limits of hanging groups may vary from place to place and time to time, as will the number, span, and identity of the age divisions which delineate cliques and subgroups.

The specific activities which compose a gangs’ total activity repertoire show a good deal of variation, particularly with respect to the proportion of time and attention devoted to activities of various kinds. Such proportions vary from gang to gang and for the same gang during different seasons and age periods. Hanging is always an important component of the gang’s activity repertoire, but the frequency and duration of hanging periods show considerable variation, particularly by season. The amount of time and attention devoted to mating activity varies both by age and sex, with females devoting proportionately more attention to such activity than males and with intensified concern generally starting at an earlier age.

Variation in the forms and frequency of illegal activities is especially relevant to the issue of gang persistence. As shown in later chapters, involvement in the several forms of customary gang crime (theft, assault, drinking, vandalism) shows systematic variation by age within particular gangs. “Favored” forms of crime vary from gang to gang, and “fashionable” forms vary over time. While theft in its various forms shows a high degree of persistence as a major component of the gangs’ repertoire of illegal activity, certain forms of assault—particularly inter-gang assault—show a great deal of variation both in frequency and scope. Such variation, as already seen, frequently provides a major basis for concluding that gangs do or

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126 Ref. to activity distribution statistics.
127 See Sex and Mating Chapters (Chapters 8,9).
128 Ref. to chapters on crime
do not exist. It is important to bear in mind that involvement in collective assault—in common with other forms of gang activity—may increase or decrease without affecting the prevalence of gangs. The same principle applies to the equipment of assault; weapons may or may not be used, and the kinds of weapons utilized at different points in time and among different gangs (zip guns, knives, chains, clubs) may vary greatly. Whether or not a gang uses guns is, of course, of critical importance to the police, but has little relevance to the empirical issue of the prevalence of gangs.

The illegal use of narcotics and alcohol shows similar kinds of variation. As in the case of the term “the delinquent gang,” it is misleading in most instances to talk of “drug using” gangs. Almost all gang members have some experience with narcotics in one or more of their various forms and with alcohol of various kinds. Frequency of usage, favored forms, and degree of public attention to usage are subject to the same kinds of time and place variation as obtains for other forms of customary gang behavior.

It is hardly necessary to mention that forms of recreational activity vary greatly, particularly over time. The zoot-suited gangs of the 1940’s jitterbugged to swing music; the “cool” gangs of the 1960’s did the twist and boogaloo to electronic rock music. Music and dancing in some form, however, consistently play an important part in gang activities, with favored forms generally reflecting contemporary fashions of the larger adolescent subculture. Participation and spectatorship of athletic activities tends to be more conservative; baseball has remained a central preoccupation of gang males for well over half a century.

Involvement by gang members in political and politically-oriented activities appears to show cyclical variation in response to the changing political climate of the cities. During most periods political activity does not play an important part in the customary activities of gangs. However, during the heyday of the big city political machines gang members frequently became involved in local political activity, acting as runners, and performing a variety of tasks (posting bills,
transporting voters) during election time. Not infrequently gangs were partially subsidized by local ward bosses.\textsuperscript{129} Similarly, during the heyday of the Negro advancement movements of the 1960’s and 70’s, some Negro gang members, particularly older males, became involved in a variety of activities relating to one or another of the constituent enterprises of this movement.\textsuperscript{130}

Intra-unit differentiation in gangs shows wide variation. “Leadership,” already discussed, takes many forms and varies along the dimensions of concentration-diffuseness, strong and weak authority, and others. Evidence does not support the simple notion that groups with a single strong and visible leader are “gangs” and those without such a leader are not. There is also variation with respect to the number and sizes of intra-gang cliques, the number and types of special roles, the ranking of members with respect to prestige and the degree of development of the “ranking” principle. The relation of the gang to “organization” is also widely misconceived, as evidenced in part by the prevalent confusion between the terms “gang” and “club.” Some see a group as a “gang” if it is “organized,” and a “non-gang” if it is not; others assume the opposite view.

The gang is essentially an “informal” association unit—that is, its many forms of role differentiation, leadership arrangements, subunit formation, and modes of operation are not governed by or delineated in a codified charter. Under some circumstances, however, smaller or larger parts of a gang may adopt one or more of the features of a formal organization—with codified rules and bylaws, elected officials, committees, and so on.\textsuperscript{131} Despite the presence of such elements, however, the basic congregating unit may still be readily identified as a “gang” on the basis of the defining criteria presented here. As in other instances, the degree of

\textsuperscript{129} Ref. to Thrasher, Chapter XXI, The Gang in Politics. 1920’s.
\textsuperscript{130} Ref. to gang involvement in rioting. By and large not “political.” See June ’68 report to N.Y. State Legislature.
\textsuperscript{131} Relation of “club” and “gang” discussed in some detail in W. Miller, “The Place of the Organized Club on Corner Group-work Method,” 1956. Also discusses issue of “formal” vs. “informal” organization. Also Miller 1957 “Impact...etc.” In most usages the term “street club” is essentially equivalent to the term “gang” as here defined.
formal organization manifested by gangs represents a range of variation rather than a present-absent dichotomy.

Variation also affects characteristics of gangs other than the defining characteristic just discussed. Included among these are names, language, attire, size, number, and ethnic composition. Gang names, when they are present, are often colorful and striking, and thus appear to provide a simple and obvious indication of the presence of gangs. The actual relationship of formal names to gangs is, however, quite complex. Many gangs which meet all of the definitional criteria cited here have no formal name. There are numerous ways other than names by which gangs may be designated. These include locality designations (the kids that hang out at Ace Variety; the gang at 12th and Poplar), and names of key members (Digger and them kids). Some gangs assume a name for some purposes and not for others, or assume different names under different circumstances. Athletic teams whose membership overlaps that of a gang may have names which are the same as or different from the gang name, if there is one. Some gangs, as indicated by the quote at the head of this chapter, eschew formal names for a variety of reasons (kid stuff, passé, enhancement of vulnerability to arrest). Both the use of names and the types of names used are highly subject to changing fashions. Instances where a named gang decides to drop its name may be perceived by outsiders as indicating the dissolution of the gang, when in reality nothing has gone but the name. Thus, gang names neither represent an unambiguous present-absent characteristic nor are in any way intrinsic to the existence of gangs.

There is little in the way of a special or distinctive gang “language” independent of the larger subcultural systems of which gang members are a part. Most usages current among gang members which differ from those current in the schools are derived from one of several “prime” subcultures, primarily those of

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132 Gang names are discussed in several works, including Thrasher, 1927 (page 275) and Cavan, 1969 (page 269), others.
adolescence and the social class of gang members. Grammatical usage in particular is affected by social status (lower class III, “I seen them guys;” lower class I, “I saw those guys”). An additional set of terms in common usage by gang members derives from certain non-prime subcultures with which there is some contact, such as the drug-users subculture (a bust; the fuzz) and the subculture of the prison and/or adult crime (stoolie; packing; a hustle). A further set of terms does derive primarily from gang life itself (turf, rumble, rep), but is relatively small. As in the case of other gang characteristics, language patterns show a fascinating mixture of stability and change; some of the terms cited by Thrasher in 1926 are still current (punk; jackrolling); others are quite passé. Variations in terminology from area to area and time to time (jam, rumble, bopping, punch-up) of course have little relation to the persistence of gangs.

The clothing, hairstyles, and forms of bodily adornment of gang members are, like language, highly susceptible to fashion. Persons seeking to locate or identify gangs or gang members through any distinctive “uniform” or mode of dress are generally disappointed. From time to time some article of clothing or mode of adornment becomes particularly fashionable among members of urban street gangs (pachuco marks, west coast, 1950’s; leather jackets) but such fashions are never universal, and are generally short-lived. The “gang jacket” popular in the 1950’s closely resembled similar jackets worn by members of athletic teams and adult laborers. Members of the same gang generally dress pretty much in the same fashion, but in this they differ little from groups of 14-year-old schoolgirls. Attire and adornment of gang members generally reflect fashions current in adolescent

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133 A general explanation of gangs as a product of “subcultural conjunction” which includes the distinction between prime” and non-prime” subcultures is presented in the concluding chapter of this volume.

134 Thrasher failed to recognize the subcultural origins of many of the terms he perceived as distinctive gang usages. For example, his discussion of the “argot of the gang” includes the phrasing “We was by my sister for two days” an obvious Yiddishism more current among the adult Jews of the time than among their then numerous gang-member offspring. Thrasher, op. cit.
and lower class subcultures, and, like other “extrinsic” gang characteristics discussed here, may vary widely without affecting the identity of the gang as such.

The size of gangs is, of course, subject to wide variation. What are the lower and upper size limits of the gang as defined here? As already seen, the basic “building blocks” of gangs are cliques, some as small as two or three persons. Different numbers of cliques form larger units. The size of the group which customarily congregates at particular assemblage locales generally ranges from five or six to 25 or 30 persons. This does not mean that 25 or 30 adolescents are always or usually at the same assemblage point at the same time, but that the hanging aggregate draws from a group of this size. Frequently several such units, differentiated by age, sex, and specific hanging locales are associated with a particular corner or assemblage area. In such cases the total collectivity may be designated an “aggregate,” and its component units “segments” or “subdivisions.” When the 6 to 30 person unit is the only or major group at that locality, it may be called an “aggregate.”

With respect to the lower limits of gang size, present usage would apply the term “gang” to any regularly congregating group where the potential recruitment pool numbers six or more persons. Five would represent a borderline case. General statements as to the upper limits of gang size are difficult to make. Gang members, for a variety of reasons, frequently make highly exaggerated claims as to the size of their own and other gangs, and some observers take these at face value. The size of congregating units is elastic, depending largely on participation in particular activities. It is most unusual for the number of gang members associated with a particular “corner” or other hanging locale to exceed 100 or 120 persons, and a group of this size seldom if ever assembles at the same place at the same time.

Gangs in some cities sometimes claim extensive “lateral” or cross-territorial

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135 Ref. to terms, other discussions of size, 1957 paper. Also present chapter. Present discussion of “size” very incomplete, due to lack of necessary empirical data. Unit-subunit situations can be very complex, adequate treatment would require extended discussion.

136 The reliability of the gang member as a source of information concerning gang characteristics will be discussed shortly.
alliances or aggregations, but these claims are usually questionable, and even if
valid apply only to very limited kinds of association or collective endeavor.137

The size of gangs in different neighborhoods, different cities, and different
countries at different times is affected by many factors, including seasonal
variations, age levels, local population density, and rates of population movement.
Since the propensity to form gangs is higher at lower social status levels, one would
expect to find the largest gangs in areas with relatively large lower class II and III
populations. As in the case of other gang characteristics, variations in the size of
gangs within the limits discussed here have little effect on their identity as gangs.

The number of gangs in any particular neighborhood, city, or country, during
the past or in the present, is not known. Accurate information based on an explicit
operational definition of the phenomenon at issue, as already mentioned, has never
been collected. It is thus impossible to make reliable statements as to change
trends. What data are available, however, would appear to indicate that the number
of gangs does vary considerably, both through time in given areas and among areas
at any given time. Neither the extent of variation nor its causes are known. Factors
affecting the numbers of gangs are similar to those affecting gang size—size of local
populations, residential density, rate of population movements. Here too the size of
the lower status population is of critical importance—roughly, the larger the lower
class population, the more gangs. Operations of public “service” agencies such as
police and social welfare agencies also have some affect on the number of gangs, but
its nature is poorly understood. More intensive police action in an area with larger
gangs may result in a larger number of smaller congregating aggregates, thus
reducing size but increasing numbers. Action by social welfare agencies appears to
have little effect on the numbers of gangs. However variable the number of gangs in
different places and different times, they have always been present, in major
American cities, and will be for the foreseeable future.

137 Ref. to Thrasher data on gang size. In his table (p. 119) 60% of gangs between 6 and 20. However,
hard to know what order of unit his figures refer to since there are no specific definitions of units
and/or subunits.
The ethnic composition of gangs also varies according to the kinds of demographic variables which affect size and numbers. Observers during any particular historical period tend to relate the existence of gangs to characteristics of the particular ethnic groups which figure prominently in the urban lower class during that period. Gangs were thus seen as distinctively “Irish” or distinctively “Italian” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; similarly, they were seen during the middle and late twentieth century as somehow related to the particular circumstances and subculture of urban lower class Negroes. As shown elsewhere, the ethnic composition of particular gangs may affect some of their non-defining characteristics (e.g. Jewish gangs in the 1910’s used many Yiddish phrases; Puerto Rican gangs in the 1950’s spoke Spanish), but has little effect on the form or basic pursuits of the gang. The number and sizes of gangs reflect the size of the lower class population; the degree to which the several ethnic populations maintain lower class status (Italians and Negroes more; Jews and Japanese less) affects the numbers of gangs in various ethnic communities, but the general influence of ethnic status is minor compared with that of class status.

It is now possible to return to a question posed at the beginning of this section: “How are perceptions of the prevalence of gangs affected by matters of definition?” Many of the reasons for misperceiving the prevalence of gangs center on a widespread tendency to force observed groups into one of two discrete and mutually-exclusive categories—“gangs” and “non-gangs”—on the basis of the perceived presence or absence of one or more elements seen as essential to the “true” gang, and which also are conceived as discrete entities. If one takes as the

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138 The tendency to conceive differentiation in terms of conceptual dichotomies rather than continuous variation is a common characteristic of many approaches to social phenomena which evoke moral disapproval or are perceived as threatening. This phenomenon is identified by John and Elaine Cumming as “conceptual isolation,” and discussed by them as it operates with respect to the mentally ill (J. and E. Cumming “Mental Health Education in a Canadian Community,” in B.D. Paul and W. Miller, Editors, Health Culture and Community, Russell Sage, 1955). This approach affects many treatments of both gangs and delinquency. Mentioned earlier is the common practice of dichotomizing gangs into two discrete types, “delinquent” and “non-delinquent.” In both instances, variant types are designated by terms such as “near-or “quasi- or “pseudo-delinquent.” The “gang”-
essential criterion of the “true” gang particular elements such as strong leadership or gang fighting, and if these elements appear to come and go, then gangs themselves are seen as coming and going. The evidence of the present study does not support such a conceptualization, but indicates instead that core characteristics of the urban adolescent street gang manifest an extensive range of continuous variation from place to place and from time to time without negating the existence of the gang. Gangs may be larger or smaller, named or nameless, modestly or extensively differentiated, more or less active in gang fighting, stronger or weaker in leadership, black, white, yellow or brown, without affecting their identity as gangs. So long as groups of adolescents gather periodically outside the home, frequent a particular territory, restrict membership by age and other criteria, pursue a variety of activities and maintain differences in authority and prestige—the gang, as a basic associational form, will continue to exist.

**Perception and Gang Prevalence**

Information as to the actual number of gangs in the United States, as already noted, is not collected on a systematic basis. In such a situation, conceptions as to the prevalence of gangs are heavily influenced by the perspectives derived from one’s social “location” with respect to characteristics such as age, sex, social status, occupational status, and residential locale. Perceptions of gang prevalence, as well as many other kinds of perception, are closely related to the “class” interests and subcultural concerns of these various categories as well as to the kinds of information ordinarily accessible to them.\(^{139}\) The following paragraphs will discuss

\(^{139}\) “non-gang” dichotomy is a product of the same process, with the reality of continuous variation being accommodated by terms such as “near-” or “pseudo-gangs.” This mode of conceptualization is apparently responsive to a human tendency to isolate or wall-off threatening behavior manifestations by conceptually insulating those persons and forms of behavior which have moved sufficiently for beyond certain limits of “acceptable” variability so that it appears dangerous to admit the essential continuity between the “deviant” forms of behavior and those of “normal” persons.

\(^{139}\) As mentioned, categories are designated in a later chapter as “status classes” and are defined and discussed in detail. Influence on perception of differing social ‘positions’ can be designated

257
briefly influences affecting the perceptions of four categories of persons—middle class adults, “service” personnel such as police and social workers, ex-gang members, and gang members themselves.

To the average middle class adult the street gang represents something dangerous and distasteful whose existence he would ordinarily prefer to ignore. On the other hand, insofar as gang activities are represented as shocking and spectacular, they constitute a salable product for which middle class adults provide an important part of the market. Since few middle class adults have any direct experience of gangs in the ordinary course of their lives, their primary sources of information in this area are the mass media, local and national. However, as already indicated, the kinds of information furnished by the media depend on many considerations other than the actual prevalence of gangs and the nature of their activities. Gang activities, like crime, are sufficiently prevalent as to constitute a virtually inexhaustible reservoir of potentially-reportable events; whether or not the media choose to report these, and the kinds of events they do report are determined by a complex set of definitions of what is “news” at different times and for different purposes.¹⁴⁰

As shown earlier, newspapers do not report the day-to-day activities of gangs, nor pay much attention to their routine criminal involvements. On the contrary, those aspects of gang life which are seen as “newsworthy” are the most spectacular and unusual, and thus least representative of customary gang behavior. Moreover, as already noted, the very existence of gangs is ignored except when they manifest extreme and atypical forms of behavior such as violent conflict, at which times they

¹⁴⁰“Rashomon” phenomenon, after a Japanese movie vividly depicting highly divergent conceptions of the same event by its several participants.

¹⁴⁰Determinants of media reporting choices extremely complex, can't analyze here. One aspect, “wave” phenomenon; one spectacular instance of type of event ordinarily ignored triggers attention to others of similar type, creates artificial impression of “wave.” Data on relation between press coverage and police-recorded events; 10’s of thousands of gang offenses reported over police radio, recorded for several cities; virtually none are reported in newspapers. See also analysis of newspaper coverage of Midcity gang “violent” crimes in “assault” chapter, earlier discussion of “mutual feedback” phenomenon in re press attention and the “fighting gang.”
receive a good deal of press attention. This artifact of media reporting—silence during periods of ordinary gang activity and focus during times of atypical activity—creates an impression of abrupt appearance and disappearance, when in fact what is reflected are those peaks of behavioral variation sufficiently extreme as to pierce the threshold of press attention. Through these and other aspects of media coverage, then, the picture of gang prevalence and activity available to the average middle class adult is distorted and inaccurate.

Adults whose occupational responsibilities bring them in direct contact with gangs are generally in a good position to provide data with respect to gang prevalence. This is especially true of “service” workers such as juvenile police officers or “area” social workers, whose special area of responsibility is youth and/or gangs. However, unless these organizations maintain a specialized research branch, their estimates as to the prevalence of gangs must be accepted with considerable caution. One major limitation has already been discussed; agencies of this kind tend to define as a “gang” only those aggregates which are perceived as appropriate objects of the kinds of services they render; others are accorded little attention and generally do not figure in counts of “gangs.” Discrepancies arising from such definitional differences are attested by the Philadelphia example cited earlier where police estimated that 80 gangs were active in the city while social workers gave the figure as 200. An additional limitation relates to the area of geographic responsibility of involved personnel; a particular policeman or area social worker might be quite well-informed as to the gang situation in his own district, but poorly informed as to other districts. Unless careful counts are furnished by special administrative or research personnel, workers in local urban areas are generally poor sources of information as to the number of gangs in the total metropolitan area, and quite unreliable as to numbers in other cities.

Young lower class adults or older adolescents who formerly belonged to gangs are often sought out as sources of information concerning gangs and gang prevalence. It would seem reasonable that their status as ex-gang members would
qualify them for the role of expert—a role readily offered by adults such as reporters, social workers and sociologists, and generally accepted with little reluctance. The kinds of information generally furnished by ex-gang members are, however, significantly influenced by the perceptual consequences of a process discussed in later chapters—the “natural” dissolution of gangs as their members leave adolescence.\textsuperscript{141} With some exceptions, ex-gang members respond to the question of gang prevalence in terms of their personal experience. A 19 or 20 year old will say—“The gangs are all breaking up...” A 23 or 24 year-old—“The gangs have all broken up.” What this means is that his gang and those of his peers have passed through the traditional developmental sequence of the adolescent street gang. He will often give reasons: all the fellows are getting jobs instead, or becoming involved in narcotics or prostitution, or getting married, or going into the service, or have just generally “wised up.” These activities are perceived as newly-discovered alternatives to gang life rather than as a natural consequence of moving toward adulthood.

Questioned about the “younger kids” who are still hanging out, the same person might say—“Oh them. They ain’t wised up yet. Still acting like idiots like we used to...” The perspectives of the ex-gang member are colored by a powerful perceptual process whereby changes in behavior, which arise naturally from age-passage, are seen as general trends which affect everybody. It is not simply forgetting that clouds the vision of the ex-gang member; it is virtually essential to the effective conduct of his adult life that he erase from his mind much of the essential substance and circumstances of his “gang” phase. Not that he cannot and does not recover, often in vivid detail, the character and flavor of many of his gang experiences, but these are recast into a largely ritualized framework which better serves the purposes of adulthood than those of factual accuracy. An ex-gang member generally loses familiarity with details of the gang situation among the

\textsuperscript{141} Ref. to discussion in Male Sex and Mating. Gangs like grades in a school; today’s fifth graders are tomorrow’s sixth graders and day-after-tomorrow’s graduates, but the “fifth grade” goes on. (Check if point made elsewhere)
“younger kids” a surprisingly short time after his own gang experience has ended, even in the neighborhood he once knew most intimately.

But what of the “younger kids” themselves as a source of information? Surely it must be a gang member, himself, who is in the best position to provide reliable and accurate information as to the prevalence and activities of gangs. Unfortunately this is not the case. While any informed picture of gangs must, of course, ascertain and take into account the verbal expressions of gang members, it is folly to accept them at face value. The capacity of the gang member to furnish accurate estimates, descriptions, or explanations is significantly affected by strong perceptual influences related to his age, his social status, and his locality.

Two kinds of reasons can be distinguished. The first concerns the gang member’s actual conceptions of local gang situations, and the second, what might be considered “motivated” misrepresentation. The average gang member lives in a world of images, or rumors, of phantasms, molded and shaped by strong emotions—particularly that of fear. He sees himself as inhabiting a perilously circumscribed zone of relative safety surrounded by a mysterious and menacing terrain alive with malign and threatening forces. Perception tinged by fear predisposes him to exaggerate the numbers, size, and prowess of gangs in other areas. The gang member is an imminently parochial being; his knowledge of gangs fades off with great rapidity as one moves away from his immediate neighborhood, and he ordinarily possesses surprisingly limited knowledge as to the gang situation even in neighborhoods close to his own, let alone throughout the city as a whole.  

Closely related to the perceptually influenced tendency to exaggerate the size, numbers, and ferocity of other gangs is a propensity, more pronounced at lower status levels, to foresee unbounded calamity in the near future. Gang members often represent themselves as privy to absolutely reliable inside information as to

\[142\text{After mapping Midcity gangs though methods described earlier (locations, sizes, subdivisions, etc.) conducted a limited survey of knowledge by gang members of other areas. Knowledge was extremely limited; often quite ignorant of major aggregates within a mile of own hanging corner; what was known was usually fragmentary or badly distorted. “Peripheral” member of several gangs as partial exception.}\]
unprecedented carnage or other terrors just about to explode, and disseminate, year after year, dire predictions of horrendous events in the offing. Very often there is trouble, and some of it serious, but under most circumstances only a small proportion of the catastrophes predicted with unshakable confidence ever materialize. Sub-culturally influenced perceptions also affect the kinds of explanations for their own behavior gang members customarily offer. Through the years gang members have been confronted with a set of standardized questions for which they have developed equally standardized answers. Why do you join gangs? “We have to! With that other gang threatening us it’s a simple matter of self-defense.” Why do you get in trouble? “Boredom! There’s nothin’ to do around here. It’s so dead we get into trouble just for a little excitement.” Why do you fight? “We gotta show them they can’t step all over us.” These ritualized explanations, which change very little over the years, are often taken at face value by persons who would be more than a little skeptical of a colleague’s explanation that he pursued extra-marital affairs because his wife did not understand him. Considering that explanations for phenomena such as the existence of gangs and criminal behavior are sufficiently complex and elusive as to tax the powers of the best analysts, it is surprising how often these traditional and ritualized “horse’s mouth” explanations are sought, granted credence, and reported in all seriousness.¹⁴³

A second factor affecting the accuracy of information obtained from the gang member derives from his estimate of what kinds of information are appropriate for different categories of questioner. Gang members for the most part are sensitive to the differing interests and concerns of outside adults, and are quite skillful in shaping the kinds of information they offer to accommodate such considerations as what they think the questioner would like to hear, the image of their gang they wish to project, and matters of prudence and self-interest. A gang member soon senses the interests of a reporter looking for a sensational feature, and will

¹⁴³ Issue of ritualized explanations complex; could be developed at some length. For example of comparison of gang-member reasons for behavior with analytic reasons, see Chapter 10 on Drinking Behavior.
frequently accommodate him with lurid details of enormous gangs, shocking violence, and outrageous happenings. The tendency to exaggerate is often enhanced by a desire to represent one’s gang as important and powerful. “We got 250 kids right here we can get together in 20 minutes, and we got branches all over the city. I’d say we got a thousand kids altogether, maybe two thousand.” There is often some order of reality to which such statements correspond, but they are framed more with an eye to impressing others (including members of other gangs who will read the story) than the interests of factual accuracy. Different kinds of information are seen as appropriate for different categories of adult (e.g., sociologists, educators, social workers). For example, the boy who belongs to a two-thousand member gang for the news reporter might tell a policeman or attendance officer—“There’s no gangs around here. We got about 9 or 10 kids that hang around together, but there ain’t no gangs.” Information subject to both orders of influence—situation-biased perception and audience-adapted formulation—must be interpreted with particular caution.

It should be evident at this point that representations of the urban adolescent street gang, its activities, and its prevalence, are particularly susceptible to misperception and distortion. Information obtainable from each of the sources cited above—media reporters, service workers, ex-gang members, and gang members—can and do contribute valuable facets of the total picture, and it is obvious that information derived from several or all of these and similar sources will be more adequate than that derived from a single source. But it is also obvious that all of these sources are systematically affected by particular kinds of perceptual bias, making it most unwise to accept the information they provide at face value without “correcting for” expected kinds of limitations in the perception of each. There is no cheap or easy way to obtain detailed, balanced, and accurate information on gangs. It requires research which is systematic, intensive, and comprehensive, staffed by the most perceptive, conscientious, and objective personnel available.

263
Characteristics of City Gangs

...at any and all hours of the day there are multitudes of boys wandering about and congregated on the corners of the streets, idle in their habits, dissolute in their conduct, profane and obscene in conversation and gross and vulgar in their manners. If a female passes one of the groups she is shocked by what she sees and hears...

Report in Brooklyn Newspaper; 1865

The group of adolescent peers is a prevalent and persisting form of human association, and the adolescent street gang a prevalent and persisting feature of cities, in the United States and elsewhere. But the urban adolescent street gang, viewed as an associational form, exhibits an unusually wide range of variation over time and from place to place—in size, in prevalence, in composition, in customary pursuits, in favored forms of illegal behavior. In part as a consequence of this variation, few forms of human association are as extensively misperceived and misrepresented. Misperception affects not only the way gangs are characterized, but extends even to the fundamental fact of whether they exist at all. As a further consequence, the picture of gangs presented by different authors is highly sensitive to the characteristics of those gangs which form the primary basis of their experience. Particular gangs in particular cities at particular times reflect differences in city size, in racial and ethnic composition, in rates of immigration and emigration, in region, in current fashions of the adolescent subculture, and other factors. As in the case of the blind men and the elephant, one observer will maintain that gangs are small, loosely organized, and peaceful, and another that they are large, tightly organized, and violent.

Of central importance, therefore, is the question of how “representative” a particular gang situation is or appears to be. In this respect the situation in Midcity in the 1950's and early ‘60's is particularly fortunate. The city was large, but not one of the largest. The population included Catholics, Protestants, Jews, whites and blacks. It contains both lower and middle class populations, and a range of levels within the lower class. The neighborhood was in flux, but not radically so. There
was no unusual level of racial conflict. Gang warfare was not practiced at near-mania levels, as in New York in the 1950’s and Philadelphia in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s. There were no unusually large gang complexes, as in Chicago in the 1960’s and ‘70’s. While no local urban community or gang situation can be truly “representative” of all, the circumstances of gang and community in Midcity during the period of this study were probably about as typical as one could find in any major American city during the mid-twentieth century.

The previous chapter contains a good deal of detailed information as to particular characteristics of Midcity gangs and their neighborhood settings, along with specific analyses of features such as leadership, cliques, crime, and their mutual relationships. These data support a picture of the average Midcity gang as an ordered and adaptive form of human association, and its members as able and rational human beings. Because of these qualities, and also because of the “representative” character of Midcity gangs, the present chapter will use the specific data and analyses of the last as the basis of an examination of the characteristics of city gangs on a higher level of generality. This will be done in two ways. First, the seven “intensive-study” gangs, heretofore treated separately, will be combined into a single study population, and examined with respect to selected characteristics such as age, social status, illegal involvement, and the relationships among them. Second, the empirical data and related analyses will be brought to bear on a set of more general issues relating to gang characteristics—issues, for the most part, where differing empirical findings and/or conceptual approaches have resulted in divergent conclusions by different authors. These issues are: the definition of a gang, variation in gang characteristics, the prevalence of gangs, the solidarity of gangs, the “conventionality” of gangs, the normality of gangs, and racial aspects of gang life.
Status Characteristics and Illegal Involvement

The present work, in addition to its descriptive objectives, aims to present a general explanation of basic forms of gang behavior—particularly illegal forms. This explanation, as already mentioned, centers on the notion of “subculture conjunction,” which proposes that subcultures connected with certain “status characteristics”—particularly those related to age, sex, social status and locality—exert a direct and compelling influence, both singly and in combination, on gang behavior. Chapters One and Three have already explored the relation of such characteristics to crime and other attributes of the population, using the “census tract” as the basic analytic unit. It is now possible to pursue this mode of analysis on a smaller scale and with greater “control” of the data by combining the seven gangs into a single “study population” of 205 persons, and presenting first the status characteristics of this population, and second the relation of these characteristics to illegal behavior.¹⁴⁴

Of direct relevance to the important methodological issue of validity is the fact that in the present analysis measures of both the dependent variable (law-violating behavior) and the independent variables (characteristics of the population) are different from those previously used. The “census tract,” which served as the population unit in the previous analysis, is highly useful in that detailed and uniform information is available for many thousands of tracts in widely varying localities, thus making possible very large-scale analyses and good comparability of units. One difficulty with the census tract, however, involves what has been called the “ecological fallacy;” that is, data are presented in such a way so that it is impossible to know which of the many individuals who compose the population unit manifest the specific characteristics being measured.¹⁴⁵ This presents certain problems as to the meaning of relational propositions based on such units. For example, if 70% of the population of a census tract falls into a “low income” category

¹⁴⁴ Preliminary analyses and formulations by Rainer Baum.
¹⁴⁵ Ref. to W. S. Robinson 1950 “Ecological Correlates and the behavior of Individuals” Am. Soc. Rev. June 1950 pp. 351-357. Ref. also to other City Gangs reference to this, e.g. Ch. 1.
and 70% into a “low education” category there would appear to be a good relation between income and education. It is logically possible, however, that some unknown proportion of the 30% who do not have low incomes are of low educational status, and that some proportion of the 30% with higher education have low incomes, so that the correspondence between education and income might, in individual cases, be poorer than indicated by the mass data.

The use of the “gang” as a population unit makes it possible to accommodate this difficulty. Since each unit is composed of specific individuals with designated characteristics, the correspondence or lack thereof between two or more characteristics in individual cases can be known directly. On the other hand, the gang is a very small unit relative to the census tract, thus lacking many of the analytic advantages of large units, particularly with respect to the stability of percentages and the use of refined subcategories in analysis. Also, the rarity of systematic data-gathering efforts which use the gang as a unit poses problems for comparability. What is important here, however, is that the one type of unit is strong where the other is weak, so that when both are brought to bear on the same analytic problem it is possible for strengths and weaknesses to balance each other and correct for the respective inadequacies. Moreover, if the general thrust of findings based on both types of unit is in the same direction, one’s confidence in the validity of both is increased.

Similarly, the “court case,” used in the previous analysis as the measure of law-violating behavior, is widely available for thousands of jurisdictions, facilitating the purposes of large-scale analysis, comparability, and generalizability. An important weakness of this measure, as already mentioned, is that those criminal acts which eventuate in court action represent some unknown proportion of an unknown population of potentially arrestable acts, admitting the possibility that data derived from a process whereby some cases and not others are selected for action through various forms of police and judicial discretion may fail to reflect accurately the “true” distribution of crime.
The “illegal involvement,” the measure used in the present analysis, is derived from information as to all law-violating acts observed by or reliably reported to field workers in daily contact with gang members. Since such acts were recorded whether or not official action was taken, this measure is largely free of the possibly biasing influences of official procedures.\textsuperscript{146} On the other hand, while clearly closer to the “true” volume of criminal behavior than “official” measures, it can scarcely be considered as exhaustive, and must, along with all other known measures of criminality, be seen as a selection from a theoretically exhaustive universe of violative acts, with principles of selection not systematically known. However, as stated above, a significant degree of correspondence between findings derived from measures whose bases of selectivity are different would appear to indicate that the differing bases of selectivity tend to balance each other, or that the several measures somehow reflect a similar “reality” despite such selectivity.

The “subcultural conjunction” theory presented in later chapters relates variations in the form and frequency of criminal behavior primarily to four “status characteristics”—sex, age, social status, and locality; a fifth characteristic, race, also figures in the analysis. The demographics analyses already presented have attended, in some form, variation in age (juvenile, youth), social status (lower class I, II, III, middle class), and race (white, black). Variations in locality (urban, suburban, rural) were not systematically attended, with all analyzed localities (Midcity, Port City, Port City higher status) being urban. The present analysis also examines variation by age, social status, and race.\textsuperscript{147} It includes, in addition, both sexes, since there were sufficient illegal involvements by females to make such analysis feasible. As before, locality variation is not involved, with all gangs being located within a single urban district. The primary question of the present section is: what were the age and social status characteristics of the seven intensive-study

\textsuperscript{146} Reference to “illegal involvement;” definitions, etc. (e.g., Violent Crimes paper, Theft, Assault chapters)
\textsuperscript{147} Seven gangs thus characterized, Table 1.4. Present data gives basis of age and social-status assignments.
gangs, and how were these, along with their sex and racial status, related to involvement in illegal behavior?

Age-status of Gang Members

Of the four major status characteristics of the present analysis, two are “discrete” and “given” by inspection (sex, race), and two are “continuous” and must be derived through computation (age, social status). In the latter instance, as in the case of any continuous variable, any assignment to discrete categories must involve analytic conventions which are to some degree arbitrary. Several considerations make it advisable in the present analysis to treat both age and social status as simple dichotomies. One is that the number of individuals under consideration is sufficiently small that more refined categories become analytically unfeasible. A second is that the analysis is based primarily (although not exclusively) on information obtained during the “intensive observation” period—that period when field workers were in direct contact with the gangs. As in the earlier analysis of community characteristics, this period is here treated as a “static” phase; intra-phase trends and variations are not systematically considered. For these and other reasons, age and social status in the present analysis are represented only by two categories apiece.

The two age categories are “older and “younger;” the basis for assignment to these categories is presented in Table 1.4. The four “older” gangs, Senior Outlaws,

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148 Possible subcategories within the “white” and “black” racial categories are not delineated. “White” or Caucasian gang members represented a variety of national backgrounds, but these “ethnic” differences are not used systematically as analytic variables in the present analysis, an intra-African or African-European-mixture differences are not used in the analysis of the “black” or Negro gang members. A rough determination of European backgrounds was made through an examination of gang members’ surnames. Of these, a customary national identification of the name was recognizable in 92% of the cases. Distribution of the 111 nationally-identifiable surnames was as follows: Gaelic Irish (Grannigan) 40%; English Irish (Buckley) 24%; Italian (DiGiacomo) 12%; French (Boudreau) 10%; Scottish (Strachan) 7%; German (Mannke) 4%; Slavic (Ivanowski) 2%; Swedish (Karlberg) 1%. The white gang-member population as a whole thus shared the “multi-national Catholic” character of much of white Midcity, and there were few significant differences among the several gangs with respect to the general ethnic distribution.

149 Ref. to three intra-period phase divisions of “change” analysis. Later analyses treat age as continuous variable, e.g., assault, theft, law-violation behavior.
Senior Bandits, Kings, and Queens, were contacted when the average gang member was between 16 and 16.5 years old, with contact terminating when the average member was between 18 and 19.\textsuperscript{150} The three “younger” gangs—Junior Bandits, Junior Outlaws, and Molls were contacted when the average gang member was between 13.5 and 15.5 years old, with contact terminating when he or she was between 16 and 17.5. Thus, on a very rough basis, average age of the younger gangs during the observation period was from about 14.5 to 16.5 years, and of the older from about 16.5 to 18.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Gang</th>
<th>Average Age Start of Period</th>
<th>Average Age End of Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Senior Outlaws</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior Bandits</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Junior Bandits</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior Outlaws</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Molls</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{150} Description of “average age” method. Cite fact that range of variation around mean also determined, presented in individual accounts, not systematically in table.
Social Status of Gang Members

Table 2.4 designates three of the seven intensive study gangs as of “lower” status within the lower class, and four as “higher.” What is the basis of these designations, and how do they relate to the delineation of social status levels for census tracts presented in Chapter 1? Since the present unit of analysis, the gang, is composed of individuals to whom various characteristics may be attributed directly, it would appear possible to ascertain social-status directly—that is, to assign to each gang member a score or scores derived from one or more status-relevant characteristics, and then to characterize the gang as a whole on the basis of the collective scores of its members. An effort to follow such a procedure was made, but results were unsatisfactory. The procedure used here for designating the social status of gangs is, therefore, very similar to that used previously.

This procedure shares three major characteristics with the method used in connection with census tracts. It utilizes multiple rather than single assignment criteria; it is based on educational and occupational measures; distinctions are based on the percentage of persons falling into one of two major categories. While the “direct assignment” method can have considerable value for certain purposes, the use of a method which is analytically parallel to that used for mass data has important advantages in the present instance—primarily those of comparability and the articulation of different bodies of data. Once the appropriate translations between the two types of unit are made, characteristics of the gang and the census tract can be compared directly, thus facilitating the task of relating gang characteristics to those of the population at large as well as to many relevant subpopulations.

Three criteria are used to designate the social status of the gangs: occupational status of fathers, occupational status of male gang members, and educational criteria, making a total of five measures. These criteria differ from those used for census tracts primarily in that the use of fathers’ occupation provides an important element of time-depth, and that two rather than one measure of
occupational position are employed. Both these advantages are made possible by the fact that the population under consideration consists of specific known individuals. Status assignment is thus better “controlled” and based on more refined criteria. Assignment categories and numerical data are shown in Table 2.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.4 Seven Intensive Study Gangs: Social Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gang</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Bandits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Bandits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Lower Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Outlaws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Outlaws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Higher Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total All Gangs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. N = number of persons with lower occupational status (see text)  
b. US Census occupational categories 6 thru 10  
c. Score below 20, Duncan Socio-Economic Index  
e. Females omitted, see text  
No group members with known occupational status (except armed forces)

The use of multiple criteria for ascertaining social status, as discussed earlier, has both strengths and weaknesses. As the number of assignment criteria increases, the likelihood of adequate status placement improves, but at the expense of increased methodological difficulties—particularly with respect to discordance among criteria. In the present instance the use of measures involving two generations is virtually necessary, due to the relatively young age of gang members.

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151 Recall, as discussed in Chapter 1, that even most “refined” analysis based on quantifiable characteristics still only represents “index to” or “locator of” social status categories conceptually based on “style of life” rather than “numerical interval” criteria.
Gang members’ occupations shown in Table 2.4 are those of young adults (average age 25) whose full occupational potential has not yet been achieved. Fathers’ occupations, on the other hand, involving for the most part men between the ages of 40 and 50, do in all probability approximate the maximum occupational achievement. The social status position of gang members during the intensive-study period is thus seen to represent some combination of the “achieved” status of their parents and their own status potential. The fact that placements which combine the circumstances of two generations are largely concordant strengthens confidence in the adequacy of the assignments; discrepancies provide valuable information with respect to social mobility.

Each of the three assignment criteria requires a few methodological comments. There are two measures of “fathers’ occupation:” the percentage of persons in “low manual” occupations, and the percentage with “low” scores in the Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations. The “low-manual” occupations are the four lower non-agricultural occupational categories of the U.S. Census, namely operatives, private household workers, service workers, and laborers. These are the same categories used in the delineation of social status levels for census tracts, except that the “manual” classification used in that analysis includes one additional category, “craftsmen and foremen.”

Occupations with “low” scores in the Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations are those with scores of less than 20. The Duncan Index is a method for assigning scores from 1 to 100 to a wide range of occupational categories, based on

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152 The U.S. census system of occupational categorization is described and discussed earlier in this text. The “low manual” occupations are the first four in Table 5.1. The term “low manual” is used to refer to these categories in Blau, P.M. and Duncan, O.D. The American Occupational Structure, John Wiley, N.Y. 1967.

153 No theoretical reason for this; as in case of census tract analysis, selection made empirically on basis of which “cutting point” discriminated most sensitively among data at hand. Developed that bottom 5 discriminated best for census tract data and bottom 4 for gang data. Probably is reason for, related to sensitive position of foreman-craftsman category with respect to lower class I-middle class III boundary, but not worked out here.
those of the U.S. Census.\textsuperscript{154} The availability of 100 occupational distinctions provides the basis of a considerably more refined system of status-placement than is possible on the basis of four distinctions. Such additional refinement is of particular importance when one is dealing with intra- rather than inter-class distinctions. One reason for using this system is that it accommodates in some degree a major defect of the census classifications—namely, that the broad categories such as “sales workers” include positions whose status implications vary widely.\textsuperscript{155} Given the capacity of the Duncan system to discriminate so much more finely, it is all the more significant that results obtained from the two measures are so similar.\textsuperscript{156}

The term “father” as it appears in the phrase “fathers’ occupations” is not strictly accurate. The 205 gang members originated in 186 household units; information as to the occupational circumstances of adult household members was obtained for 165, or about 90\% of all units. Of these, occupational information for a male acting in the “father” role (father, stepfather) was obtained for 152 units, or 92\%. In the remaining 13 instances occupational assignments were made on the

\textsuperscript{154} This scale is described in Chapters 6 and 7 of Reiss, A, et. Al, Occupations and social Status, Free Press, 1961. The index itself, which assigns scores to (450) occupational titles, is presented as Appendix B, pp. 263-275. “Status” in this system is based largely on the computed “prestige” scores of the various occupational categories. The assignment of status scores to occupations along a unidimensional scale involves some extremely complex conceptual and methodological problems, as does the whole field of the relationship between social position and occupational status—problems which cannot be treated here, but which are discussed in some detail elsewhere. Two such discussions are contained in Reiss 1961, op. cit., and Blau and Duncan 1967 op. cit. The application of the Duncan Index in a research context similar to the present one is discussed in Bernard, Sydney E., “The Economic and Social Adjustment of Low-Income Female Headed Families” Heller School Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, Brandeis University 1964, pp. 197-200. Since the Duncan occupational ratings are based primarily, although not entirely, on occupations of adult males, the present use thereof involves problems with respect to occupations of younger persons and females.

\textsuperscript{155} Several examples of this. The census category “sales workers” includes both “huckster” and “stock and bond salesman.” The Duncan Index assigns a score of 8 to the former and 73 to the latter. The category “service workers” includes both “bootblack” and “government detective,” scored by Duncan as 8 and 40, respectively.

\textsuperscript{156} The one exception is found in the case of occupations of higher-status gang members. The failure to discriminate well in this instance is a function of the cutting point used. As in the case of the “low-manual” cutting point just discussed, the “under 20” level was chosen because it proved empirically to discriminate most sensitively among occupations in the lower class II-III zone—where the present analysis requires such sensitivity. As one moves up in the occupational scale this cutting point loses its power to discriminate. If it were desirable to discriminate, say, between lower class I and middle class III, a different and higher cutting point would be used.
basis of a person other than a male acting in the role of mate to the mother. In most cases these were uncles or grandfathers. In a few instances the occupation of the mother herself was used, despite differences between males and females in the status connotations of occupations.

Another methodological problem involves multiple occupations. As will be discussed in later Chapters (Work, Theft), many lower status adults work at several different jobs and kinds of jobs, simultaneously or sequentially. In some instances information as to five or six different jobs was available for a single individual. This posed no problem for jobs which fell into the same “low-manual” category, as most did. In the few instances where jobs fell into two categories, assignments were made on the basis of which kind of job was most common. In deriving Duncan scores in the case of multiple jobs, scores of all known positions were averaged.

Measures of gang members’ occupations were derived in the same fashion as those of their fathers. It should be repeated that occupations in this instance are those of men twenty years younger whose full occupational potential had not yet been realized. Occupational data for females is not included for several reasons. Since many of the girls were married and not working, numbers were too small to provide reliable percentages. In addition, the status implications of certain female occupations can be quite different from those of male occupations in formally similar categories. For example, many lower class females work at jobs such as “ten-cent-store clerk,” which are classified as “clerical”—a white-collar category. For this and other reasons the Duncan scale is based on male occupations only, so that the females could not have been categorized on the basis of this measure. In the case of the Queens, the absence of occupational categorizations is compensated to some degree by the fact that, as the “sister” group of the Kings, they could be expected to fall into a similar status category. There was, in addition, enough occupational data available for the Queens to provide the basis of certain conclusions, to be presented

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157 Following common practice, persons serving in the armed forces were excluded from the occupational analysis. In some cases this accounts for discrepancies between the number of persons for whom occupational and educational date were available.
shortly. As for the Molls, assignment of status must rest on the three measures of
Table 2.4; their educational standing makes it highly probable that their own
occupational involvement, had they been males, would fall within the “lower status”
range.

The measure of educational status, failure to complete high school, is self-
explanatory. Similar information for gang members’ parents would have been
extremely useful, but could not be obtained readily or reliably by the methods used
here. The “failure to complete high school” measure in Table 2.5 differs from that
used in the census tract analysis in that the latter applies only to persons 25 and
older. Since the percentage of persons completing high school has been rising
steadily during the past decade, generational differences must be kept in mind
when comparing percentages based on the present age group with those for older
persons.

What is the social status of each of the seven intensive-study gangs on the
basis of these assignment criteria? Table 2.4 places the gangs into two categories;
“lower status” (Senior and Junior Bandits, Molls), and “higher status” (Senior and
Junior Outlaws, Kings, Queens). The term “lower status” as used here is analogous
to “lower class III” as previously used, but the “higher status” category does not
incorporate the distinction previously made between a middle and higher level
within the lower class, for reasons to be discussed. For the gangs in the “lower
status” category, 80% of the fathers and 75% of the sons pursued low-manual
occupations, and 83% of the gang members failed to complete high school. For the
“higher status” gangs, 60% of the fathers and 50% of the sons were employed in low-
manual occupations, and one-quarter of the gang members failed to complete high
school. The proportion of males in low manual occupation ranged from 68% to 87%
in the lower status gangs and from 50% to 68% in the higher. The proportion of high
school failures ranged from 59% to 90% in the lower-status gangs and 21% to 43%
in the higher. Each of the seven gangs is thus assigned, with little ambiguity, to one
of two status categories which show little overlap, despite a fair degree of variation both within gangs and within categories.

For the lower status gangs the degree of agreement between the two occupational measures, low-manual and Duncan, is quite good. For fathers, the difference between percentages is less than two points, and for sons about five points. For individual gangs percentages fall within ten percentage points of one another in four out of five cases. Comparing the two indexes for individual gangs shows that the Senior Bandits, fathers and sons, held jobs of somewhat lower status within the broader categories than did the Junior Bandits, fathers and sons. For the higher status fathers, differences between the two indexes on an all-gang basis are rather low (4.4%), but an examination of individual cases shows that the Negro fathers held substantially higher positions within the broader categories than did their white counterparts. This is particularly true for the King fathers, who rank lowest of the higher status fathers on the basis of the low-manual index (68% compared to 54% for Junior Outlaw fathers) but highest on the basis of the Duncan prestige scores, (48% below Duncan 20 compared to 62% for Senior Outlaw fathers).

The largest discrepancy between the low-manual and Duncan indexes appears in the case of the higher status gang members, and raises the important issue of intergenerational mobility. Differences between fathers and sons in social and/or occupational status are of the most direct relevance to the issue of lower class social status.\textsuperscript{158} Conceptual fashions with respect to this issue are changeable. One popular concept sees “upward social mobility” almost as an inherent property of the American social system, and assumes that the “normal” or expectable progression is from lower to higher status.\textsuperscript{159} Another concept, related to the “cycle of poverty” tradition, talks of a “permanent underclass,” and stresses the extent to which upbringing in a lower class cultural milieu consigns one to the same social status level as one’s parents. Present data accord with neither of these concepts.

\textsuperscript{158} Classic problem in sociology, many studies of. Prob. best of more recent works Otis Dudley Duncan, references.
\textsuperscript{159} Ref. Leibow, Tally’s Corner.
Significant differences in intergenerational mobility appear between higher and lower status gangs, and between whites and blacks. For the three lower status gangs, all white, the degree of upward occupational movement, even taking age differences into account, is rather small. About 75% of the gang members worked in low-manual jobs compared to about 80% of the fathers (if one assumes that the Molls’ occupational status, if males, would be commensurate with their educational status, the difference would be even less). The Junior Bandits achieved a somewhat higher occupational status than their fathers (fathers, 82% low-manual; sons 68%), but the occupations of the Senior Bandits were somewhat lower than theirs (fathers, 74% low-manual, sons 83%). The chances that the Junior Bandits might move into a higher status level seemed good, but the Senior Bandits and Molls would appear to be well entrenched in a lower-class III way of life.

The higher status gangs show, a considerably greater degree of upward occupational mobility. Intergenerational differences appear most clearly on the basis of the Duncan scores; only 25% of sons’ occupations fall below Duncan 20, compared to 55% for the fathers. Percentages for the higher status gang members, black and white, fall into a substantially lower range than any other set of occupational figures—indicating that their occupational status as young adults had risen beyond the level where the “under 20” cutting point was able to discriminate intra-lower class status levels with any degree of sensitivity. This suggests in turn that the social status position of some significant proportion had risen above the lower class II level. While most of the fathers’ and many of the sons’ occupations were consistent with lower class II status, the “higher status” category must be regarded as including persons at the lower class I level as well.

On the basis of the “low-manual” criterion, the greatest degree of upward occupational mobility is shown by the male Negro Kings; 50% were employed in low-manual jobs, compared to 68% for their fathers. The Junior Outlaws, by contrast, showed little movement, with the sons differing from their fathers by less than two percentage points. The educational experience of the black gangs, both
male and female, also shows them to have been the most upwardly mobile; only 22% failed to complete high school, compared to a figure of 46% for the higher status whites and 62% for all whites.

The educational and occupational experience of the Queens is relevant in this connection. The Queens’ high-school completion rate of 80% was the highest of all gangs. Occupational information available for 24 of the girls shows that their occupational status directly reflected their educational background; only 12% held jobs in the “low manual” category—a category which contains numerous positions traditionally held by low-status Negro women, such as domestic day-work and hospital kitchen work. The fact that this figure is lower than that of any of the male gangs (Kings, Senior Outlaws, 50% low-manual) is due in part, as mentioned, to differences between male and female occupational categories; it should also be noted that the occupational status of the Queens’ fathers, on the basis of the Duncan scores, was relatively high. Even so, it is clear that the Queens’ upward mobility was substantial. It is significant also to note that while a number of Queens held very “good” white collar jobs such as real-estate broker, keypunch operator, and floor manager for a major electronics manufacturer, at least five of the girls, including white collar workers, supplemented their incomes by part-time work as prostitutes. The case of the wealthiest Queen, a full-time prostitute, will be discussed in a later chapter.

The social mobility experience of Negro gang members in Midcity furnishes some evidence with respect to the influence of race prejudice on such mobility. A comparison of the young adult occupational status of the Queens with that of the Kings provides one of the few instances in the present study where evidence for differential opportunity connected with race prejudice seems clear. With similar high-school completion rates (Kings 24%, Queens 21%), the proportion of males (Kings 50%, Queens 88%) appears to indicate differential access by sex to positions in the lower-class I-middle-class III range, and accords with other evidence in the study which indicates a “bimodal” distribution of male Negro jobs—one group in the
low-manual category, another in the white collar category, but relatively few in between. It is likely that a reluctance to admit qualified Negro males to jobs at the level of craftsman, foreman, and the like, contributed to this situation in the 1950’s and ‘60’s.

If, however, one side of the coin shows that jobs at the lower class I level were less accessible to black males than white, the other side of the same coin shows that they were more accessible to black females than males. This would call for some qualification, at the least, of the notion that the restriction of opportunity on the basis of race operated in a uniform manner for both sexes. Even more important in this connection is the data presented here which shows that the greatest degree of occupational mobility was shown by the blacks rather than the whites. The Kings produced more college graduates and the Queens more high school graduates than any of the white gangs, and their adult occupations reflected their educational background. The contrast between Queens and Molls is particularly striking, with the same proportion of Queens completing high school (80%) as the proportion of Molls who failed.

Whatever the influence of race prejudice in Midcity in the 1950’s and ‘60’s—an influence of unquestionable importance—the evidence of Table 2.4 indicates with little ambiguity that the factor most closely associated with educational and occupational advancement was the occupation of one’s father rather than the color of one’s skin. Explanations based on race prejudice provide very little help in explaining why the white Senior Bandits showed a 10% drop in occupational status compared to their fathers while the black Kings, whose fathers were themselves higher in status than those of the Senior Bandits, showed an 18% rise over theirs. In this instance, as in many others in this study, influences associated with social status appeared far weightier than those associated with race. To what degree is it possible to generalize the method used here for categorizing gangs according to social status, and for providing a statistical basis for extending present conclusions.

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160 Ref. to similar findings, national sample, Schiller Study, 1969.
to other populations? One way of answering this question is to examine the degree of comparability between the method used here for small groups to that used earlier for mass data. Chart 2.4 presents the defining limits of the several social status levels as developed for the gangs in a manner analogous to that presented for census tract data. Allowing for minor differences in definitions, results are closely comparable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 2.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defining Criteria of Social Status Levels</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gang as Unit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent fathers in low-manual occupations.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Status (Lower Class III)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Status (Lower Class I-II)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The occupational criterion for lower class III used in Table 2.4 (census tract as unit) shows that 80% or more census tract males are employed in manual occupations; in Chart 2.4 (gang as unit), 70% or more are in low-manual occupations. The defining limits for lower class I-II in Table 2.4 are 60-80%; in Chart 2.4, 50-70%. The 10% difference in both cases is consistent with the fact that the “manual” category includes one more subcategory (craftsmen) than the “low-manual.” It should be noted that the limits delineated for the gangs include the occupational positions of both fathers and sons.
The limits for the educational criteria reflect generational differences already mentioned; definitions in Table 2.4 apply only to persons 25 years of age or older; in Chart 2.4, for the most part, to persons 25 or under. In Table 2.4, the educational criterion for lower class III is that 70% or more persons have failed to complete high school; in Chart 2.4, 55% or more. For lower class I-II, the Chart 2.4 definition is 50-70% high-school failure; in Chart 2.4, 35-50%. The gang figures are sufficiently lower than the census tract figures as to suggest that the high-school completion rate might be losing its capacity to discriminate differences within the lower class as fewer persons in the general population fail to complete high school. Considering the degree of concordance of the two methods, then, it would appear, despite minor differences in cutting points and definitions, that the method for defining social status levels for census tracts and that used for gangs delineate populations which are sufficiently similar as to provide a relatively firm basis for assuming that major subcultural characteristics of the smaller units also obtain for the larger.

A final point with respect to the assignment of social status concerns the degree of concordance among the several indexes. As mentioned earlier, the larger the number of measures one uses to discriminate social status, the greater the likelihood of low correspondence among measures. In addition, the use of data based on two generations increases the likelihood of discordance, in that possible shifts over time in occupational prestige and the educational experience of the general population are conducive to changes in the social status connotations of the several indexes. The existence of inter-generational mobility also enhances the likelihood of discordance.

A comparison of Table 2.4 and Chart 2.4 shows that the degree of concordance among the several indexes is quite good. The five separate indexes produce a total of 19 cell values for the seven gangs. Of these, only three fall outside the limits delineated in Chart II. The Junior Bandits fit the criteria with respect to their fathers’ occupational status and their own educational status, but their own “low-manual” figure of 68% falls just below the 70% cutting-point of Chart 2.4. The
educational level of both the Kings and Queens is considerably higher than the indicated limit for lower class status. In the face of the considerations just noted, however, the degree of concordance among indexes is unexpectedly high. Even more impressive is the fact that the two series which are conceptually the most independent (different people, different measures), show the closest correspondence. The ranking of paternal occupational status on the basis of the Duncan scores almost exactly “predicts” the ranking of high-school completion; the rank correlation of the two series is +.93. Desirable refinements in the present assignment system would require a series of experimental applications to other populations, but the method as developed is quite effective for present purposes of differentiating the social status of gangs.

**Illegal Involvements by Gang Members**

The measure of criminal behavior used in the present analysis is “illegal involvement.” This unit, as mentioned earlier, was derived primarily from direct field observation, and represents each instance in which a gang member was observed, or reliably reported, to have been involved in an incident wherein specific legal statutes were violated.\(^{161}\) In important respects this measure is the most “exhaustive” measure of legally-violative behavior used in this study. Actors are both male and female, and events are recorded whether or not official action was taken. As noted elsewhere,\(^{162}\) the ratio of illegal involvements to officially recorded offenses was something on the order of eight to one. Since the measure is based on field records, it is available only for the intensive-observation period, and cannot be

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\(^{161}\) Relevant definitions as published in Miller, W. “Violent Crimes in City Gangs,” Annals, Vol. 364, March 1966 are as follows: “Incidents: An illegal incident is a behavioral event or sequence of events adjudged by a coder to provide a sound basis for arrest if known to authorities. Information as to most incidents was obtained from field records. In the case of (certain kinds of incidents, such as intra-gang fights), this definition ruled out a fair number of moderately to fairly serious instances...which involved members of the same gang or occurred under circumstances deemed unlikely to produce arrest even if known. Involvements: Incidents multiplied by number of participants. For example, three boys “mug” a victim; one incident, three involvements).

\(^{162}\) Ref. to figures.
used directly in analyses involving different or more extended time spans. Statistics presented at this point, it should be noted, do not differentiate among different types of offenses; later chapters will present separate analysis of illegal involvement in theft, assault, drinking, and so on.

Table 3.4 shows that during a total observation period of 175 months, an average of two years per gang, the 205 gang members were known to have been involved in 1,122 instances of illegal activity—producing a rate of 31.4 involvements for each ten gang members during each ten month period. Rates range from a figure of 60 for the highest ranking Junior Bandits to a low of 6.8 for the lowest ranking Queens. Differentiation of rates according to the status characteristics of age, sex, and so on is presented in the next section, but even a cursory inspection of Table 3.4 reveals a very good relationship between illegal involvement and social status. The three gangs which rank highest are of lower social status, and no higher status gang ranks above those of lower status.

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Judgment as to the “absolute” level of criminality indicated by these figures depends on what they are compared to. On the basis of the totals, the fact that 200 adolescents accounted for 1,000 instances of illegality over a 2 year period appears to indicate a fairly high level of criminality. On the basis of the rates, however, the fact that all gang members accounted for 3 violations per month, with each individual showing a rate of .3 per month, appears to indicate that criminal involvement was relatively infrequent compared, say, to the frequency of involvement in eating or group conversations. This issue is dealt with further in later sections. From the point of view of research design, of course, it is clear that a population of over 1,000 units provides a good basis for analysis.
Table 3.4

Seven Intensive Study Gangs: Illegal Involvements
Ranked by Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gang</th>
<th>Number of Individuals</th>
<th>Number Months Observation</th>
<th>Number of Involvements All Offenses</th>
<th>Rate of Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior Bandits</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Bandits</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molls</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Outlaws</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Outlaws</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1122</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. involvements per 10 persons per 10 months

Illegal Involvement and Gang Characteristics

The delineation of two subcategories apiece for each of the four status characteristics presently under consideration and the availability of a measure of illegality makes it possible to return to the question posed at the members and their involvement in illegal activity. Table 4.4 shows rates of illegal involvement by social status and age, sex, and race, respectively, and also the degree of rate differentiation among the major status characteristics.
Table 4.4
Seven Intensive Study Gangs: Status Characteristics and Illegal Involvement
(Not Legible) = 205
Social Status, Sex, Age, Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Status</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lower = Higher x 4.2  
Male = Female x 2.9  
Younger = Older x 2.1  
Lower Status Male = Higher Status Female x 8.7

Of the four status characteristics, social status shows the best capacity to discriminate. The rate for lower status gangs is over four times that of the higher status. The next best discriminator is sex, with male rates about three times female. Social status and sex in combination produce the highest degree of discrimination in the table, with the rate for lower status males (59.0) almost nine times the rate for higher status females (6.8). Age discriminates by a factor of two, with younger gangs showing about twice the rate of the older. Since these same characteristics have figured in earlier conclusions and will also figure in later ones, it will be useful to compare briefly present conclusions with those presented elsewhere for each characteristic.

According to present data, rates of illegal involvement for gang members between the ages of 14.5 and 16.5 were twice as high as rates for those between 16.5 and 18.5. Chapter Three showed court rates for Midcity males between 17 and 20 to
be substantially higher than those for males between 7 and 16. These differences are due in part to differences in sex composition and the age-spans under consideration, but it should be reiterated that age is a “continuous” variable, and is analyzed far more adequately on the basis of year-by-year treatment than on the basis of dichotomous categories. This type of analysis is undertaken several times in future sections—particularly in connection with assaultive behavior, theft, and the general patterning of court-handled crime.

Each of these analyses shows a regular tendency for involvement in crime to “peak” at certain ages—rising incrementally prior to the peaks and falling incrementally subsequent thereto. While the particular ages at which peaking appears varies according to the type of offense under consideration and the type of measure employed, the peaking tendency itself occurs consistently, showing a strong association between age passage and the frequency of illegal involvement. In the present instance, the 16.5 year cutting-point which serve to distinguish older from younger gangs probably falls somewhat later than a major all-offense peak for this particular measure, so that the averaged rate of several near-peak years for the younger gangs runs about twice that of older gangs moving away from that peak.

Present data with respect to race are inconclusive, due to the absence in these computations of Negro gangs in the “low status” category, and no direct comparisons of black and white rates are presented here. Chapter One showed poor statistical associations between juvenile court rates and the proportions of Negroes in Midcity neighborhoods, but present data which show white rates of illegal involvement to be substantially higher than those of blacks can be attributed primarily to the influence of social status. Since higher status gangs showed markedly lower rates than those of lower status, and since all black gang members were of higher status, the influence of class status was obviously the important factor. Future analyses, which utilize a population of fourteen male gangs and which do include a “low-status Negro” category, provide a basis for ascertaining
more accurately the relative influence of social status and race on gang-member crime.

Rates of illegal involvement for male groups are approximately three times those of female groups. This is a substantial but not striking degree of differentiation. Moreover, the rate of illegal involvement for the Molls as shown in Table 3.4 is higher than that of any of the higher-status male gangs, suggesting that the influence of social status differentiation might be superior to that of sex differentiation. Later data show that this is not the case, and differences are found between males and females on the order of ten or more times. The major reason for the relatively high rates shown here by the female Molls is the absence of offense-differentiation in the present measure. A very substantial proportion of the Molls' illegal involvements consisted of acts of truancy—a practice engaged in quite frequently by several Molls as a prelude to leaving school altogether. Truancy is a special sort of offense in that it is illegal only at particular ages; at age 16 the heavily truant Molls dropped out of school, thus automatically terminating the illegality of their absences therefrom. This does not mean, of course, that truancy is only casually related to lower social status or is not a significant offense; if, however, it is excluded from consideration, the Molls' rate drops below that of the Junior and Senior Outlaws, but not that of the Kings. Later analyses, which distinguish various forms of offense, make it possible to base rate calculations on the more “serious” forms of crime such as theft and assault; in these calculations the predominance of males over females is consistent and marked.

The strong relationship shown here between social status and illegal involvement parallels the findings of the demographic analysis presented earlier. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, conclusions based on the demographic data are subject to question with respect to characteristics of both the independent and dependent variables. Good statistical association between demographic measures of social status and court rates does not establish conclusively that census-tract residents of low social status are the same persons as those who appear
in court; the consistently higher court rates shown by lower status population could conceivably be explained on the grounds that lower status persons are more likely to be brought to court than higher status persons even when similar levels of crime are involved.\textsuperscript{164}

Present findings then enormously strengthen the methodological basis for posting a direct link between lower social status and higher criminal involvement. Present measures in themselves are not without defects, but they are strong where the previous measures are weak. All measures, both of social status and criminal involvement, apply to the same population of known persons. The population of “illegal involvements” which serves as the present measure of criminality is largely free from the influence of official procedures since 85% of all recorded offenses involved no official action. The general concordance between conclusions drawn from two substantially different bodies of data greatly strengthens the plausibility of both.

Social status differentiated well within each of the sex, age, and race categories. Lower status gangs showed higher rates in every instance. For males, lower status rates were 3.2 times as high; for females, 4.1; for younger gangs, 2.1; for older, 5.6; for white, 3.3. Moreover, at the lower class III level, the degree of upward social mobility showed little apparent relationship to the frequency of illegal involvement; the Junior Bandits, who were the most upwardly mobile of the lower status gangs, were also the most heavily involved in illegal activity.

Conclusions of the present analysis are derived from a small number of cases relative to those of the mass data. They are, however, based on more direct and intensive methods of data collection, utilize more refined categories, and are developed from a better controlled analytic design. They support with little ambiguity the proposition that criminal involvement by members of city gangs varies systematically according to status characteristics such as age, sex, and social status. Evidence with respect to social status is particularly impressive. The

\textsuperscript{164} Ref. to ASR article on demog. Correlates cited in Chapter Three
proposition that urban adolescents of lower social status customarily engage in more illegal behavior than do those of higher status, both where official action is taken and where it is not—a proposition which emerged as the likely conclusion of the demographic analysis—must be seen as sufficiently well affirmed and strengthened by the present analysis as to be considered an established conclusion.